








# “The impact of export market orientation on SME market performance: Exploring the moderating effect of government policy and the mediating effect of information access”

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# THE IMPACT OF EXPORT MARKET ORIENTATION ON SME MARKET PERFORMANCE: EXPLORING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF INFORMATION ACCESS

## Abstract

This study addresses the relevance of export market orientation in enhancing the market performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), specifically examining the moderating role of government policy and the mediating effect of information access. The paper aims to provide insights into how these factors collectively impact SME performance. Data were collected from members of the Malang Regency SME Communication Forum, chosen for their relevance as active players in one of Indonesia's regions with the highest SME concentration. An online questionnaire was used to gather insights directly from the business owners and managers, yielding 448 valid responses that provide a representative perspective on SME market dynamics. The collected data were then analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) techniques. The findings demonstrate that export market orientation significantly boosts SME market performance (path coefficient = 0.512,  $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting its critical role in fostering customer-oriented practices and adaptive marketing strategies. Additionally, export market orientation positively influenced information access (path coefficient = 0.359,  $p < 0.001$ ), facilitating timely market insights that support decision-making. However, the mediating effect of information access on the relationship between export market orientation and market performance was not statistically significant (path coefficient = 0.242,  $p = 0.072$ ). Furthermore, the strengthening effects of government policy on both export market orientation and market performance and on export market orientation and information access were also insignificant (path coefficients = -0.103 and 0.053,  $p = 0.053$  and 0.132, respectively).

**Keywords** performance, orientation, accessibility, policy, decision-making, Indonesia

**JEL Classification** L21, L25, M21

## INTRODUCTION

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital contributors to economic growth and hold immense potential in global markets. However, SMEs face considerable obstacles, especially in pursuing international market presence. They often operate with limited resources and restricted information access and face significant competition in global markets, threatening their sustainability and growth potential (OECD, 2020). Export market orientation has emerged as a critical strategy to help SMEs navigate these barriers, enabling them to understand international market demands, identify emerging opportunities, and adapt strategically to competitive pressures (Cadogan et al., 2002). However, the effectiveness of export market orientation in driving SME performance also depends on other external factors, particularly access to crucial resources such as market information and government support.

Government policy plays a pivotal role in shaping the business environment for SMEs, either enhancing or inhibiting their international competitiveness. Supportive government interventions can strengthen SMEs by facilitating resource access, including funding, training, and technological resources essential for entering and thriving in foreign markets (Taneo et al., 2022). On the other hand, poorly aligned or insufficiently targeted policies may limit SMEs' ability to leverage export market orientation effectively, restricting their potential in global markets. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the combined effects of export market orientation, information access, and government policy on SME market performance.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Market performance is a critical factor in determining the success and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs with effective marketing strategies and capabilities are more likely to attract and retain customers, increase sales and profits, and expand their market share (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2023). Therefore, enhancing market performance has become a crucial objective not only for SMEs but also for policymakers.

However, SMEs often face significant challenges that impede their marketing performance. These challenges include limited resources, lack of expertise, insufficient digital readiness, and intense competition (Kolbe et al., 2022; OECD, 2020). To overcome these barriers, SMEs must leverage support from various external stakeholders, including government entities (Noya et al., 2023). Governments can play a pivotal role by providing training, mentorship, funding, and implementing policies that foster SME development (Taneo et al., 2022; Musabayana et al., 2022; OECD, 2020). This external support is essential for improving SMEs' market performance and ensuring sustainable growth in increasingly competitive environments.

The relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance has become a focal point in recent research, as export market orientation is widely acknowledged as a driver of competitive advantage in international markets. By adopting an export market orientation, SMEs can better align with global customer needs, respond proactively to market shifts, and strengthen their competitive positioning, enhancing performance outcomes. However, the influence of export market orientation on SME performance is complex and often depends on additional factors. Access to high-quality information is essential for SMEs to leverage export market orientation effectively, as it enables informed decision-

making and rapid adaptation to market changes. Additionally, government policy can moderate the impact of export market orientation by providing essential support structures, resources, and guidance, which are especially critical for SMEs facing entry barriers in international markets. This literature review synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence on export market orientation, information access, and SME performance, with particular attention to the mediating role of information access and the moderating role of government policy. The resulting framework and hypotheses aim to empirically examine how these factors influence SME performance, offering deeper insights into the mechanisms through which export market orientation and supportive policy measures drive SME growth in competitive global markets.

