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# Attitude Toward Internationalization And Early Internationalization: Comparison of Indian and French SMEs' Decision Makers

Antonin Ricard ● Abrar Ali Saiyed

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**Abstract.** This research has two objectives. The first is to study the link between SMEs internationalizing at an early stage and the attitudes of their decision makers toward internationalization. The second is to analyze this relationship in an international context (India and France). We thus propose to contribute to a better understanding of the factors behind internationalization. To meet these objectives, we used an original methodology: decision makers' practices were studied using the scenario method. The assessment of attitudes toward internationalization was carried out using a new multidimensional scale of measurement. The measurement tool was distributed to decision makers in French and Indian SMEs. A database of 234 respondents was used. This research presents three main results: we found that the decision makers of SMEs with a very positive attitude towards internationalization are more conducive to internationalizing early than others but that the opposite is not always true. Contrary to our expectations, we observed that French decision makers are more favorable to internationalization than Indians. Finally, we identified that Indian decision makers are more likely to internationalize early than the French.

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In the 1990s, a surge in investment flows from emerging countries to developed markets (North-South) and to other emerging markets (South-South) followed the opening of economies such as China and India. This phenomenon is very pronounced today and opens up interesting opportunities for research into international expansion strategies, especially the internationalization trials of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Filling this gap would help to understand the internationalization process more accurately. Furthermore, as noted by Federico Federico, Kantis, Rialp & Rialp (2009), there is a lack of research into international entrepreneurship (IE) in emerging countries.

One of the first research topics to emerge in IE was focused on Born Globals and International New Ventures (INVs), firms that internationalize early and fast. Rennie (1993) and Oviatt & McDougall (1994) did pioneering work on INVs twenty years ago. A burgeoning literature has emerged since, reflecting the growing number of firms in the last thirty years that started to internationalize as soon as they came into being (Zucchella, Palamara & Denicolai, 2007). The temporal dimension is one of three key dimensions of INV theory, along with scope and extent (Madsen, 2013). Seen by some as essential in the internationalization process (Jones & Coviello, 2005), the temporal dimension is "one of the most important concepts for gaining a true understanding of how the internationalization processes develop" (Casillas & Acedo, 2013: 16). It should be

one of the main topics for future research on the internationalization of firms, as shown by recent research into the subject (Cabrol & Nlemvo, 2013; Chetty, Johanson & Martín Martín, 2014; Tapia Moore & Meschi, 2010) and special issues devoted to this theme (Beddi, Merino & Coeurderoy, 2013; Liesch, Nummela & Welch, 2014; Meier, Meschi & Dessain, 2010).

Among the main issues, some researchers have recognized there is a lack of knowledge about the determinants of early internationalization (Casillas et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2005; Rialp, Rialp & Knight, 2005). More specifically, research into the subject has not yet examined the influence of attitude on internationalization. This gap is all the more surprising, considering that many works analyzing the impact of attitude on behavior have revealed that it has a significant role both on practices (Ahn, 2009; Ajzen, 2001; Kraus, 1995) and on the decision making process (Crano & Prislin, 2006; Marquardt & Hoeger, 2009). Attitude facilitates the acquisition of information and accelerates decisions through their heuristics and their schematic functions (Pratkanis, Greenwald & Breckler, 1989). So it seems that this trait is relevant to studying behaviors in firms that internationalize early. Also, we can ask the question: is there a link between the attitude of decision makers toward internationalization and the earliness of internationalization?

This question brings us closer to the current context in which we can observe a sharp increase in investment flows from companies in emerging countries. These flows reflect the good performance of the exports of some emerging economies in recent years, following the example of India (Report of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Boosting Exports from MSME Sector, 2013). In contrast, SMEs from some developed countries are struggling to internationalize. For instance, a recent report of the General Confederation of SMEs (CGPME) denounces the poor performances of French SMEs abroad (Les 20 Mesures de la CGPME pour Dynamiser les Exportations Françaises, 2012). These performance differences are of particular interest, given that the French are rather unfavorable to globalization (Guimelli & Abric, 2008; Poeschl, Campos & Ben Alaya, 2007) while the Indians have a favorable view (Chopra, 2003). In this context, studying the determinants of early internationalization in France and India seems very relevant.

As Keupp & Gassmann (2009) have pointed out, it is important to note in an introduction the specific field in which you are positioning your research. By comparing the behavior of entrepreneurs from different countries, we are positioning this paper in the emerging field of hybrid research into IE (Jones, Coviello & Tang, 2011).

This research presents three main results. First, decision makers who are most favorable toward internationalization decide to internationalize earlier than others. Second, contrary to our expectations, we observed that French SME decision makers are more in favor of internationalization than Indian decision makers. Third, we identified that Indian decision makers are more likely to internationalize early than French decision makers. Theoretical, methodological and managerial contributions derive from this article. From a theoretical point of view, our results provide some answers to the question of the determinants of early internationalization. The developed method is original, and opens interesting perspectives for studying internationalization decisions and processes. We also make a managerial contribution: this research helps to highlight the importance and role of campaigns improving the image of internationalization to develop SMEs' foreign trade.

This article is composed of four parts. A literature review positions our research in the current literature and introduces our research hypotheses. A methodological section details the procedure we followed to develop our measurement tool and presents the field of our study. Then, we present the results of this research and a validation of our hypotheses. The last part

discusses the results in relation to the existing literature and recent reports on the internationalization of SMEs.

