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Leveraging network competence and market knowledge for export resilience: A resource-based perspective on Indonesian SMEs in global markets

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Abstract

This study investigates how Indonesian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can develop export resilience through strategic resource orchestration in dynamic global markets. Drawing on resource-based view (RBV) theory, we examine the differential impacts of network competence and market knowledge capability on export performance while testing competitive aggressiveness as a potential boundary condition. Data collected from 174 Indonesian exporting SMEs were analyzed using PLS-SEM. Results reveal that both network competence ($\beta = 0.311$, $p < 0.05$) and market knowledge capability ($\beta = 0.514$, $p < 0.05$) significantly enhance export performance, with market knowledge exerting a substantially stronger influence. Contrary to expectations, competitive aggressiveness did not moderate these relationships, suggesting Indonesian SMEs benefit more from collaborative approaches than aggressive competition. The model explains 54.9% of the variance in export performance, offering strong predictive validity. Our findings contribute to international entrepreneurship literature by delineating the specific resource configurations that enable SMEs from emerging economies to overcome inherent resource constraints and build export resilience. For policymakers, this study highlights the need for targeted interventions that enhance Indonesian SMEs' knowledge acquisition capabilities and network development skills rather than promoting competitive aggressiveness. For practitioners, we provide empirical evidence that investment in market knowledge and relationship-building yields substantial returns in international markets.

Keywords: Competitive aggressiveness, Emerging economies, Export resilience, Indonesian SMEs, Market knowledge capability, Network competence, Resource-based view.

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1. Introduction

In today's interconnected global economy, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from emerging economies face the paradoxical challenge of international expansion despite resource constraints. How do SMEs in developing nations like Indonesia exploit and manage their global performance when hampered by inadequate skills, limited resources, and insufficient foreign market exposure? This question is particularly critical as emerging markets and developing economies now contribute approximately 70 percent of global economic growth (IMF [1]), with an increasing number of SMEs from these regions pursuing internationalization strategies.

While international entrepreneurship research has flourished since the 1990s, the literature remains disproportionately focused on high-tech industries and large corporations in developed economies [2]. Relatively little scholarly attention has been directed toward Asian contexts, particularly Indonesia—Southeast Asia's largest economy with substantial untapped export potential. Terjesen, et al. [3] argue for more theoretical and empirical investigations of international entrepreneurship in developing countries, a position reinforced by Wimpertiwi [4] studies on entrepreneurial education in Indonesia.

Indonesia presents a compelling research context, ranking first among ASEAN nations in entrepreneurial activity [5]. Despite hosting 3.75 million local and foreign entrepreneurs and 4,495 export-registered companies, the Indonesian Ministry of Trade [6] indicates that Indonesia's export performance consistently lags behind neighboring East Asian economies [7]. The country's persistent negative trade balance and declining export trajectory, as noted by Putra [8], have prompted concerns among policymakers, with the Indonesian Minister of Finance highlighting that current export growth remains below 7%, significantly short of the 15% target. This underperformance stems from structural weaknesses, including inadequate supply-side support infrastructure, underdeveloped human capital, and ambivalent attitudes toward global market integration [9].

These challenges align with the resource-based view (RBV) theory, which posits that firms achieve a competitive advantage by strategically developing and deploying valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources [10]. For resource-constrained Indonesian SMEs, identifying which capabilities most effectively enhance export performance becomes paramount for sustainable internationalization.

Given that SMEs constitute most Indonesian export companies, understanding their behavior under varying market conditions is essential for effective policy formulation. Current export promotion policies often fail because they are designed without adequate comprehension of SME-specific characteristics and constraints. As Pane and Patunru [7] argue, firm-level analysis is necessary to identify the distinctive attributes and capabilities of Indonesian enterprises that enable export resilience.

This study makes three key contributions to international entrepreneurship literature. First, we examine how two critical intangible resources—network competence and market knowledge capability—directly impact Indonesian SMEs' export performance. Second, we investigate competitive aggressiveness as a potential boundary condition that may amplify or attenuate these relationships, addressing calls for a more nuanced contextual understanding of SME internationalization strategies [11]. Third, we provide empirical evidence from an under-researched but economically significant emerging market context, extending the generalizability of existing internationalization theories beyond Western economies.