Export market orientation refers to how an organization adopts an export-oriented approach in its marketing activities. This approach involves efforts by the organization to gather accurate information about current and potential customers, competitors, and other critical actors in export markets. According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990), export market orientation is a systematic effort to gain deep insights into customer needs and preferences while responsively and proactively adapting marketing strategies based on this information. This orientation is crucial because it enables SMEs to recognize and capitalize on emerging export opportunities while delivering superior value to foreign customers. Fernandes et al. (2020) and Cadogan et al. (2002) emphasize that export market orientation is not merely a strategy but a fundamental driver of SMEs' success in achieving sustainable competitive advantage in global markets. By adopting a strong market orientation, SMEs can effectively tailor their products and services to meet global demand, respond to changing customer needs, and proactively address competitive dynamics. Thus, a deep understanding of export market orientation is

relevant in academic contexts and critical for SMEs aiming to expand their international presence and build a solid, sustainable foundation for growth.

Export market orientation is critical to SME performance (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023). As defined by Cadogan et al. (2001), this concept refers to the degree to which a firm concentrates its marketing activities on foreign markets. It reflects the company's efforts to actively understand and respond to the dynamics of international markets. Recent studies have highlighted the positive relationship between export market orientation and improved market performance in SMEs. The higher the level of export market orientation an SME possesses, the greater its likelihood of achieving significant improvements in export market performance (Nguyen et al., 2023; Katsikeas et al., 2016). Furthermore, Cavusgil et al. (2017) emphasize the role of export market orientation in raising competitive capabilities and flexible marketing strategies, improving marketing performance in foreign markets. By adopting this approach, firms can optimize their marketing strategies to meet international market demands and requirements.

Thus, a comprehensive understanding of export market orientation as a theoretical concept and a crucial practical foundation for SMEs aiming to succeed and remain competitive globally is needed. SMEs that focus on improving their export market orientation are better positioned to improve their market performance. The connection between export market orientation and SME market performance has significant implications for SMEs seeking to expand their existence in international markets. By adopting a customer-centric and globally aligned approach, SMEs can strengthen their competitive position, drive sustainable growth, and seize cross-border opportunities. However, the relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance is complex and multifaceted, necessitating consideration of the factors that moderate and mediate this relationship.

For a business to succeed, access to information is critical, serving as a medium through which enterprises can identify and explore opportunities (Ulhøi, 2021). Information is a collection of well-organized facts that hold meaning and clarify a particular condition or situation (Valacich & Schneider, 2015; Child & Hsieh, 2014). In the context of SMEs, information

access refers to the extent to which SMEs can obtain relevant, timely, and accurate information to support their business activities. A lack of adequate information can negatively affect SMEs' development, sustainability, innovation, competitiveness, productivity, and overall performance (Noya et al., 2024; OECD, 2020). Therefore, improving SMEs' access to information should be a key objective for SMEs and government policymakers.

To address this, many governments have implemented policies to enhance information access for SMEs (Bodlaj & Cater, 2022; Kolbe et al., 2022). These policies and interventions are designed to facilitate the creation, dissemination, and use of information within the SME community and its stakeholders. Additionally, they intended to overcome the barriers and challenges SMEs face in obtaining necessary information, fostering better decision-making, innovation, and competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Studies have shown that export market orientation, which emphasizes understanding and meeting the needs of international customers, is positively related to SMEs' access to relevant information about international markets. Fletcher and Harris (2012) argue that internationalization enhances a company's knowledge and information base by encouraging engagement in new practices and environments. Firms can learn from export environments through collaborations within global supply chains (Salomon & Shaver, 2005). As noted by Cadogan et al. (2001), a company's export market orientation is measured by the extent to which it generates, disseminates, and responds to information about its export markets. This information focuses on the needs of export customers, competition in export markets, and other external factors that ultimately affect the company's export performance (Pascucci et al., 2016). Export market orientation is closely linked to information about export markets.