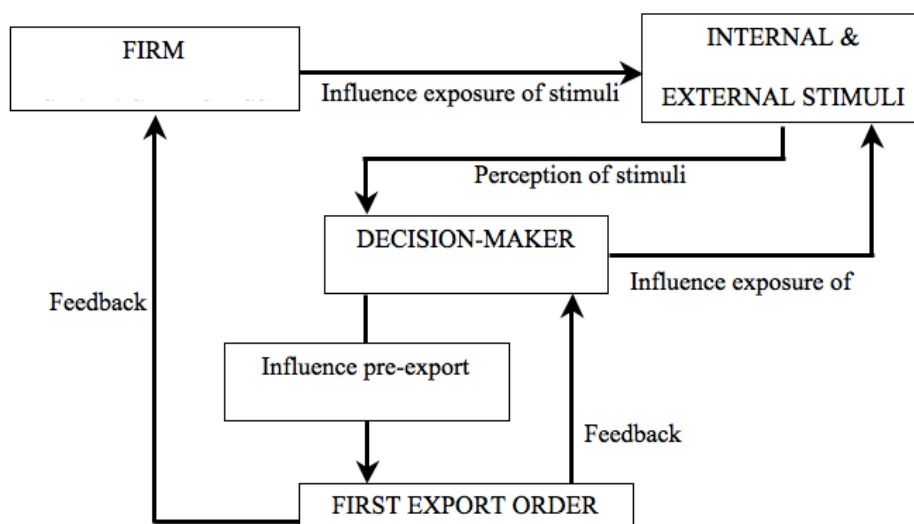
## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEFINITION

There has been very little research into the determinants of early globalization since the seminal work of Rennie (1993) and Oviatt et al. (1994). This issue is now crucial and remains insufficiently treated in the literature of International Business (IB) (Casillas et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2005; Rialp et al., 2005).

Oviatt & McDougall (2005) developed a theoretical model showing the different forces affecting the timing of internationalization. There are four kinds of forces: permissive, mediating, motivational and moderating. The permissive force is what facilitates accelerated internationalization (for example, communications, transport, digital technologies etc.). The second force, which Oviatt and McDougall call “motivation” is the competition or rivalry that drives an SME to find solutions abroad (for example, exports, using a technology solution from abroad etc.) (Fuentelsaz, Gomez & Polo, 2002). This force is linked to the environment of the firm (Dimitratos, Petrou, Plakoyiannaki & Johnson, 2011; Federico et al., 2009; Hutchinson, Fleck & Lloyd-Reason, 2009). The third force is the perception of a situation by the decision maker. The decision maker’s personal characteristics (for example, psychographic traits, experiences etc.) will influence and “mediate” his perception of the situation and speed of action (Casillas, Acedo & Barbero, 2010; Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2011; Sommer & Haug, 2010). Finally, two forces “moderate” the speed of internationalization: the level of knowledge about an opportunity to move abroad and the expertise of the decision maker and the leader of the international social network (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Oviatt et al., 1994).

The earliness of internationalization is dependent on factors lying at three levels: interagency, firm and individual. The model proposed by Tan, Brewer & Liesch (2007: 291) shows the pre-internationalization process and the role played by the decision maker.

Figure 1. Pre-export model (Tan et al., 2007: 291)



This model emphasizes the central role of the individual in the decision to internationalize. This central role is also defended by other authors like McDougall, Shane & Oviatt (2007) who established that the decision-making system is contained in the minds of the leaders of young firms. Attitude plays a major role in the context of the decision, since it determines the susceptibility of an entrepreneur to seizing opportunities (Tan et al., 2007) and it is mainly the entrepreneur's duty to seize opportunities for internationalization (Andersson & Wictor, 2003).

## ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION AND EARLINESS

Thomas & Znaniecki (1918) were the first to work on the concept of attitude. Their research in the field of social psychology binds social values to psychological attitudes. The attitude is often considered crucial in social psychology as it guides perceptions and information processing (Ahn, 2009). Its influences on the components of decision making have been demonstrated repeatedly (Marquardt et al., 2009). Therefore, it seems appropriate to study the influence of attitude on firms' internationalization decisions.

First, research on attitude and its influence on the internationalization of firms dates back to 1980 (Brady & Bearden, 1979; O'Rourke, 1985; Gripsrud, 1990). The concept, which was subsequently abandoned for almost twenty years, has recently seen renewed interest with the rise of research into IE (Sommer, 2010; Sommer et al., 2010). The definitions used by the authors in this field of research are either not given or are some distance from the original meaning given in social psychology. For example, Brady et al. (1979), O'Rourke (1985), Patterson (2004) and Sommer (2010) do not define "attitude" in their research. Gripsrud (1990) uses the definition of Hughes (1971: 10,11), proposing that attitude is "a hypothetical construct that describes the potential human behavior". According to Sommer et al. (2010: 116), the attitude is the "desirability of a specific behavior from the decision maker perspective", and Tan et al. (2007) refer to the attitudinal commitment Uppsala model concept. Internationalization is a concept that has all the characteristics of a social object (Abric, 2008). We choose the definition of the social psychologist Doise (2003: 242) for whom "attitude" is "a specific position the individual occupies on a single dimension or on several dimensions relevant to assess a given social entity". This definition seems particularly appropriate to our research because it incorporates the multidimensionality of internationalization and the need for measurement imposed by our problems.