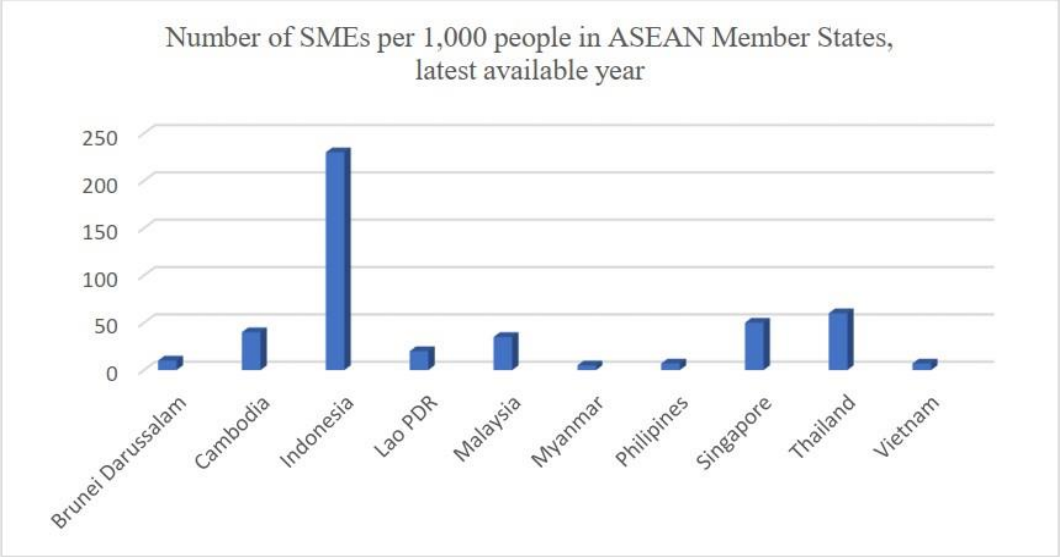

Figure 1.
SMEs in ASEAN Countries.
Source: OECD [5].

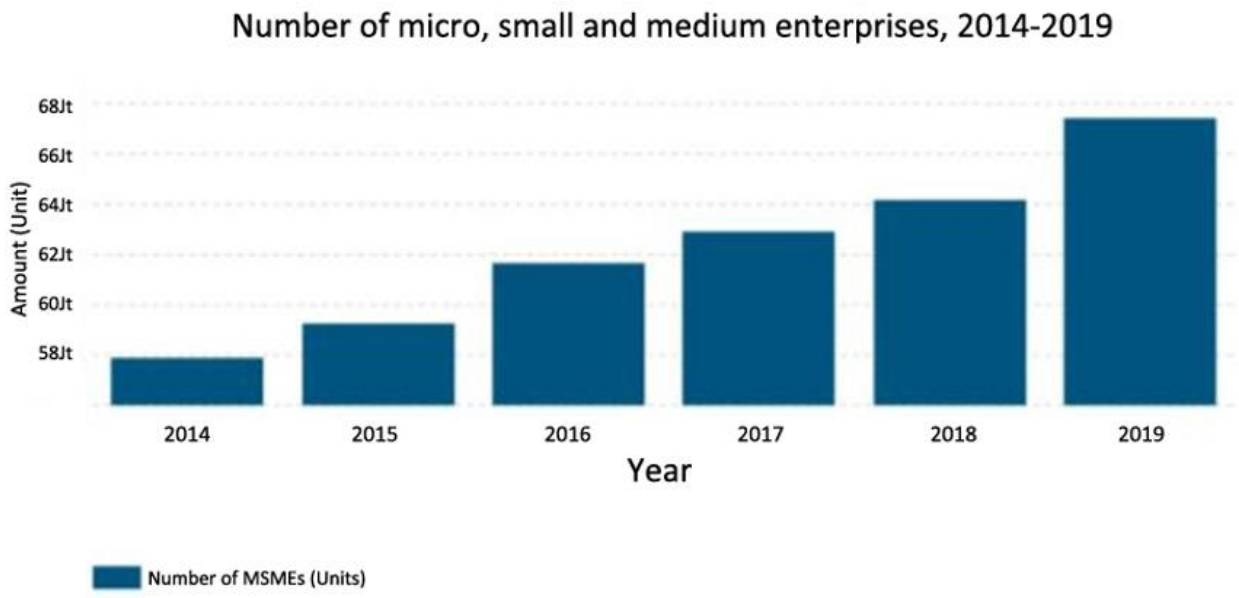

Figure 2.
SMEs in Indonesia 2014-2019.
Source: Indonesian Ministry of Trade [6].

Building on resource-based theory and international entrepreneurship literature, we develop and test a conceptual model (Figure 3) examining how network competency and market knowledge capability influence export performance, with competitive aggressiveness as a moderating variable. Our findings offer important theoretical insights and practical implications for entrepreneurs, managers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the international competitiveness of SMEs in emerging economies.

