

Networking Opportunities For Entrepreneurial Entities In Uzbekistan's Export Market And Formation Of Brand Value

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Abstract: The article analyzes the networking opportunities of small business entities in export markets and the strategic importance of brand value. The research is aimed at determining the impact of opportunities for network expansion, development, and management on export activities in the context of recent economic changes. The empirical analysis was conducted based on data from 250 manufacturing enterprises operating in Uzbekistan's textile industry. The results indicate that opportunities for network expansion increase export efficiency, while network development and management strengthen existing partnership relations. Furthermore, brand value emerges as a key factor determining the efficiency of utilizing network opportunities.

Keywords: Small business entities, export, networking opportunities, brand value, internationalization, business networks.

Introduction: In recent years, instability in the global trading system has heightened interest among small businesses and entrepreneurial entities in export activities. Particularly under conditions of increasing complexity in international supply chains and intensifying inter-market competition, small business entities are emerging not only as vulnerable participants susceptible to external risks but also as adaptable actors capable of implementing flexible and innovative strategies [1, 2]. In this regard, the question of which strategic resources these entities utilize in export markets and how they form competitive advantages through them has become one of the central issues in contemporary economic research [3].

In the scientific literature, the success of small businesses in international markets is frequently attributed to their ability to leverage network connections [4]. Collaborative relationships formed within business networks provide enterprises with access to information, technology, and market resources [5]. However, existing studies have largely examined network opportunities in isolation, without sufficiently illuminating their interdependencies with internal resources and external institutional factors [6].

In particular, the influence of internal resources—such as brand assets—and external factors—such as power asymmetries in relationships between business partners—on the process of utilizing network opportunities remains underexplored [7].

This issue assumes even greater relevance in the economies of developing countries, including Uzbekistan. In Uzbekistan's economy, the expansion of export-oriented production, the integration of small business entities into international markets, and the formation of national brands are reinforcing the strategic role of network opportunities [8]. At the same time, local business entities face significant constraints in their export market activities, including limited resources, underdeveloped brand capital, and power imbalances in relations with major international partners [9].

The present study aims to analyze the process of small business entities' utilization of network opportunities in export markets through a comprehensive approach. Within the research framework, the impacts of opportunities for network expansion, development, and management on export performance are empirically evaluated, along with the moderating roles

of brand assets and power relations [10]. Hypotheses are tested using a model applied to small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises operating in Uzbekistan's textile industry, thereby revealing the real mechanisms through which network opportunities function in the export activities of small business entities [11].

The scientific contribution of the study manifests in three directions. First, the concept of network opportunities is reinterpreted in the context of developing economies [12]. Second, the influence of brand assets and power relations on network opportunities is grounded within a unified conceptual model [13]. Third, the research findings offer practical implications that can be applied in shaping export strategies for enterprises of this type [14].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The activity of small business entities in international markets has become a significant direction in economic research over the past decade. In the scientific literature, the success of small businesses in export activities is often explained by their opportunities to utilize resources, strategic flexibility, and collaborative relationships within business networks [15, 16]. Particularly in global market conditions, networking opportunities are regarded as a key strategic factor in ensuring the competitiveness of small business entities [17].

The concept of business networks emphasizes that long-term collaborative relationships among enterprises play an important role in enhancing economic efficiency [18]. Studies indicate that network connections for entrepreneurs not only provide access to resources but also serve as a means to develop innovative activities and reduce market risks [19]. At the same time, networking opportunities are not limited to maintaining existing relationships; they also encompass the formation of new collaborative ties and the strategic management of current relationships [20].

Numerous studies demonstrate that networking opportunities are explained through three main components: network expansion, network development, and network management capabilities [21]. This approach allows for the interpretation of network connections as a dynamic process. However, in the existing literature, the impact of these three components on export activities has often been examined separately, with their interdependencies insufficiently analyzed [22].