Other related concepts have also been proposed in the literature as important to firms' internationalization. The "global mindset" is defined as an openness and an awareness of the markets and of the diverse cultures in the world (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). The "perception" refers to the understanding of the situation by the decision maker (Oviatt et al., 2005). And the "international orientation" is linked to decision makers' exposure to foreign cultures (Acedo & Florin, 2006; Manolova, Brush, Edelman & Greene, 2002; Ruzzier, Antoncic, Hisrich & Konecnik, 2007). Although the link between these concepts and "attitude" has never been specifically studied in the literature, we observe certain proximities. A global mindset is probably correlated with a favorable attitude toward internationalization. Indeed, attitude toward internationalization affects the integration of information by an individual (Doise, 2003; Flament, 2003) and the way he sees the world. Perception corresponds to the distortion of a signal based on the characteristics of an individual (Plous, 1993), thus it is shaped by the attitude. Finally, much research on the determinants of attitudes lead us to believe that international orientation is a component of the attitude toward internationalization (Abric, 2008).

Some research into the internationalization of firms has studied the link between attitude and behavior. We distinguish a set of research in the 1980s and another set in the 2010s. Some 1980s research discusses the impact of attitude on the management of firms. Brady et al. (1979) evaluated the behavior of three groups of managers (those involved internationally directly, those involved indirectly and those not involved) toward direct and indirect import methods. Their results show that managers involved internationally are more favorable to internationalization than others and that they are also the ones who prefer direct import methods. Later, O'Rourke (1985) found differences in attitude between employees of large companies and SMEs. Gripsrud (1990) links attitude with the characteristics of the firm and its products with perceived barriers and opportunities. This first set of research does not directly link attitude to firm behavior. In contrast, the second set of research on the subject does study this link. Sommer et al. (2010) found a link between attitude toward entrepreneurial behavior abroad and the actual intention to go abroad. The same year, this result was confirmed by Sommer (2010).

Attitude has the property of selecting and altering received information. This trait facilitates the possession of the environment by an individual (Fazio, 1989) and accelerates his decisions (Crano et al., 2006). Transposing these results from social psychology to our research, we can assume that attitude toward internationalization is linked with the earliness with which the contractor is developing its international activities. Thus, we propose our first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1 (H1): Decision makers who are favorable<sup>1</sup> to internationalization go abroad earlier than decision makers unfavorable toward internationalization.*

## INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF ATTITUDE AND OF INTERNATIONALIZATION EARLINESS

The comparison of two culturally and economically very different countries must emphasize divergences. It seems interesting here to compare France and India. Indeed, there is a paradox between the position of these countries in international rankings and their peoples' attitudes toward internationalization. The KOF Globalization Index (2010) ranks France in 13th position and India 111th (out of 181 countries ranked). This difference reflects the greater integration of France into the global system. Based on these figures, one might expect that France holds a favorable opinion on internationalization and that India holds an unfavorable opinion. However, the French see globalization pessimistically (Guimelli et al., 2008; Poeschl et al., 2007), unlike the Indians, who are very favorable to globalization (Chopra, 2003). The attitude of the Indians is all the more surprising considering that the authors found that globalization has highlighted problems such as illiteracy, poverty, premature death and inequity in emerging economies (Chopra, 2003; Drèze & Sen, 2002; Gaiha, Thapa, Imai & Kulkarni, 2008). The research done by Guimelli et al. (2008), Poeschl et al. (2007) and Chopra (2003) is not conducted in the field of decision makers. It would be interesting to see whether their findings are applicable to SME decision makers. This paragraph brings us to introduce our second hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2 (H2): Indian decision makers consider internationalization more favorably than French decision makers.*

This paradox is especially interesting given that there seem to be significant performance differences between French and Indian SMEs.

1. The distinction between favorable and unfavorable toward internationalization is done using a measurement scale (Likert type) of attitude. The scale will be presented in the methodology section of the article.

Firstly, as Mathieu & Sterdyniak (2005) have noted, the French do not benefit as much as they could from globalization and global trade. Recent reports corroborate the work of Mathieu & Sterdyniak (2005) by highlighting poor performance on the part of French SMEs' exports (Évolution Récente du Commerce Extérieur Français, 2006<sup>2</sup> ; Les 20 Mesures de la CGPME pour Dynamiser les Exportations Françaises, 2012, etc.). This evidence suggests that French decision makers have a tendency to postpone internationalization. Meanwhile, Indian SMEs exhibit positive international performance (Report of the Inter-Ministerial Committee for Boosting Exports from MSME Sector, 2013): increasing numbers of Indian companies are committed abroad and managing to be competitive (Ramachandran et al., 2004). This trend has reached SMEs, which are of increasing importance in the Indian economy (Uma, 2013) and are experiencing notable success abroad (Radulovich, 2008). The corollary of this is that Indian decision makers must have a tendency to internationalize their firms early.

From the above we can extrapolate that French decision makers tend to internationalize their firms more slowly than their Indian counterparts. This leads us to our third hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3 (H3): Indian decision makers decide to internationalize earlier than French decision makers.*

## METHOD

The objective of this section is to detail how we will study the link between attitude toward internationalization and the point at which internationalization occurs. Thus, the following paragraphs discuss the design of the measurement tools, the field of this study, and the data processing design.

### MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION

The existing literature tackles different aspects of the attitude toward internationalization. Brady et al. (1979) measure attitude with items evaluating the available degree of control over the marketing program, the information available on the international market, the cost associated with sales, the effectiveness of the product sales and the amount of administrative work required for exporting to begin. In their analysis, Brady et al. (1979) consider each of these independent dimensions. O'Rourke (1985) found attitudinal differences between SMEs and large enterprises, but does not explicitly specify how attitude is measured. Gripsrud (1990) chose to measure the attitude toward future exports. Patterson (2004) focused on the perceived benefits of internationalization. Tan et al. (2007) used involvement abroad as a proxy. Recently, Sommer participated in two pieces of research into attitudes towards the behavior of international entrepreneurs (Sommer et al., 2010) and attitudes toward partners and competition (Sommer, 2010).

Measures of attitude used in previous researches cannot be used in this article. Most of these researches measure only one aspect of internationalization and when the attitude is broken down into several dimensions, they are analyzed independently from each other. Therefore, the methods used previously to measure attitude toward internationalization cannot be exploited in our research to measure a general attitude toward an object (not an attitude toward one dimension of the object).

We built a measurement scale composed of five items following the paradigm of Churchill Jr (1979). We also took care to include the recommendations of Gerbing

2. <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/commerceexterieur.pdf>



& Anderson (1988). First, we specified the construct from a literature review (stage 1 of the paradigm of Churchill). Two facets of attitude toward the internationalization were distinguished: the personal aspect (Adler & Mittelman, 2004; Arora, Jaju, Kefalas & Perenich, 2004; Gupta et al., 2002), and the professional aspect (Arora et al., 2004; Bouquet, 2005; Nummela, Saarenketo & Puumalainen, 2004). We have written a series of items in French based on the literature and interviews with experts (step 2). After submitting our questionnaire to the judgment of six experts, we distributed to future managers and collected 102 complete responses (step 3). The psychometric properties of the measurement scale (dimensionality and convergence of items) were then evaluated (step 4). Once the scale was finalized, we distributed our questionnaire to the final sample (step 5). This step allowed us to test the general characteristics of our scale: unidimensionality (with the elbow test, the map test and the percentage of variance), and reliability, ensuring that Cronbach's alpha is greater than 0,7 as suggested by Nunnally (1967) and Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) (step 6). Finally, the construct validity of the measurement scale was tested by checking that the attitudes of respondents were correlated to other closed measures (valence of social representations of internationalization) and by the findings of this research, which shows a link between international behavior and attitude toward internationalization (step 7).

#### MEASURING INTERNATIONALIZATION EARLINESS

The measurement of early internationalization can be done in two ways: by measuring the characteristics of a firm at a given time or by measuring the decision makers' behavior in real time. In the first case, there is a time lag between the measurement of the characteristics of the firm and the decision. During this time, the characteristics of the decision maker (and his attitude toward internationalization) can be influenced by the evolution of the firm, including by the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In the second case, the real time measure of the intended behavior can overcome this bias, and gives very good results for predicting actual behavior (Ajzen, 2001). Therefore, we choose to measure the earliness of internationalization in real time.

Like any strategic decision, the earliness of internationalization may be considered as significant (Voss, Lawrence & Engle, 1991), of high complexity (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1970) and of a strong irreversibility. In this very case, the measurement of the decision is strongly affected by the use of direct techniques (Barnes, 1984). Direct methods for collecting data suffer from bias, such as prestige bias or ex post facto rationalization, which affect the accuracy of responses (Reynaud, 2001). Thus, a projective method that overcomes these biases seems particularly suited to our research (Reynaud, 2001).

We chose to use the scenario method which is a projective technique. According to this method, the respondent faces a scenario, a "short description of a person or a social situation" (Alexander & Becker, 1978: 94), with respect to which he must position himself. This real life situation (Lavorata, Nillès & Pontier, 2005) fits the need to measure behaviors in real time. This method is particularly suitable in the case of cross-cultural research (Datta Gupta, Kristensen & Pozzoli, 2010) because it enables the researcher to "understand [the decision process] in several environments" (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014: 366) while providing a standardized framework.

A common complaint about the scenario method relates to the validity of the results. Although the internal validity is not questioned, external validity is sometimes discussed. Various elements enable us to argue for a satisfactory external validity. First, the question of the validity of this method has, since its origins, had the attention of the academic world. Some researchers have published articles arguing for the method's good external validity (Cavanagh &

Fritzsche, 1984; Weber, 1992). Second, many studies have analyzed the external validity of three very similar methods: the Delphi method (Gupta & Clarke, 1996; Tomasik, 2010), the policy capturing method (Arrègle & Ulaga, 2003) and the thumbnail method (Aguinis et al., 2014; Datta Gupta et al., 2010).

We based our scenario-building procedure on the work of Chonko, Tanner & Weeks (1996). Their method was originally developed to create a questionnaire measuring behaviors in the ethics field. We transposed their procedure to fit our problem. This led us to follow a five-step process described in detail in the appendix. This procedure led us to construct one scenario and three behavioral responses (see Appendix 3).

Following these behavioral responses, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement (scale of 1 to 7; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Once the scenario was tested and validated in French, it was translated into English, Hindi and Gujarati according to the following steps: the questionnaire was translated from French into English by a bilingual researcher (1); the translation of the questionnaire was checked and corrections were made – this step was carried out by a second researcher supported by a bilingual French teacher (2); the questionnaire was translated into Hindi and Gujarati by a trilingual researcher (3); the questionnaire was pretested in a pilot study with 20 Gujarati SMEs (4); the questionnaire was given out to 98 SME managers (5).