Empirical evidence underlines adequate information's essential role in enhancing SME performance (Noya et al., 2024). Popovič et al. (2012) highlight that information is indispensable for managerial decision-making, strategic planning, uncertainty mitigation, and adaptation to dynamic business environments. Companies that successfully leverage high-quality information resources can integrate this information effectively across all layers of their

business processes, significantly improving firm performance (Sparks & McCann, 2015).

Supporting these findings, Msomi et al. (2022) demonstrated a substantial positive correlation between access to information and SME performance. Their study claimed that inadequate information, particularly regarding market conditions, can lead to a significant lack of SMEs' responsiveness to emerging market opportunities. In this context, limited access to information becomes a barrier and a critical factor that hampers SMEs' ability to enter and compete in markets.

Given the central role of information access, it is plausible that SME information access mediates the relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance. SMEs with a strong export market orientation may better access and utilize relevant market information, enhancing their overall market performance.

One of the government's essential functions is to act as a catalyst in strengthening business sectors to improve their performance (Taneo et al., 2022) and overall market output (Mankiw, 2011). A government policy framework provides a clear roadmap for implementing policies that support SME performance. Several studies have found that SMEs needing more government support face restricted access to opportunities that enhance growth and performance (Musabayana et al., 2022). These studies report that SME development in developing countries is strongly supported by government policies aimed at facilitating their growth.

Government involvement in enhancing SME performance has become an essential area of research in recent years. Empirical studies confirm the effectiveness of government support in influencing SME performance. These studies show that government policies can mediate and moderate, strengthening the relationship between SME performance and its antecedents. Government support manifests in various forms, including training programs, direct purchasing of SME products (Taneo et al., 2022), provision of information technology assistance, financial aid, and tax reductions (Moreira et al., 2022). Other forms of support include assistance with eco-friendly technologies

(Severo et al., 2017), quality and technological support (Nguyen et al., 2023), export assistance programs (Comi & Resmini, 2020), and SME internationalization programs (Mota et al., 2021).

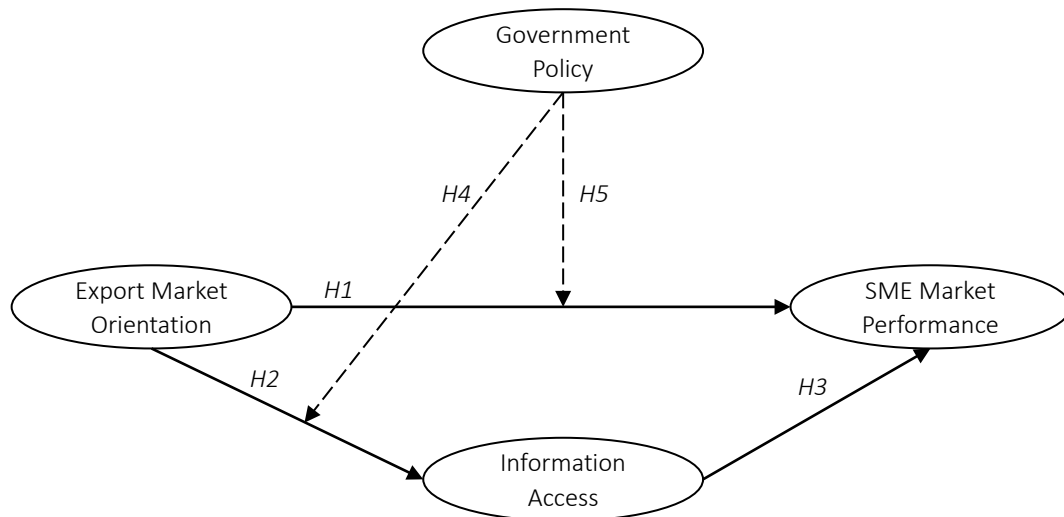
In addition to direct support programs, government assistance often comes in the form of regulations or policies designed to ease SME operations (Nassr & Siddiqui, 2022; Musabayana et al., 2022; Hoque, 2018; Turner et al., 2016). Comparing SMEs with larger firms reveals the complex economic dynamics that distinguish the two sectors. Beck et al. (2005) describe how SMEs, unlike larger firms, face multifaceted challenges such as limited economies of scale, inadequate technological resources, and restricted access to information. SMEs are thus positioned within a business landscape filled with uncertainty, compounded by their weaker market power. In this context, government support becomes crucial, offering relevant solutions to ensure SME continuity. In particular, macroeconomic policies designed to enhance SME competitiveness and performance are vital.