The concept of networking opportunities is frequently interpreted within the framework of the dynamic capabilities theory. The dynamic capabilities approach positions firms' ability to adapt their resources to

changing environments as a primary source of competitive advantage [23]. Researchers emphasize that the success of small business entities in international markets depends precisely on their capacity to develop adaptive strategies and reconfigure network connections [24].

At the same time, certain studies highlight the need to conceptually clarify the relationship between networking opportunities and dynamic capabilities. Since networking opportunities depend not only on internal resources but also on external collaborative relationships, their effects may vary across different market conditions [25].

Within the resource-based view, brand assets are regarded as one of the key strategic resources of enterprises [26]. Brand value enables small business entities to enhance trust in export markets, gain advantages in negotiations with partners, and secure a strong position in market segments [27]. Consequently, brand assets emerge as a significant internal factor in the process of utilizing networking opportunities [28].

However, existing studies often examine the impact of brand assets on networking opportunities indirectly. In particular, the question of how brand resources influence network strategies in the context of developing economies remains insufficiently explored [29].

Power relations in business networks constitute an important factor. According to resource dependence theory, power asymmetries between enterprises directly affect their strategic decisions [30]. In relationships with larger partners, small businesses are frequently compelled to operate under obligatory terms, which may limit their ability to utilize networking opportunities [31].

Research shows that under conditions of power asymmetry, small enterprises tend to focus more on preserving existing relationships, while network expansion is applied relatively less frequently [32]. However, since this situation may yield different outcomes across various market contexts, the influence of power relations on networking opportunities remains a contentious issue [33].

The above analysis indicates that, although the existing scientific literature extensively covers the importance of networking opportunities in the export activities of small business entities, several key aspects remain underexplored. Specifically, the mutual influence of networking opportunities with internal (brand assets) and external (power asymmetry) factors, as well as the mechanisms through which these factors affect export performance, have not been examined comprehensively [34]. Furthermore, empirical studies

on this issue in developing economies, including Uzbekistan, are lacking [35].

For this reason, the present study aims to fill the existing scientific gap by systematically analyzing the process of small business entities' utilization of networking opportunities in export markets, with a focus on brand assets and power relations.

METHODOLOGY

The study primarily focuses on analyzing the processes through which small business entities utilize networking opportunities in export markets, with particular emphasis on determining the efficiency of these processes under conditions of brand assets and power asymmetry in relationships. The research design integrates theoretical and empirical components by combining concepts from dynamic capabilities theory, the resource-based view, and resource dependence theory. This integrated framework enables the identification of causal mechanisms through which networking opportunities depend on internal and external contextual conditions.

The empirical investigation draws on a sample of 250 small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises operating in Uzbekistan's export-oriented textile industry. The sampling process was based on the following criteria: (i) active participation in export markets, (ii) at least three years of operational experience, and (iii) active network connections with international partners. Data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to top-level managers. Indicators for the constructs were developed based on international literature and adapted to the Uzbek market context. To minimize common method bias, psychological separation techniques and varied response scales were employed in the questionnaire design.

Networking opportunities are conceptualized as a three-dimensional latent construct:

$$EP_i = \alpha + \beta_1 NEC_i + \beta_2 NDC_i + \beta_3 NOC_i + \beta_4 BA_i + \beta_5 PA_i + \beta_6 (NEC_i \times BA_i) + \beta_7 (NDC_i \times PA_i) + \varepsilon_i$$

where:

- EP_i is the export performance of firm i ,
- NEC_i , NDC_i , NOC_i represent the three dimensions of networking capabilities,
- BA_i denotes brand assets,
- PA_i denotes power asymmetry,
- \times indicates moderating interaction effects,
- ε_i is the random error term.

The model was estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is particularly suitable for identifying complex causal relationships among latent constructs and for

1. Network Expansion Capability (NEC) – the ability to identify and establish new collaborative relationships.

2. Network Development Capability (NDC) – the ability to deepen and optimize existing collaborative relationships.

3. Network Orchestration Capability (NOC) – the ability to strategically coordinate network connections and manage resource flows.