## THE FIELD OF STUDY AND DATA PROCESSING DESIGN

The data collection was carried out on SME decision makers from France and India. It is important to note, firstly, that the definition of SMEs differs between the two countries. In France, the European Union proposes a definition of SMEs. According to this definition, SMEs are firms with fewer than 250 employees whose turnover is less than 50 million (Recommendation 2003/361 / EC, OJEU L124: 36, May 20, 2003). In India, the definition of SMEs is proposed by the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Act (2006). According to this definition, an SME in the industrial sector is a firm whose investments (plant or machinery purchases) are valued lower than Rs.10 crores<sup>3</sup> (approximately € 1.2 million); an SME in the service sector is a firm whose investments in equipment are valued lower than Rs.5 crores (about € 0.6 million) (Uma, 2013). The characteristics of SMEs and their environments are very different in France and in India. We reckoned it would not be appropriate to apply one or the other definition. The contingency theory applied to SMEs and supported by some authors (Torrès, 1997) confirms our choice. Thus, we preferred to meet the criteria set by local legislation and to respect the specificities of the two countries. In a second step, certain characteristics of the French-Indian comparison must be fixed. Indian Territory, by its demographics (1.2 billion people), its location, and its history, has important religious and linguistic differences. We restricted our Indian field to the state of Gujarat (comparable in terms of population to France) to strengthen the homogeneity of our sample. This state (whose dominant religion is Hinduism, and primary language is Gujarati) is quite homogeneous and suits our comparison. Finally, the entrepreneurial and international features of Gujarat seemed relevant for studying the differences in behavior and attitudes among decision makers in French and Indian SMEs.

Data collection was done in two stages. The first phase was completed in France in May 2012 (149 French decision makers participated in this study). A second phase was conducted in 2013 in India (98 Indian decision makers participated in this study).

The first phase of data collection was mainly conducted through an email campaign from databases from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and KOMPASS. The business sectors in these databases were selected services and

3. The crores is a monetary unit of measure used for large sums of money in India. 1 crore rupee is equal to ten million rupees.

industry. The companies contacted were drawn at random. It is difficult to accurately estimate the return rate of the email campaign, as many email addresses were incorrect. However, we believe that the return rate was between 5 and 7%. This result is satisfactory if we consider that the scope is very specific, that the target respondents have very little time to devote to outside work, and that we have implemented a number of actions to improve return rates (Helgeson, Voss & Terpening, 2002). In addition, the French seemed less inclined to participate in academic research. This may be reinforced by a comparison of the typical response rates of US researchers (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000) and French researchers (Cerdin & Peretti, 2001; Ganassali & Moscarola, 2004; Mamlouk, 2011).

For the Indian data collection, we obtained the addresses of SMEs from the Industrial Commissioners Office. SMEs contacted this way were unwilling to participate in the survey, fearing espionage. One of the authors participated in numerous conferences and meetings to disseminate the questionnaire. This more personal method is renowned to effectively reach specific populations (Jolibert & Jourdan, 2006; Royer & Zarlowski, 2007). Two separate questionnaires were developed in Hindi and Gujarati to facilitate the understanding of the respondents, as some Indian small business owners are not comfortable with the official language or the vernacular language of the state of Gujarat. We sent out 500 emails and received 234 entries and 126 usable questionnaires (including 28 with significant missing data). Our return rate was thus approximately 20%.

The data processing of the attitude measurement scales was performed using SPSS software. First, we calculated the average attitude scores to separate our respondents into groups. We distinguished between respondents who were most favorable to internationalization, those who were moderately favorable, and those who were least favorable. We used the cutoff point of one standard deviation. We then calculated a score for the behavioral responses of each group. Finally, the differences in scores between the groups were analyzed using the analysis of variance test (ANOVA). This type of processing data is recommended for researches using scenarios method (Aguinis et al., 2014).

We controlled variables identified in the literature as determinants of the internationalization of firms. Three levels of control variables were monitored: the individual (age, professional experience, hierarchical position) (Federico et al., 2009; Fernández & Nieto, 2006; Manolova et al., 2002), the firm (size, turnover) (Federico et al., 2009), and the environment of the firm (industry) (Jones, 2001; Leonidou, 2004; Molina, 2004). Table 6 summarizes the main characteristics of our samples (see section "Appendices"). We note that the two samples do not show large imbalances between them, or in relation to the national characteristics available.

## **RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH**

Table 1 presents the psychometric properties of the measurement scales. The values of Cronbach's alphas and dimensionality indicate good characteristics of measurement scales, as defined by Churchill Jr (1979) and Nunnally et al. (1994).

**Table 1.** Psychometric properties of the scales measuring attitude to internationalization

	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardised Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items	Number of dimension(s)
French scale	.86	.86	5	1
Indian scale	.92	.92	5	1

Table 2 shows the scores of attitude and behavioral responses of the Indian decision makers. The three "items" in the table correspond to the three behavioral responses introduced earlier.

**Table 2.** Attitude score and behavioral responses of Indian decision makers

Group	Number of respondents per group	Attitude toward internationalization	Item 1 <sup>a</sup> (early exploration)	Item 2 <sup>a</sup> (moderate behavior)	Item 3 <sup>a</sup> (cautious behavior)
1 (Anti-internationalization)	16	2.06	3.67	4.67	5.27
2 (Pro-internationalization)	59	5.51	5.24	5.71	3.97
3 (Very pro-internationalization)	23	6.74	6.04	6.57	3.48
Total	98	5.27	5.09	5.73	4.12

a  $p < 0.05$ .