In light of the insights from previous studies, this paper aims to examine the impact of export market orientation on SME market performance, explicitly investigating how government policy moderates this relationship and whether information access serves as a mediating factor. Through this approach, the study seeks to deepen the understanding of critical drivers that enhance SME competitiveness in international markets and provide a framework for effective policy support.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Export market orientation positively and significantly affects SME market performance.*
- H2: Export market orientation positively and significantly affects SME information access.*
- H3: SME information access mediates the correlation between export market orientation and SME market performance.*
- H4: Government policy strengthens the correlation between export market orientation and SME information access.*





**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

*H5: Government policy strengthens the correlation between export market orientation and SME market performance.*

The hypotheses are visualized in the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1.

## 2. METHOD

This quantitative investigation utilized a survey method to collect data from SME managers concerning their profiles and their perceptions of the key constructs in the study: export market orientation (EMO), information access (IA), SME market performance (MP), and government policy (GP). The measurement items were carefully selected based on an extensive literature review, with indicators from prior studies adapted to align with the specific context of this study. A complete list of the measurement items utilized for data collection is provided in Table A1 in Appendix A. All indicators were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

The data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to members of the Malang Regency SME Communication Forum in Indonesia. The forum comprises 12 associations representing approximately 500 food SMEs, and all are included as the research population. According to the Indonesia Central Bureau of Statistics, Malang Regency is one of the regions in Indonesia with the highest number of SMEs. The characteristics of the respondents are shown

in Table 1. The respondents, primarily business owners/managers, provided insights through the survey, yielding 448 valid responses after sorting. This sample size met the minimum requirement for variance-based structural equation modeling partial least squares (SEM PLS), ensuring robust analysis to address the research hypotheses. According to Hair et al. (2022), the minimum acceptable sample size for SEM PLS is ten times the maximum number of indicators used to measure a single construct in the model. This study's maximum number of indicators per construct was seven, ensuring the sample size requirement was met. Data were analyzed using WarpPLS version 8.0 to assess the correlations between variables and the mediating and moderating effects. The significance level applied in this study was 5% ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the respondents

Characteristic		Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	17.0
	Female	83.0
Level of Education	Elementary	2.5
	High School	71.8
	Higher Education	25.7
Age	< 25	4.2
	25 -40	33.5
	> 41	62.3
Business Age	< 2 years	13.4
	2 – 5 years	40.2
	6 – 9 years	27.3
	10 – 12 years	6.9
	13 – 15 years	4.9
	> 15 years	7.3

### 3. RESULTS

The model fit and quality indices (Kock, 2022) confirm the model's robustness and appropriateness for hypothesis testing. As shown in Table 2, crucial indicators such as the Average Path Coefficient (APC) and Average R-squared (ARS) were statistically significant at the 1% level, emphasizing the strong relationships between the latent variables and highlighting the meaningful connections between exogenous and endogenous variables. The substantial Tenenhaus GoF index of 0.591 further supports the model's explanatory capacity, indicating that it successfully captures critical interactions. Furthermore, the Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF) of 1.259 surpassed the standard threshold, indicating full collinearity without redundancy among the latent variables. These findings confirm that the model is well-structured, valid, and fully prepared for hypothesis testing, providing a solid foundation for the study's analytical framework.