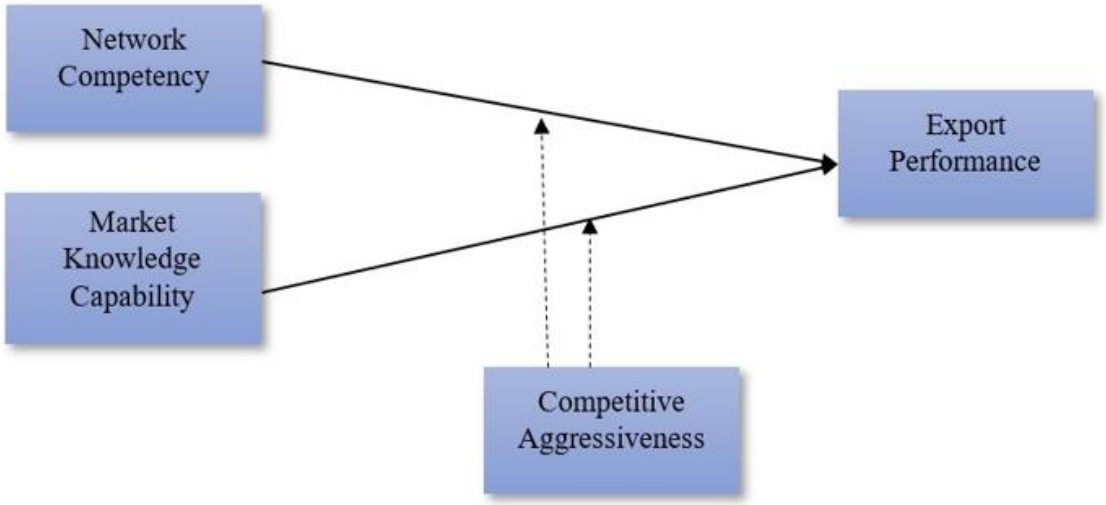

Figure 3.
Research Framework.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theoretical Framework: Resource-Based View in SME Internationalization

This study is anchored in the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm, which posits that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by acquiring, developing, and strategically deploying resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable [10]. For SMEs pursuing internationalization, the RBV is particularly relevant as these firms typically face significant resource constraints compared to multinational enterprises [12].

The internationalization of SMEs requires specialized resources and capabilities to overcome the "liability of foreignness" and "liability of smallness" [13]. Among these critical resources, intangible assets such as network competence and market knowledge capability have been identified as potentially more valuable than tangible resources in dynamic international contexts [14]. Additionally, entrepreneurial characteristics like competitive aggressiveness may influence how effectively firms leverage these resources in foreign markets [15].

Building on this theoretical foundation, we develop a model examining how Indonesian SMEs can enhance their export performance through the strategic deployment of network competence and market knowledge capability, with competitive aggressiveness serving as a potential boundary condition.

2.2. Network Competence and Export Performance

Network competence refers to a firm's ability to develop and manage inter-organizational relationships to gain access to external resources [16, 17]. A substantial body of international entrepreneurship literature identifies network competence as a key determinant of firm performance in global markets [18, 19].

For SMEs with limited internal resources, network competence is particularly crucial to internationalization processes. It facilitates access to business opportunities Hill and Scott [20] reduces knowledge acquisition costs and adaptation requirements Oviatt and McDougall [21] and enables firms to identify and exploit market opportunities more effectively [18]. Furthermore, networks provide SMEs with access to critical resources, market knowledge, and innovations that would otherwise be difficult to obtain [22].

Network competence enables SMEs to build legitimacy and credibility in foreign markets despite their limited international experience [23]. This is especially important for Indonesian SMEs, which often lack established international reputations and face skepticism from potential foreign partners and customers. Empirical evidence suggests that firms with stronger network ties achieve faster international market entry, broader geographic scope, and higher export intensity [24, 25].

However, developing network competence requires a significant investment of time and resources, and not all network relationships yield positive returns. Some networks may lock firms into inefficient processes that constrain knowledge transfer and resource utilization [26]. Inter-organizational relationships must be actively managed to create value, as knowledge transfer between network partners is complex and interactions are rarely specified in advance [27].

Despite these potential challenges, the weight of theoretical arguments and empirical evidence suggests that network competence enables resource-constrained SMEs to access valuable external resources that facilitate international expansion and enhance export performance. Accordingly, we hypothesize:

H_1: Network competence positively influences Indonesian SMEs' export performance.

2.3. Market Knowledge Capability and Export Performance

Market knowledge capability refers to a firm's ability to acquire, interpret, and utilize knowledge about foreign markets, including customer preferences, competitor strategies, channel structures, and institutional environments [28, 29]. In the context of internationalization, market knowledge capability represents a critical resource that enables firms to identify opportunities, mitigate risks, and adapt their strategies to local market conditions [30].