From Table 2, we noted significant disparities between respondents' attitude scores. We identified three distinct groups of attitudes: unfavorable, favorable and very favorable. These disparities are also reflected in the behavioral responses. The least favorable respondents (group 1) are most likely to delay the decision to internationalize an activity. The scores of the behavioral responses of favorable and very favorable respondents (group 2 and 3) reflect a propensity to internationalize earlier (which validates H1 on Indian field).

In the whole sample, we note a rather positive attitude vis-à-vis internationalization. The scores of the behavioral responses suggest that Indian decision makers are more conducive to pursue internationalization moderately (as the score of item 2 was the strongest).

Table 3 presents the scores of attitude and behavioral responses of the French decision makers.

**Table 3.** Attitude score and behavioral responses of French decision makers

Group	Number of respondents per group	Attitude toward internationalization	Item 1 <sup>a</sup> (early exploration)	Item 2 <sup>a</sup> (moderate behavior)	Item 3 <sup>a</sup> (cautious behavior)
1 (Anti-internationalization)	21	4.05	4.28	5.42	3.38
2 (Pro-internationalization)	100	5.75	4.78	5.39	3.45
3 (Very pro-internationalization)	28	6.95	5.03	5.39	3.57
Total	149	5.74	4.76	5.40	3.46

a  $p < 0.1$ .

Table 3 shows that the attitude toward the internationalization of French respondents can be divided into three groups: moderately favorable, favorable and very favorable. This lower variance is reflected by the scores of behavioral responses. Thus, we note minor differences between the scores of the behavioral responses of the French decision makers. Only the first item is significantly different between anti and very pro-internationalization respondents. In the whole sample, we find a positive attitude to internationalization. The scores of behavioral responses suggest that French decision makers are more conducive to moderately internationalize early (as the score of item 2 was highest). Finally, we note that respondents who are most favorable to internationalization tend to internationalize faster than others, which validates H1 for the French SMEs (the score of item 1 was highest for respondents who are very favorable to internationalization).

Comparing the average attitude toward internationalization between French and Indian decision makers, our results show a small but significant difference of around 5% (Table 4): The decision makers of French SMEs are slightly more in favor of internationalization than their Indian counterparts. Hypothesis 2 is not validated.

**Table 4.** Comparison of attitude mean of both samples

Sample	Attitude toward internationalization	T-test	Significance	Standard Error
Indian	5.27	-2.88	0.04	0.16
French	5.74			

Table 5 shows the comparison of the scores of behavioral responses of the two samples. This comparison was performed using a T-test.

**Table 5.** Comparison of behavioral answers of both samples

Group	Item 1a (early exploration)
Indian	5,09
French	4,76

a p<0.05.

Table 5 allows us to answer our last hypothesis. According to this table, the score of the Indians on item 1 (behavioral response evaluating the tendency of participants to export early) was significantly higher than the score of the French. In other words, Indian decision makers tend to internationalize earlier than French decision makers. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is validated.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aims to analyze the differences in international behavior between a southern (India) and a northern country (France). Our original methodology allows us to jointly measure decision makers' attitudes toward internationalization and their propensity to engage in early movement abroad. Statistical analyses allow us to establish three main results, which we discuss below.

First, we notice that decision makers with a strongly favorable attitude towards internationalization have a propensity to internationalize their businesses earlier than others. This result is interesting since attitudes toward internationalization have not been studied in recent models analyzing the determinants of the decision to internationalize (Casillas & Moreno-Menéndez, 2014; Chetty et al., 2014; Federico et al., 2009). It would be wise to introduce this variable in the existing studies to measure its influence over other factors. This result also helps to provide a partial empirical validation of the theoretical model of Tan et al. (2007). Researchers belonging to the recent trend of international entrepreneurship initially developed theories positioned at the level of the firm. It is only very recently that a growing body of research has analyzed the individual level. In this context, the issue of the decision to internationalize is crucial and we propose that future research should study this decision further, as suggested by Lamb & Liesch (2002).

Second, our empirical results contradict some research on the subject. Indeed, we were expecting, according to the results of Guimelli et al. (2008), Poeschl et al. (2007), and Chopra (2003), that the French decision makers would be less favorable to internationalization than the Indian decision makers. Our results show the opposite. A closer look at attitudes at the level of the entire sample enables us to distinguish four groups of individuals: adverse, neutral, favorable and very favorable. The Indian decision makers had more distinct attitudes than the French decision makers: the unfavorable group is only present in the Indian sample, which affects the overall sample average. The negative attitude to internationalization of some of the Indian respondents is probably due to the recent global crisis that has affected the populations of LEDCS more strongly (Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). By contrast, the 2007 crisis has had less serious consequences for the French economy.

Third, the scenario method allowed us to measure the willingness of decision makers to internationalize early. A comparison of the behavioral responses of our samples shows that the French decision makers were less likely to internationalize early. This result is in line with the poor performance of French SMEs in exporting (Les 20 Mesures de la CGPME pour Dynamiser les Exportations Françaises, 2012) and the strong results of Indian exports (Emerging SMEs of India, 2008). Looking at the behavioral responses, we note that with equal attitude, Indian decision makers are more likely to internationalize early. This last point is also in line with the findings of the above reports. These international differences in behavior are interesting because we did not find any research that addresses this issue. Thus, it seems that there are factors related to national characteristics that influence the decision to internationalize. It would be interesting to extend this result to identify more closely what other factors might explain the decision, and replicate this study to compare the propensity of entrepreneurs from different countries to internationalize.