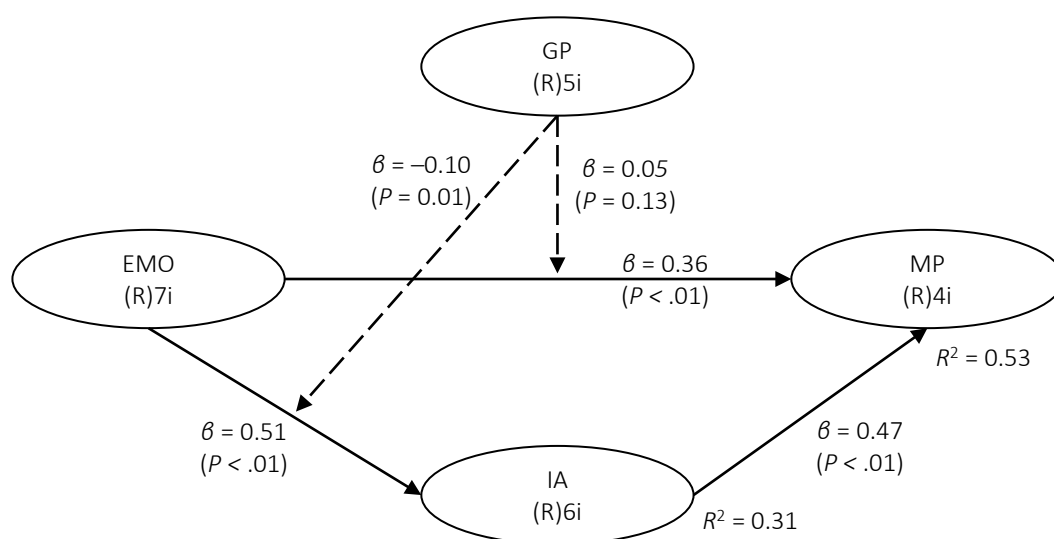
Figure 2 shows the result of WarpPLS's statistical analysis, summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the statistical analysis results for five hypotheses tested in the study. The first hypothesis (H1) examines the relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance, showing a path coefficient of 0.512 with a *p*-value of less than 0.001. This strong positive relationship is statistically significant, thus supporting the hypothesis. Similarly, the second hypothesis (H2), which explores the impact of export market orientation on SME information access, reveals a positive path coefficient of 0.359 and a *p*-value of less than 0.001, confirming its significance and supporting this hypothesis.

However, the third hypothesis (H3), which proposes that SME information access mediates the relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance, is rejected, with a path coefficient of 0.242 and a *p*-value of 0.072, in-

**Table 2.** Model fit and quality indices

Goodness of Fit	Value	Cut-off	Inference
Average Path Coefficient (APC)	< 0.001	0.05	Significant (good)
Average R-Squared(ARS)	< 0.001	0.05	Significant (good)
Average Block VIF (AVIF)	1.259	≤ 5: acceptable ≤ 3.3: ideal	Ideal
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.7	≤ 5: acceptable ≤ 3.3: ideal	Ideal
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.591	≥ 0.1: small ≥ 0.25: medium ≥ 0.36: big	Big



Note: EMO = export market orientation; IA = information access; MP = SME market performance; GP = government policy.