Globalization has intensified competition and increased customer sophistication, making market knowledge capability increasingly important for international success [31]. Firms with superior market knowledge can operate more efficiently in competitive global markets, overcome entry barriers, and satisfy customer requirements more effectively [32]. This capability helps SMEs identify appropriate market destinations and reduce market failure rates, thereby enhancing their economic contributions [33].

For Indonesian SMEs seeking international expansion, market knowledge capability is particularly valuable due to the significant psychic distance between Indonesia and many target export markets. Research shows that SMEs with strong market knowledge accelerate their international market entry and achieve superior performance in global markets [34]. Conversely, Indonesian SMEs lacking market knowledge often produce goods that fail to meet international quality standards and consumer preferences [35].

This deficiency has been a persistent challenge for Indonesian SMEs. Bhasin and Venkataraman [36] noted the shortage of local entrepreneurs with sufficient market expertise to mentor prospective exporters, while more recent studies continue to identify inadequate business knowledge and skills as barriers to internationalization [37, 38]. Consequently, many Indonesian business owners struggle to adapt to foreign market requirements, resulting in suboptimal export performance [39, 40].

Government officials have also recognized these limitations, with an Indonesian minister highlighting that inadequate market information and quality assurance capabilities hinder SMEs' participation in global value chains [41]. The high financial and opportunity costs of acquiring market knowledge and obtaining necessary certifications pose additional barriers for resource-constrained SMEs.

From a resource-based perspective, market knowledge represents a valuable, often tacit resource that is difficult for competitors to imitate, thereby providing a basis for sustainable competitive advantage [42]. As such, SMEs that develop superior market knowledge capabilities can overcome informational disadvantages and navigate the complexities of international markets more effectively. Therefore, we propose:

H_2: Market knowledge capability positively influences Indonesian SMEs' export performance.

2.4. The Moderating Role of Competitive Aggressiveness

Competitive aggressiveness, defined as a firm's propensity to directly and intensely challenge competitors to achieve entry or improve position Lumpkin and Dess [15] represents an important strategic orientation that may influence how effectively SMEs leverage their resources in international markets. As one dimension of entrepreneurial orientation, competitive aggressiveness reflects a combative posture and willingness to use unconventional tactics to outperform industry rivals [43].

Previous research has established links between competitive aggressiveness and export performance in various contexts [44, 45]. By adopting an aggressive competitive stance, firms can establish and maintain strong market positions, overcome environmental instability, and defend against competitive threats. Furthermore, competitive aggressiveness may enable firms to capitalize on their distinctive resources in ways that rivals find difficult to replicate [46].

For Indonesian SMEs entering challenging international markets, competitive aggressiveness may be particularly valuable. Abidemi, et al. [47] argue that international success requires SMEs to set ambitious goals and compete fiercely. Miller [48] emphasizes that competitive aggressiveness incorporates the distinct concept of "defeating competitors," suggesting its potential importance for firms seeking to establish themselves in crowded global markets.

When combined with network competence, competitive aggressiveness may enhance a firm's ability to leverage network relationships strategically, extracting maximum value from these connections while defending against opportunistic behavior by network partners. Similarly, competitively aggressive firms may more effectively deploy their market knowledge to identify and exploit competitive gaps, respond quickly to market changes, and neutralize competitor advantages.

However, the interaction between these variables is complex. At lower levels of competitive aggressiveness, SMEs may demonstrate greater trust toward network partners and market stakeholders, potentially enhancing knowledge exchange and collaborative innovation [49]. As competitive aggressiveness increases, firms might struggle to balance cooperation and competition, potentially undermining the effectiveness of their network relationships [50].

Despite these potential tensions, Kusnadi, et al. [51] found that Indonesian SMEs demonstrating aggressive competitive behavior in international markets identified more opportunities than their less aggressive counterparts. Intense competition may heighten SMEs' market vigilance, enabling them to better detect and respond to environmental signals, thereby enhancing export performance. Based on these arguments, we hypothesize:

H_3: Competitive aggressiveness positively moderates the relationship between network competence and Indonesian SMEs' export performance.

H_4: Competitive aggressiveness positively moderates the relationship between market knowledge capability and Indonesian SMEs' export performance.