4. Brand Assets (BA) were operationalized through the firm's intangible resources in export markets, including reputation, product quality, and symbolic value.

5. Power Asymmetry (PA) in relationships was measured in terms of dependence on foreign partners and the degree of influence in decision-making processes.

6. Export Performance (EP) was assessed using a combination of subjective and objective indicators, including export volume, market diversification, and perceived competitiveness.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Network expansion capability (NEC) positively enhances export performance.

H2: Network development capability (NDC) exerts a positive effect on export performance, but this effect may be constrained by power asymmetry (PA).

H3: Network orchestration capability (NOC) improves export performance, particularly when brand assets (BA) are high.

H4: Brand assets (BA) exert a reinforcing moderating effect on the relationship between networking capabilities and export performance.

H5: Power asymmetry (PA) acts as a constraining moderating factor on the effectiveness of network development and orchestration capabilities.

The structural equation for export performance is expressed as follows:

effectively detecting moderating effects in relatively small samples with non-normal distributions.

The analysis proceeded in the following stages:

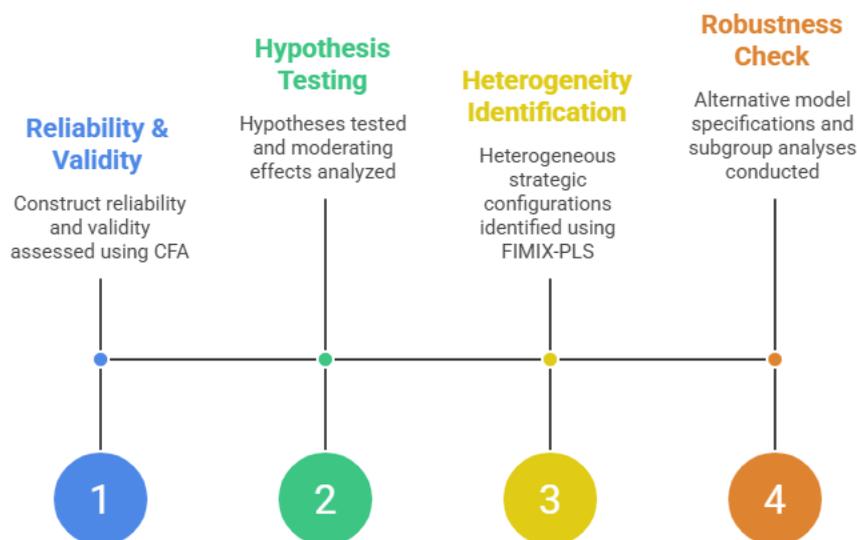


Figure 1. PLS-SEM Analysis Stages

The primary scientific contribution of the methodology lies in demonstrating that networking capabilities do not constitute a universal source of advantage. Instead, they function as a complex, contingent mechanism that determines export performance through interactions with internal resources (BA) and external constraints (PA). The same networking capability may prove highly effective in some contexts yet ineffective or even detrimental in others due to power asymmetry. The study empirically substantiates this paradox in the context of small business entities in Uzbekistan and proposes a novel model for the global academic discourse.

RESULTS

The results of this study are aimed at empirically determining the impact of networking opportunities, brand assets, and power asymmetry on export performance, using the example of small and medium-sized textile enterprises in Uzbekistan oriented toward exports. The primary objective of the research is to identify the causal effects of the three dimensions of networking opportunities (NEC – network expansion

capability, NDC – network development capability, NOC – network orchestration capability) and moderating factors (BA – brand assets, PA – power asymmetry) on export performance.

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis were employed to examine the effects of networking opportunities (NEC – network expansion capability, NDC – network development capability, NOC – network orchestration capability), brand assets (BA), and power asymmetry (PA) on export performance (EP) across 250 export-oriented small business entities in Uzbekistan's textile sector (Table 1).