**Figure 2.** WarpPLS analysis result

**Table 3.** Statistical analysis result

Hypothesis	Path	Coeff.	P-value	Hypothesis Decision
H1	EMO → MP	0.512	<0.001	Supported
H2	EMO → IA	0.359	<0.001	Supported
H3	EMO → IA → MP	0.242	0.072	Rejected
H4	GP*EMO → IA	-0.103	0.014	Rejected
H5	GP*EMO → MP	0.053	0.132	Rejected

Note: EMO = export market orientation; IA = information access; MP = SME market performance; GP = government policy.

dicating that the mediation effect is insignificant. The fourth hypothesis (H4), which tests whether government policy strengthens the relationship between export market orientation and SME information access, is also rejected, showing a negative path coefficient of  $-0.103$ . Lastly, the fifth hypothesis (H5), which posits that government policy moderates the relationship between export market orientation and SME market performance, is also rejected, with a path coefficient of  $0.053$  and a  $p$ -value of  $0.132$ . These results suggest that government policy does not have a strengthening effect on either of the examined relationships.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that export market orientation positively influences SME market performance, aligning with previous research. Nguyen et al. (2023) and Katsikeas et al. (2016) demonstrate that SMEs with a strong export market orientation can better understand customer needs, adapt to market changes, and improve their competitive position. By adopting an export market orientation, firms can optimize their marketing strategies to respond to the evolving demands of international customers, leading to enhanced performance. Cadogan et al. (2002) and Fernandes et al. (2020) further emphasize that export market orientation is not just a marketing strategy but a crucial driver of sustainable competitive advantage, especially for SMEs navigating volatile global markets. These findings highlight the critical role of export market orientation in ensuring success for SMEs.

Hypothesis 2 posited that export market orientation positively affects SME information access is also supported. This finding aligns with the literature, where scholars like Fletcher and Harris (2012) argue that an internationalization mindset enhances a firm's ability to access critical information.

Through export market orientation, SMEs continuously learn and gather insights from global markets, expanding their informational resources (Salomon & Shaver, 2005). Export market orientation fosters the collection, dissemination, and response to valuable export-related information, as Cadogan et al. (2001) and Pascucci et al. (2016) emphasized. Consequently, SMEs prioritizing export market orientation can access timely and relevant information, facilitating better decision-making and strategic adaptation. This result underscores export market orientation's role as an information enabler, further enhancing its strategic value for SMEs striving to succeed in international markets.

Despite the strong relationships established in H1 and H2, the mediating role of SME information access between export market orientation and market performance was not supported, as proposed in H3. The data do not indicate a significant mediating effect. This outcome may suggest that while information access is essential, its impact on performance is not substantial enough to mediate the relationship between export market orientation and market performance. Popovič et al. (2012) and Sparks and McCann (2015) emphasized the importance of high-quality information in enhancing business processes and outcomes. However, SMEs may already be leveraging other resources or capabilities, such as innovation or network collaborations, that directly link export market orientation to market performance without requiring a mediating role for information access. Additionally, the effectiveness of information access may be contingent on other factors, such as SMEs' ability to process and utilize the information effectively, which was not directly examined in this study.

Hypothesis 4, which proposed that government policy strengthens the relationship between export market orientation and SME information



access, was rejected. The negative path coefficient suggests that government policy may not effectively facilitate or amplify the role of export market orientation in improving information access. This result contrasts with the literature, highlighting government intervention's importance in reducing information barriers for SMEs (Musabayana et al., 2022; Bodlaj & Cater, 2022). One explanation for this discrepancy could be the ineffectiveness or misalignment of government policies in the context studied, particularly regarding communication and implementation (Musabayana et al., 2022). While policies might exist, their impact on enabling better access to information could be limited by bureaucratic inefficiencies, or they may not directly address the specific informational needs of SMEs involved in export activities. Therefore, this finding calls for a more tailored and responsive government approach to support SMEs' information access, particularly in export-oriented sectors.

Similar to H4, hypothesis 5, which examined the moderating effect of government policy on the re-

lationship between export market orientation and SME market performance, was also rejected. This result suggests that government policy does not significantly enhance the impact of export market orientation on market performance. This finding contradicts theoretical expectations (Porter, 1985; Taneo et al., 2022), which argue that government policy should act as a catalyst, providing SMEs with the support necessary to improve market outcomes. However, it aligns with evidence indicating that government policies often fall short in many developing economies due to poor implementation, lack of transparency, or an insufficient understanding of SMEs' real needs (Musabayana et al., 2022). For government policies to effectively moderate the export market orientation and market performance relationship, they must be well-targeted and efficient and address SMEs' specific barriers, such as funding gaps, technology access, or market entry assistance (Moreira et al., 2022). The rejection of this hypothesis highlights the need for more effective governmental interventions responsive to SME internationalization's nuances.