The results of this research allow us to provide theoretical, empirical and managerial inputs.

From a theoretical point of view, these findings enrich the latest research in IE on the internationalization of firms. The issue of time in the internationalization process is central (Casillas et al., 2013; Chetty et al., 2014; Eden, 2009) and is drawing more and more attention in IE. This research has highlighted the influence of attitude toward internationalization on the earliness of internationalization. Hence, it enriches the existing theories from a new determinant. Also, we extend current theories of internationalization with an element that may be re-used in future research.

The methodological originality of this research (the scenario method) allowed us to observe the behavior and intentions of decision makers. The deployment of the scenario method was used to measure the propensity of SMEs' decision makers to initiate early international business. We believe that

this method has major importance for future research on the internationalization process (Welch & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2014). In addition, this method can be used to analyze the existing theories from a new perspective. This method opens up the original theoretical and empirical developments on the topic of the decision to internationalize and its determinants.

Regarding the managerial inputs, it would be interesting to exploit the main result of this research, namely that there is a significant relationship between attitude toward international leaders and the decision to internationalize. This result highlights the importance of improving SME leaders' attitudes toward internationalization. Consequently, institutions that develop foreign trade (such as the International Chambers of Commerce) should carry out more campaigns to improve the image of internationalization, in order to develop international trade for SMEs. These same institutions could also use our results as an argument to convince policy makers of the importance of the image of internationalization on the desire to go international. This point is all the greater since Nummela et al. (2004) found that the success of internationalization missions was linked to the global mindsets of managers (heavily influenced by their attitudes). This theme could also be a module to complement the initiatives already in place in the accompanying structures (Catanzaro, Messeghem & Sammut, 2013).

Finally, we identify two main limitations to this research. First, the scenario method emphasizes internal validity rather than external validity. This limit was diminished as much as possible by taking two precautions (Aguinis et al., 2014): the scenario construction process allows for situations based on real business contexts, which favors cases realism. We maximized the number of explicit elements (including the introduction of scenarios and behavioral responses) recalling that the respondent is in a real management situation. This limit is also mitigated by the work of Krueger Jr. (2003) that has validated this type of method, as well as numerous validations of the theory of planned behavior of Fishbein & Ajzen (1975), and the large number of studies using this marketing method. Lavorata (2004) counts 21 studies in the field of business ethics and Weber (1992) counts 26 studies in various other fields such as sociology and psychology. Second, some studies propose an alternative perspective to the causal vision presented in this research. Recent research in IE has highlighted phenomena such as improvisation (Evers & O'Gorman, 2011) and effectuation (Frishammar & Andersson, 2009; Nowiński & Rialp, 2013) that influence the way decisions are made. The results of this research lead us to believe that other aspects of behaviors (like effectual and improviser behaviors) are linked to attitude toward internationalization. This last point seems to be a promising avenue of research.

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## **APPENDIX A. ITEMS OF THE SCALE MEASURING ATTITUDE TOWARD INTERNATIONALIZATION**

- AI1: Internationalization increases the growth of my company.
- AI2: Internationalization stimulates me a lot.
- AI3: Internationalization increases my ambition.
- AI4: Internationalization increases my employability.
- AI5: Internationalization enriches my personal culture.

## **APPENDIX B. STAGES OF THE SCENARIO METHOD**

**Step 1.** Identification of decision-making situations. This step is required to collect stories describing the internationalization of SMEs' leaders. The objective is to identify generic management situations relevant for SMEs. This phase was carried out on a first sample of 19 SME managers.

**Step 2.** Schematic situations description (creating the scenario). At this stage, the aim is to write short scripts outlining a difficult situation for the respondent to face. The description of the scenario must include a realistic constraint, but also a strong ambiguity with respect to the way in which the respondent should position themselves.

**Step 3.** Pretest of scenario and identification of behavioral responses. This phase aims to verify the practicality of the generic management situations and establish behavioral responses. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to confront previously set-up generic situations. The objective is to identify whether respondents take a position with respect to the scenarios and whether they assess their credibility. This phase was carried out on a second sample of 14 managers of SMEs.

**Step 4.** Pretest of the instrument measuring behavior. In this phase, a validation of the measuring instrument is carried out by third parties. This phase was conducted with a panel of two researchers, two teachers, and two SME managers.

**Step 5.** Exploitation of the questionnaire. This phase consists of collecting data. It was initially conducted on a sample of 149 French SME decision makers and subsequently on 98 Indian SME decision makers.

## APPENDIX C. SCENARIO AND BEHAVIORAL ANSWERS

Scenario:

At a meeting of business intelligence, one of your employees in charge of the file is presenting the result of his market study. This indicates that some of your competitors are currently undertaking a world-wide distribution of the product. The question that arises is whether or not you follow the path of your competitors?

Behavioral answers:

I would explore new countries as soon as possible, if competitors are going somewhere, one shouldn't be left behind. (item 1).

I have a moderate approach: I would first start quickly by the most appropriate country. If results are good, I would try another country, and so on. (item 2).

It's very difficult to move to a foreign country. An export strategy can't be decided impulsively. I would wait to have feedback on the returns of the competitors before starting exporting activity. (item 3).