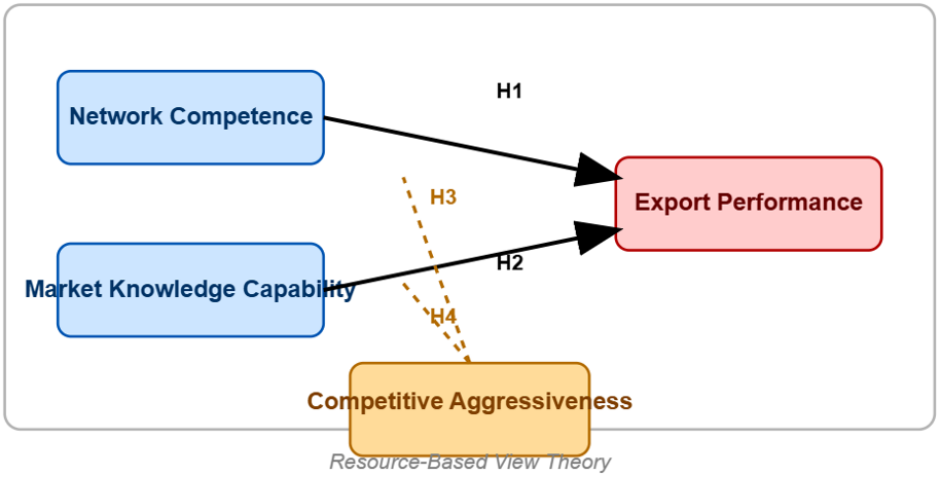

Figure 4.
Conceptual Framework with Hypothesized Relationships.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Sampling Procedure

This study employed a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between network competence, market knowledge capability, competitive aggressiveness, and export performance among Indonesian SMEs. The cross-sectional design, while limiting causal inferences, was appropriate given our focus on understanding current relationships between the focal constructs rather than changes over time [52].

The target population comprised Indonesian SMEs engaged in export activities. According to the 2015 Indonesian Export Directory, 558 SMEs were registered as international exporters. Following Krejcie and Morgan [53] sample size determination table, the appropriate sample size for a population of 558 (rounded to 600) is 234. To ensure representative sampling, we employed a two-stage sampling procedure. First, purposive sampling was used to identify SMEs meeting our inclusion criteria: (1) conforming to the Indonesian government's definition of SMEs based on assets and annual revenue; (2) actively exporting products for at least three years; and (3) independently managed by owners or owner-appointed executives. Second, we used systematic random sampling to select firms from the filtered list to reduce potential selection bias.

Data collection occurred between January and April 2022 using a structured questionnaire distributed through multiple channels: electronic surveys via email and WhatsApp, in-person visits, and telephone interviews. After multiple follow-ups, we received 189 responses (response rate: 33.9%). After screening for incomplete responses and outliers, 174 valid questionnaires were retained for final analysis, representing 31.2% of the population. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirement for PLS-SEM analysis, which suggests a minimum of 10 cases per predictor variable [54].

3.2. Non-Response Bias and Common Method Variance

To assess potential non-response bias, we compared early and late respondents (those who responded before and after follow-up reminders) on key firm characteristics [55]. Independent samples t-tests revealed no significant differences between early and late respondents in terms of firm age ($t = 1.24$, $p > 0.05$), size ($t = 0.87$, $p > 0.05$), or export experience ($t = 1.03$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting non-response bias was not a significant concern.

Since data for all variables were collected from the same respondents at a single point in time, common method variance (CMV) was a potential concern. We employed both procedural and statistical remedies to address this issue [56]. Procedurally, we guaranteed respondent anonymity, used different response formats for independent and dependent variables, and separated predictor and criterion variables within the questionnaire. Statistically, we conducted Harman's single-factor test, which revealed that the largest factor explained only 29.7% of the variance, below the 50% threshold suggesting problematic CMV. Additionally, we employed the marker variable technique Lindell and Whitney [57] using "organizational pride" as a theoretically unrelated construct. The correlations between the marker variable and our focal constructs were low ($r < 0.19$), and the pattern of significant relationships remained unchanged after controlling for the marker variable, further suggesting that CMV did not significantly influence our results.

3.3. Measures and Instrumentation

All constructs were measured using established multi-item scales adapted from prior literature, with minor modifications to suit the Indonesian SME context. The questionnaire was initially developed in English, translated into Bahasa Indonesia using the back-translation method Brislin [58] and pre-tested with a panel of five academic experts and eight SME owners to ensure content validity and clarity. Based on their feedback, several items were reworded to improve comprehension within the Indonesian business context.

All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales, where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree," except for export performance, which used a scale from 1 = "much worse than competitors" to 7 = "much better than competitors."

Network Competence: We adopted the 15-item scale developed by Ritter, et al. [17] and subsequently refined by Mu and Di Benedetto [59]. This scale captures two dimensions: network management tasks (planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling network relationships) and network management qualifications (specialist qualifications, social qualifications, and adaptability). Sample items included "We analyze what we would like to achieve with each partner" and "We have the ability to build good personal relationships with business partners."