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## CONCLUSION

This study provides fresh insights into the interplay between export market orientation, information access, SME market performance, and government policy's moderating role, offering theoretical and practical contributions. Unlike prior studies, this paper highlights that while export market orientation is a critical driver of SME performance, its benefits are not entirely mediated by information access, suggesting the need for SMEs to leverage additional capabilities. Moreover, the finding that government policy does not significantly strengthen these relationships underscores the importance of rethinking policy frameworks to better align with SME needs, particularly in developing economies.

The study also highlights the negative moderating impact of government policy on the relationships between export market orientation, information access, and market performance. This novel finding implies that existing policies may not sufficiently align with the practical needs of SMEs in global markets. Effective policy frameworks must address specific challenges faced by SMEs. The results suggest that government interventions are inadequately implemented to offer meaningful support. Thus, there is a pressing need for policymakers to develop targeted, flexible, and industry-specific policies that better facilitate SMEs' global expansion and competitiveness. Without such alignment, even SMEs with strong export market orientation may struggle to achieve sustained international success.

The study makes significant theoretical contributions by reinforcing the role of export market orientation as a core driver of SME performance while questioning the mediating and moderating roles of information access and government policy. These findings extend the discourse on SME internationalization, suggesting that additional organizational capabilities or external support mechanisms are necessary to optimize export strategies. Practically, SME managers should prioritize building robust market orientation capabilities, including strategic planning and market research, to strengthen their competitiveness. At the same time, policymakers must critically reassess the effectiveness of current support

mechanisms, ensuring that they are more targeted and responsive to SMEs' operational realities. Future research should expand on these findings by exploring other geographic contexts and additional moderating factors, such as technological innovation and market entry barriers, to better understand how SMEs can achieve sustained growth in global markets.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Writing – original draft: Sunday Noya.

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## APPENDIX A

**Table A1.** Measurement items

Construct	Item	Adapted from
Export Market Orientation (EMO)	<p>I excel in understanding export needs based on customer requirements.</p> <p>I frequently evaluate its commitment to meeting export customer needs.</p> <p>I regularly measure export customer satisfaction.</p> <p>I am driven by the needs of export customers.</p> <p>I pay special attention to after-sales services.</p> <p>I respond swiftly to export competitors' actions that pose a threat.</p> <p>I routinely discuss the strengths of export competitors.</p> <p>I regularly share information about export competitors' strategies.</p>	Bintoro et al. (2024); Imran et al. (2017); Lewrick et al. (2011); Narver and Slater (1990)
Information Access (IA)	<p>I received enough information to make a decision.</p> <p>The information I obtained is complete enough to support business decisions.</p> <p>The decisions I make are always based on accurate information.</p> <p>The information I receive is always valuable.</p> <p>It is easy for me to obtain important information.</p> <p>I can quickly obtain important information.</p>	Noya et al. (2024); Imran et al. (2019); Sparks and McCann (2015)
Government Policy (GP)	<p>I received the "credit interest subsidy" program from the government.</p> <p>I received the "income tax incentive" program from the government.</p> <p>I received the "working capital credit guarantee" program from the government.</p> <p>I often participate in training programs/activities organized by the government.</p> <p>The government implements programs that support the development of SMEs.</p>	Taneo et al. (2022)
SME Market Performance (MP)	<p>My profit has increased in the last three years.</p> <p>My sales revenue has increased in the last three years.</p> <p>My marketing area has expanded in the last three years.</p> <p>My interaction with customers has improved.</p>	Salah and Ayyash (2024); Nuryakin and Ardyan (2018)