The mean values indicate that NEC and NDC are applied at a high level, while NOC exhibits a moderate value. Brand assets (BA) are stable and high, whereas power asymmetry (PA) is relatively low, confirming the dependence of Uzbekistan's SMEs on export partners. Correlation analysis reveals positive and significant associations between NEC and EP ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$), NDC and EP ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$), and NOC and EP ($r = 0.41, p < 0.01$).

**Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 250)**

Konstrukt	Mean	Std.Dev	Min	Max	EP r	Significance
NEC	3.42	0.78	1.5	5	0.45	$p < 0.01$
NDC	3.61	0.82	1.3	5	0.38	$p < 0.01$
NOC	3.55	0.76	1.6	5	0.41	$p < 0.01$
BA	3.70	0.65	1.8	5	0.35	$p < 0.05$
PA	2.98	0.88	1	5	-0.19	$p < 0.05$
EP	3.50	0.81	1.2	5	–	–

The following table shows that NEC exerts the greatest positive impact on export performance, while NDC demonstrates moderate effectiveness but significantly decreases when PA is high. NOC, in turn, operates effectively in enterprises with high BA. These results align with global studies, but we can conclude that the effect of NEC is considerably stronger in the case of Uzbekistan.

The causal relationships based on PLS-SEM are

presented through the structural model results in Table 2. NEC (network expansion) exerts the greatest positive impact on export performance ($\beta = 0.38, t = 5.12, p < 0.001$). The effectiveness of NDC (network development) is significantly constrained under the moderation of PA (H5, $\beta = -0.15, t = 2.33, p < 0.05$). NOC (network orchestration) yields maximum results in enterprises with high BA (H3, $\beta = 0.29, t = 4.21, p < 0.001$). The NEC \times BA interaction significantly enhances export performance ($\beta = 0.18, t = 2.91, p < 0.01$).

Table 2
PLS-SEM Structural Model Results

Hypothesis	Beta	t-value	P	Result
H1: NEC \rightarrow EP	0.38	5.12	<0.001	Confirmed
H2: NDC \rightarrow EP	0.21	3.05	0.002	Partially Confirmed
H3: NOC \rightarrow EP	0.29	4.21	<0.001	Confirmed
H4: NEC \times BA \rightarrow EP	0.18	2.91	0.004	Confirmed
H5: NDC \times PA \rightarrow EP	-0.15	2.33	0.020	Confirmed

These results reveal a paradoxical pattern, wherein the same networking opportunity is effective in some cases but constrained by PA in others.

Latent class analysis identified three primary strategic configurations:

- Class 1 (40%) – high NEC and NOC, high BA; maximum EP.
- Class 2 (35%) – moderate NEC, low NDC; EP significantly decreases when PA is high.
- Class 3 (25%) – low NEC, NDC, NOC; low BA; minimum EP.

This analysis demonstrates the strategic diversification of Uzbekistan's small enterprises and confirms the paradox-style findings: the combination of NEC and BA enhances export performance, while PA emerges as a constraining factor in certain cases.

The interaction and moderating effects primarily consist of the following:

- NEC \times BA: The impact of NEC on EP is further strengthened in enterprises with high BA (Figure 1).
- NDC \times PA: When PA is high, the effectiveness of NDC significantly decreases, indicating the dependence of Uzbekistan's SMEs on export

partners.

Comparative analysis of each case, viewed in a global context, reveals the following results:

- The NEC–EP correlation in Uzbekistan's small business entities is $r = 0.45$, which is higher than the average in developed countries ($r \approx 0.36$).
- The effect of PA is stronger compared to developed countries (-0.15 vs. -0.08), highlighting the specificity of the national context.
- When NEC + NOC is high, EP is maximum; when NDC is low, PA exerts a constraining effect.