Market Knowledge Capability: We utilized Zhou, et al. [29] eight-item scale, which assesses a firm's ability to acquire, disseminate, and utilize market information. Sample items included "Our company has a thorough knowledge of our international customers" and "Our company has acquired extensive information about the industry trends in international markets."

Competitive Aggressiveness: We measured this construct using the six-item scale from Lumpkin and Dess [60] later adapted by Hughes and Morgan [43]. This scale assesses a firm's propensity to directly and intensely challenge competitors. Sample items include "Our company typically adopts an aggressive posture when confronting competitors" and "Our company takes a competitive 'undo-the-competitor' approach."

Export Performance: Following Zou, et al. [61] and Katsikeas, et al. [62] we conceptualized export performance as a multidimensional construct encompassing financial, strategic, and satisfaction dimensions. We adopted the 12-item EXPERF scale developed by Zou, et al. [61] which measures export financial performance (sales, profits, growth), export strategic performance (competitiveness, strategic position, market share), and export satisfaction (perceived success, satisfaction with export venture). Sample items included "This export venture has been very profitable" and "This export venture has significantly contributed to our global market share."

Control Variables: To account for alternative explanations, we controlled for firm size (natural logarithm of the number of employees), firm age (years since establishment), export experience (years since the first international sale), industry sector (dummy-coded: manufacturing vs. non-manufacturing), and export intensity (percentage of international to total sales). These variables have been shown to influence export performance in previous studies [63].

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Following data collection, we performed preliminary data screening using IBM SPSS 27 to assess missing values, outliers, and normality. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales. All scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with alpha values exceeding 0.80.

For hypothesis testing, we employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4.0. We selected PLS-SEM over covariance-based SEM for several reasons: (1) its suitability for predictive research objectives, (2) its ability to handle complex models with multiple relationships, (3) its robustness with smaller sample sizes, and (4) its appropriateness for testing moderating effects [9, 64].

Our data analysis followed a two-stage approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, we assessed the measurement model through tests of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Second, we evaluated the structural model by examining path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). For testing the moderating effects, we employed the product indicator approach Chin, et al. [65]which involves creating interaction terms between the predictor and moderator variables. Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 subsamples was used to determine the statistical significance of the path coefficients.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1. Data Screening and Preliminary Analysis

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted thorough data screening to ensure the quality of our dataset. As recommended by Pallant [66] researchers should filter and clean data before analysis to avoid erroneous conclusions from inaccurately entered data. Using IBM SPSS Statistics 27, we examined the data for missing values, outliers, and violations of normality assumptions.

Missing value analysis revealed complete data for all 174 respondents, eliminating concerns about missing data patterns. We assessed univariate outliers using standardized z-scores ($|z| > 3.29$) and multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis distance ($p < 0.001$). This process identified six potential outliers, but after careful examination of their response patterns, we determined these represented genuine business variations rather than erroneous data and thus retained them in the analysis [67].

Assessment of normality through skewness and kurtosis values (all within ±2) and visual inspection of Q-Q plots indicated no severe violations of normality assumptions. Moreover, PLS-SEM is relatively robust against deviations from normality [54]. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for all study variables.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Firm Size (ln)	3.56	0.84	-							
2. Firm Age	12.38	7.93	0.41**	-						
3. Export Experience	7.26	5.18	0.37**	0.62**	-					
4. Export Intensity	35.47	24.6	0.28**	0.24**	0.35**	-				
5. Network Competence	5.32	0.93	0.22**	0.16*	0.19*	0.31**	-			
6. Market Knowledge Capability	4.87	1.08	0.18*	0.14	0.25**	0.38**	0.47**	-		
7. Competitive Aggressiveness	4.12	1.26	0.21**	0.08	0.11	0.26**	0.29**	0.31**	-	
8. Export Performance	4.74	1.17	0.24**	0.17*	0.27**	0.43**	0.56**	0.64**	0.33**	-

Note: n = 174; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.010.

The reliability analysis demonstrated that all scales had strong internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.84 to 0.93, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 [68]. These robust alpha values indicated that all components within each construct were reliable and suitable for subsequent analysis.

4.2. Measurement Model Assessment

Following data screening and reliability assessment, we evaluated the measurement model using SmartPLS 4.0. The measurement model assessment examines the relationships between latent constructs and their indicators, focusing on internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity [54]. Table 2 presents the results of measurement model evaluation.

Table 2.
Measurement Model Results.