## APPENDIX D. SAMPLE

Variable	India	France
Gender	95 % Male	83 % Male
Age of decision maker (year)	54 % underneath 30 23 % from 30 to 40 23 % above 40	7 % underneath 30 27 % from 30 to 40 66 % above 40
Level of study	53 % lower than university 16 % undergraduate 30 % graduated and above	5 % lower than high school 23 % undergraduate 72 % graduated and above
Ownership	69 % Owners of the companies 10 % Shareholders 21 % Salaried	41 % Owners of the companies 27 % Shareholders 31 % Salaried
Domain	76 % industry 9 % distribution 9 % consulting	77 % industry 3 % distribution 16 % consulting
Age of the firm (year)	25 % below 5 20 % from 5 to 10 55 % above 10	17 % below 5 10 % from 5 to 10 36 % above 10
Sales	50 % underneath 1 crores <sup>a</sup> 19 % from 1 to 5 crores 29 % above 5 crores	17 % underneath 100 k€ 9 % from 100 to 500 k€ 38 % from 501 k€ to 25 M€ 35 % above 25 M€

Percentages are given according to total answered.

The difference between 100 and the percentages is the percentage of "other answer" category.

a Rs.1 crores = 122 k€.

**APPENDIX E. DETAILS OF THE STATISTICAL RESULTS PRESENTED IN THE ARTICLE**

Attitude score and behavioral responses of Indian decision makers (appendix of table 2)

Dependant variable	(I) AttiMean	(J) AttiMean	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Err. difference	Sig.	95 % confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Item 1 (early exploration)	1.00	2.00	-1.73 <sup>a</sup>	.49	.00	-2.71	-.76
		3.00	-2.16 <sup>a</sup>	.66	.00	-3.49	-.84
	2.00	1.00	1.73 <sup>a</sup>	.49	.00	.76	2.71
		3.00	-.43	.53	.42	-1.50	.64
	3.00	1.00	2.16 <sup>a</sup>	.66	.00	.84	3.49
		2.00	.43	.53	.42	-.64	1.50
Item 2 (moderate internationalization)	1.00	2.00	-1.19 <sup>a</sup>	.37	.00	-1.92	-.46
		3.00	-1.83 <sup>a</sup>	.50	.00	-2.83	-.83
	2.00	1.00	1.19 <sup>a</sup>	.37	.00	.46	1.92
		3.00	-.64	.40	.11	-1.45	.16
	3.00	1.00	1.83 <sup>a</sup>	.50	.00	.83	2.83
		2.00	.64	.40	.11	-.16	1.45
Item 3 (cautious internationalization)	1.00	2.00	1.42 <sup>a</sup>	.52	.00	.37	2.47
		3.00	1.51 <sup>a</sup>	.72	.03	.09	2.95
	2.00	1.00	-1.42 <sup>a</sup>	.52	.00	-2.47	-.37
		3.00	.09	.58	.87	-1.06	1.25
	3.00	1.00	-1.51 <sup>a</sup>	.72	.03	-2.95	-.09
		2.00	-.09	.58	.87	-1.25	1.06

a p<0.05.

Attitude score and behavioral responses of French decision makers (appendix of table 3)

Dependant variable	(I) AttiMean	(J) AttiMean	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. Err. difference	Sig.	95 % confidence interval for mean	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Item 1 (early exploration)	1.00	2.00	.49	.35	.15	-0.19	1.18
		3.00	.75 <sup>a</sup>	.42	.07	-0.08	1.58
	2.00	1.00	-.49	.35	.15	-1.18	.19
		3.00	.25	.31	.41	-.36	.87
	3.00	1.00	-.75 <sup>a</sup>	.42	.07	-1.58	.08
		2.00	-.25	.31	.41	-.87	.36
Item 2 (moderate internationalization)	1.00	2.00	-.03	.31	.92	-.65	.59
		3.00	-.03	.38	.92	-.79	.71
	2.00	1.00	.03	.31	.92	-.59	.65
		3.00	-.00	.28	.98	-.56	.55
	3.00	1.00	.03	.38	.92	-.71	.79
		2.00	.00	.28	.98	-.55	.56
Item 3 (cautious internationalization)	1.00	2.00	.07	.35	.83	-.62	.76
		3.00	.19	.42	.65	-.64	1.02
	2.00	1.00	-.07	.35	.83	-.76	.62
		3.00	.11	.31	.70	-.50	.73
	3.00	1.00	-.19	.42	.65	-1.02	.64
		2.00	-.11	.31	.70	-.73	.50

a p<0.1.

Comparing attitude means of the two samples (appendix of table 4)

	Levene's test of equity of variances		T-test test of equity of mean						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (bilateral)	Mean difference	Std. Err. difference	95 % confidence interval for mean	
								Lower bound	Upper bound
Assume equal variance	18.61	.00	-2.88	245	.00	-.46	.16	-.78	-.14
Does not assume equal variance			-2.62	144.08	.01	-.46	.17	-.81	-.11

Comparing behavioral answers of the two samples (appendix of table 5)

	Levene's test of equity of variances		T-test test of equity of mean						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (bilateral)	Mean difference	Std. Err. difference	95 % confidence interval for mean	
								Lower bound	Upper bound
Assume equal variance	9.42	.00	2.01	244	.04	.42	.21	.00	.84
Does not assume equal variance			1.92	172.96	.05	.42	.22	-.01	.86

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