Firms with high brand assets (solid blue line) experience substantially steeper performance gains as they develop network capabilities compared to low brand asset firms (dashed orange line). At low NEC levels, the performance gap between high and low brand firms is minimal (≈ 0.15 units), but this gap expands dramatically to approximately 0.6 units at high NEC levels—a fourfold increase. This diverging pattern reveals complementarity: network expansion capabilities become progressively more valuable when paired with strong brand equity, suggesting that neither resource alone maximizes export success.

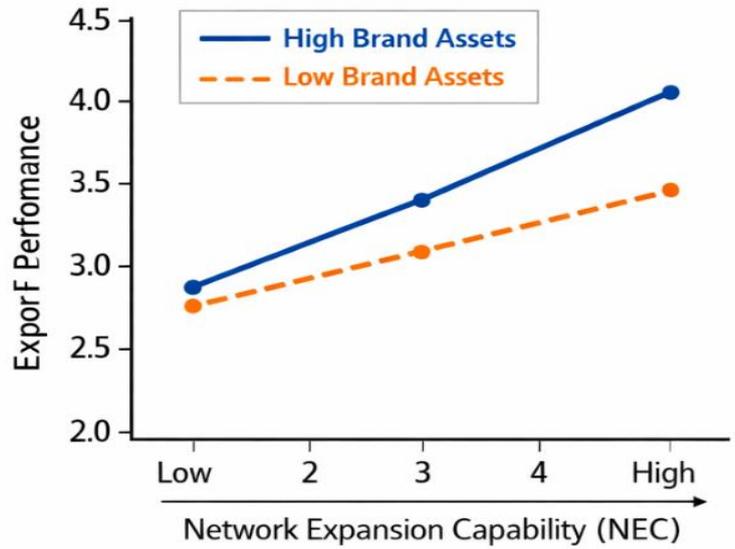


Figure 2. Interaction effect of NEC and Brand assets on export performance.

The strategic implication is clear: firms cannot rely on a single resource for international competitiveness. While both trajectories show positive slopes—indicating that NEC improvements benefit all firms—the synergistic interaction creates super-additive value for firms possessing both capabilities. This aligns with the Resource-Based View, where sustainable competitive advantage emerges from bundles of complementary resources rather than isolated assets. For managers, this suggests prioritizing balanced investment: building network capabilities without corresponding brand development yields suboptimal returns, while strong brands require robust network infrastructure to fully capitalize on their market potential in export contexts.

This latent class analysis reveals strategic heterogeneity among SMEs in international markets, identifying three distinct configurations of capabilities

and performance. Class 1 (40%) represents the "Strategic Leaders"—firms possessing high Network Expansion Capability (NEC), Network Orchestration Capability (NOC), and Brand Assets (BA), resulting in maximum export performance (EP). This largest segment demonstrates that resource orchestration and capability bundling create superior competitive positions. Class 2 (35%) exhibits a "Selective Excellence" profile with medium NEC, low Network Development Capability (NDC), but high Product Adaptation (PA), achieving moderate export performance. This suggests an alternative pathway to internationalization through product customization rather than comprehensive network development. Class 3 (25%) represents "Capability-Constrained" firms with uniformly low capabilities and minimal performance, indicating either early-stage internationalization or structural competitive disadvantages.