Constructs and Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
Network Competence		0.93	0.63
NC1: Planning network relationships	0.782		
NC2: Organizing network activities	0.805		
NC3: Staffing network positions	0.769		
NC4: Controlling network partners	0.792		
NC5: Special qualifications for network management	0.814		
NC6: Social qualifications for network management	0.826		
NC7: Adaptability in relationships	0.786		
NC8: Communication ability with partners	0.758		
Market Knowledge Capability		0.94	0.68
MK1: Knowledge about international customers	0.839		
MK2: Collecting information about market changes	0.857		
MK3: Knowledge about competitors	0.816		
MK4: Understanding overseas market trends	0.872		
MK5: Knowledge about international regulations	0.781		
MK6: Effective use of market information	0.813		
MK7: Integration of market information	0.792		
MK8: Analyzing market information effectively	0.804		
Competitive Aggressiveness		0.9	0.61
CA1: Aggressive posture toward competitors	0.776		
CA2: Cut prices to increase market share	0.748		
CA3: Sacrifice profitability for market share	0.732		
CA4: Aggressively enter markets with lower prices	0.842		
CA5: Competitive 'undo-the-competitor' approach	0.825		
CA6: Target competitor's markets	0.758		
Export Performance		0.96	0.71
EP1: Export sales level	0.834		
EP2: Export sales growth	0.868		
EP3: Export profitability	0.893		
EP4: Return on export investment	0.857		

Constructs and Items	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
EP5: Export market share	0.819		
EP6: Strategic position in export market	0.828		
EP7: Global competitiveness	0.814		
EP8: Strategic foothold in export market	0.843		
EP9: Perceived export success	0.857		
EP10: Satisfaction with export performance	0.835		

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted.

The results in Table 2 indicate that all item loadings exceeded 0.70, demonstrating good indicator reliability [54]. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs ranged from 0.904 to 0.959, well above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for all constructs exceeded 0.50, ranging from 0.612 to 0.714, establishing adequate convergent validity [69].

For discriminant validity, we employed three criteria: (1) the Fornell-Larcker criterion, (2) cross-loadings examination, and (3) the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root of each construct's AVE should exceed its correlation with any other construct. As shown in Table 3, this condition was met for all constructs. Examination of cross-loadings confirmed that each indicator loaded highest on its intended construct. Finally, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85, further confirming discriminant validity (Henseler, et al. [70]).

Table 3.
Discriminant validity assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion).

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Network Competence	0.792			
2. Market Knowledge Capability	0.472	0.82		
3. Competitive Aggressiveness	0.294	0.31	0.78	
4. Export Performance	0.563	0.64	0.33	0.845

Note: Bold diagonal elements represent the square root of AVE for each construct.

4.3. Structural Model Assessment

After establishing the reliability and validity of the measurement model, we proceeded to evaluate the structural model, which represents the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. Prior to examining the path coefficients, we assessed potential multicollinearity issues by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all predictor constructs. All inner VIF values were below the threshold of 3.3 Diamantopoulos and Siguaw [71] with values ranging from 1.214 to 1.539, indicating no significant multicollinearity concerns.

We assessed the structural model by examining path coefficients (β), t-statistics, coefficients of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Bootstrap resampling with 5,000 subsamples was employed to determine the statistical significance of the path coefficients. Table 4 presents the results of the structural model assessment, including direct effects and moderating effects.

Table 4.
Structural Model Results.

Hypothesized Relationships	Std. β	SE	t-value	p-value	95% CI	Decision
Direct Effects						
H1: Network Competence → Export Performance	0.311	0.07	4.785	0	[0.201, 0.421]	Supported
H2: Market Knowledge Capability → Export Performance	0.514	0.07	7.239	0	[0.389, 0.639]	Supported
Moderating Effects						
H3: NC × CA → Export Performance	0.055	0.1	0.548	0.292	[-0.112, 0.222]	Not Supported
H4: MK × CA → Export Performance	0.511	0.13	0.403	0.499	[-0.105, 0.246]	Not Supported
Control Variables						
Firm Size → Export Performance	0.072	0.05	1.501	0.134	[-0.022, 0.166]	
Firm Age → Export Performance	-0.03	0.06	0.589	0.556	[-0.143, 0.077]	
Export Experience → Export Performance	0.094	0.06	1.649	0.049	[0.001, 0.189]	
Industry → Export Performance	0.031	0.04	0.72	0.472	[-0.053, 0.115]	
Export Intensity → Export Performance	0.184	0.05	3.538	0	[0.082, 0.286]	

Note: NC = Network Competence; MK = Market Knowledge Capability; CA = Competitive Aggressiveness; Bold values for significant results ($p < 0.05$)