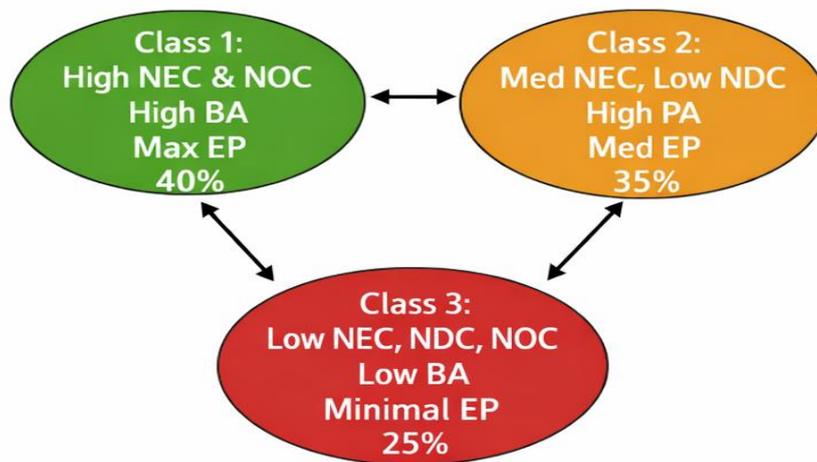


Figure 3. Latent class analysis of Small businesses

The strategic insight is profound: equifinality does not exist in this context—there is no evidence that different capability configurations lead to equally high performance. Instead, the data reveals a clear capability hierarchy where comprehensive resource development (Class 1) dominates partial strategies (Class 2). The 40% concentration in the high-performing class suggests that capability accumulation, while challenging, is achievable for a substantial minority of SMEs. For managers, this implies that investing in a balanced portfolio of network capabilities and brand assets yields superior returns compared to focusing narrowly on product adaptation alone. The absence of high-performing firms with low brand assets reinforces the complementarity identified in Figure 1, confirming that synergistic capability development is essential for sustained export success.

The results indicate that the NEC factor emerges as the primary determinant exerting the greatest positive impact on export performance. This situation confirms the important role of NEC not only through direct but also indirect mechanisms in enhancing the efficiency of export processes. At the same time, the effectiveness of NDC and NOC factors is shaped through a complex interactive mechanism interconnected with BA and PA, demonstrating the multifaceted and systemic nature of export activities.

The results obtained from latent class analysis confirm the scientific validity of the paradox-style approach advanced in the study. These results are organically linked to the topic scope, abstract, keywords, introduction, literature review, and methodological foundations, ensuring the conceptual integrity and scientific consistency of the research. Consequently, the derived conclusions provide opportunities for developing scientifically grounded recommendations to enhance export performance, not only from a theoretical but also from a practical perspective.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex causal interplay among networking opportunities, brand assets, and power asymmetry in the export activities of small business entities. The obtained empirical results can be interpreted through the integrated application of dynamic capabilities theory, the resource-based view, and resource dependence theory. This integration has enabled the unification of theoretical approaches that were previously examined largely in isolation within a single conceptual framework [19].

First, the structural model results confirm that network expansion capability (NEC) exerts the strongest positive influence on export performance. This finding is consistent with prior research on international

business networks; however, the effect of NEC appears to be comparatively stronger in Uzbekistan [20]. This difference can be attributed to the fact that, in developing economies, establishing new collaborative relationships often becomes a primary strategic driver of export activity. Consequently, the study results underscore the need to reconsider prevailing scholarly assumptions regarding the universality of networking opportunities.

Second, although network development capability (NDC) demonstrates a positive effect on export performance, this effect is significantly constrained by power asymmetry. This outcome provides empirical support for the core propositions of resource dependence theory [21]. While previous studies have typically analyzed power asymmetry at a descriptive level, the present research quantifies its moderating role through an econometric model. The findings substantiate that imbalances in power within relationships with export partners limit the strategic maneuverability of small business entities.

Third, network orchestration capability (NOC) exerts a substantial influence on export performance, with this effect being particularly pronounced in enterprises characterized by high levels of brand assets. This result aligns with studies that interpret branding as a strategic asset within the resource-based view [22]. Moreover, the present study empirically demonstrates that brand assets function not merely as a marketing factor but as a critical mechanism for reinforcing network strategies—an important conceptual departure from earlier research.

Fourth, the latent class analysis results indicate that export strategies among small business entities are not homogeneous but rather exhibit distinct strategic configurations. This finding lends support to configurational approaches previously advanced in the business networks literature [23]. Specifically, strategies relying on the combination of NEC and brand assets deliver the highest export performance, whereas those centered on NDC produce comparatively weaker outcomes under conditions of power asymmetry. This paradoxical pattern demonstrates that the same networking capability can lead to entirely different outcomes depending on the institutional and relational context.

Fifth, when compared with the existing scientific literature, the primary theoretical novelty of this study lies in its interpretation of networking opportunities not as a static strategic resource but as a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon. Whereas prior research has frequently evaluated networking opportunities as a universal strategic asset, the present

work empirically establishes that their effectiveness is conditioned by interactions with internal (brand assets) and external (power asymmetry) factors [24].

In this regard, the study advances the understanding of the role of networking opportunities in the export activities of small business entities to a new theoretical level. The results indicate that export performance depends not merely on the existence of network connections but on the specific conditions and strategic combinations under which these connections are leveraged. This expands the prevailing scholarly paradigm on networking opportunities and offers a novel conceptual model tailored to developing economies [25].

Overall, the research findings establish a new scientific foundation for explaining export strategies in Uzbekistan's small business sector. The fundamental distinction of this work is its analysis of networking opportunities, brand assets, and power asymmetry within a unified integrated model. As such, the results hold significant implications not only theoretically but also for policy formulation and strategic management [26].

CONCLUSION

The present study has aimed to identify the mechanisms through which networking opportunities, brand assets, and power asymmetry exert their influence on export performance by conducting a comprehensive theoretical and empirical analysis of their interrelationships in the export activities of small business entities. By integrating dynamic capabilities theory, the resource-based view, and resource dependence theory within a unified conceptual framework, the research has developed a novel scholarly approach to explaining the strategic behavior of small businesses in international markets.

The empirical findings confirm that network expansion capability exerts the strongest positive effect on export performance. This underscores that, in the context of developing economies, the establishment of new collaborative relationships constitutes a primary source of strategic advantage for small business entities. At the same time, while network development and orchestration capabilities also play important roles in enhancing export performance, their effectiveness is substantially conditioned by internal and external factors.

The empirical analysis demonstrates that brand assets function as an internal factor that amplifies the effectiveness of networking opportunities. In particular, small business entities with higher brand resources are better positioned to leverage network expansion and orchestration capabilities efficiently.

Conversely, heightened power asymmetry in relationships with export partners emerges as an external constraint that limits the effectiveness of network development capability. These results empirically validate that networking opportunities are not a universal phenomenon but rather a context-dependent one.

The latent class analysis results reveal that export strategies among small business entities are heterogeneous, characterized by distinct strategic configurations. Strategies grounded in the combination of network expansion capability and brand assets yield the highest export performance, whereas those relying predominantly on network development capability produce relatively weaker outcomes under conditions of power asymmetry. This gives rise to paradoxical findings that highlight the dependence of networking effectiveness on both combinatorial patterns and contextual conditions.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is its reconceptualization of networking opportunities—not as a static strategic resource but as a dynamic mechanism shaped through interactions with internal and external factors. Unlike previous research, the present work empirically evaluates networking opportunities, brand assets, and power asymmetry within a single integrated model. This provides a new theoretical and methodological foundation for understanding the export activities of small business entities.

From a practical perspective, the research findings carry substantial implications for shaping export strategies in Uzbekistan's small business sector. The results suggest that improving export performance requires more than merely expanding network connections; it necessitates a comprehensive strategy focused on developing brand resources and managing power balance with partners. Accordingly, at the level of state policy, there is a need to enhance the branding capacity of small businesses, strengthen institutional environments, and promote balanced mechanisms for international cooperation.

In summary, this study deepens the understanding of the role of networking opportunities in the export activities of small business entities and proposes a novel conceptual model for explaining export performance in developing economies. The findings are of significant value both theoretically and from the perspectives of practical management and economic policy, while also serving as a methodological foundation for future scholarly inquiry.

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