4.4. Model Fit Indices

- R^2 (Export Performance) = 0.549
- Adjusted R^2 (Export Performance) = 0.532
- f^2 (Network Competence → Export Performance) = 0.139
- f^2 (Market Knowledge Capability → Export Performance) = 0.381
- Q^2 (Export Performance) = 0.527
- SRMR = 0.058
- NFI = 0.856

The results in Table 4 show that network competence had a significant positive effect on export performance ($\beta = 0.311$, $t = 4.785$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, market knowledge capability had a significant positive effect on export performance ($\beta = 0.514$, $t = 7.239$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. The effect of market knowledge capability on export performance was notably stronger than that of network competence, as indicated by both the standardized beta coefficients and effect sizes ($f^2MK = 0.381$ vs. $f^2NC = 0.139$).

Contrary to our expectations, the interaction effects of competitive aggressiveness with network competence ($\beta = 0.055$, $t = 0.548$, $p = 0.292$) and market knowledge capability ($\beta = 0.511$, $t = 0.403$, $p = 0.499$) on export performance were not statistically significant. Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were not supported. These results suggest that competitive aggressiveness does not significantly moderate the relationships between network competence, market knowledge capability, and export performance in the context of Indonesian SMEs.

Among the control variables, export experience ($\beta = 0.094$, $t = 1.649$, $p < 0.05$) and export intensity ($\beta = 0.184$, $t = 3.538$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on export performance, while firm size, firm age, and industry did not significantly influence export performance.

The model explained 54.9% ($R^2 = 0.549$) of the variance in export performance, indicating substantial explanatory power according to Chin [72] criteria (R^2 values of 0.67, 0.33, and 0.19 are considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively). After adjusting for the number of predictors, the adjusted R^2 value was 0.532, still indicating substantial explanatory power. The model also demonstrated strong predictive relevance, with a Q^2 value of 0.527, well above the threshold of zero, suggesting that the model has good predictive ability for the endogenous construct [54].

Additionally, we assessed the model's overall fit using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normed fit index (NFI). The SRMR value of 0.058 was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating good fit [73]. The NFI value of 0.856 approached the recommended threshold of 0.90, suggesting an acceptable fit [74].

4.5. Additional Analysis

To gain deeper insight into the relationships between our focal constructs, we conducted several additional analyses. First, we examined potential non-linear relationships by testing quadratic effects of network competence and market knowledge capability on export performance. The results showed no significant quadratic effects, confirming the linearity of the relationships.

Second, we explored potential mediation effects by testing whether competitive aggressiveness might mediate (rather than moderate) the relationships between network competence, market knowledge capability, and export performance. The mediation analysis revealed no significant indirect effects, further supporting our focus on the direct relationships and moderating effects in the primary analysis.

Third, we conducted a multi-group analysis to determine whether the effects varied across different firm characteristics. We divided the sample based on firm size (small vs. medium), export intensity (low vs. high), and export experience (novice vs. experienced). The results revealed that the positive effect of network competence on export performance was stronger for smaller firms ($\beta = 0.389$, $p < 0.001$) compared to medium-sized firms ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < 0.05$), while the effect of market knowledge capability was relatively stable across firm sizes. Moreover, the positive effect of market knowledge capability was significantly stronger for firms with higher export intensity ($\beta = 0.608$, $p < 0.001$) compared to those with lower export intensity ($\beta = 0.412$, $p < 0.001$). These findings provide nuanced insights into the contingent nature of the relationships examined in our study.

5. Discussion and Implications

This study investigates how Indonesian SMEs can enhance their export performance through network competence and market knowledge capability while examining the potential moderating role of competitive aggressiveness. Our findings offer several theoretical and practical insights that contribute to the international entrepreneurship literature and provide guidance for SME managers and policymakers in emerging economies.

5.1. Theoretical Discussion

5.1.1. Network Competence and Export Performance

Our results confirm that network competence significantly enhances export performance among Indonesian SMEs ($\beta = 0.311$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding aligns with and extends previous research highlighting the importance of networks in SME internationalization [18, 22, 23]. Through the lens of resource-based view theory, we demonstrate that network competence represents a valuable, difficult-to-imitate capability that enables resource-constrained SMEs to overcome inherent limitations when pursuing international opportunities.

Specifically, our findings suggest that Indonesian SMEs with superior network competence can more effectively leverage relationships with various stakeholders—including suppliers, distributors, industry associations, and government agencies—to access critical resources and knowledge needed for successful internationalization. These network relationships appear to serve as conduits for information about foreign market opportunities, potential partners, and regulatory requirements, while also providing legitimacy and credibility that Indonesian firms might otherwise struggle to establish independently in international markets.

The significant relationship between network competence and export performance in our Indonesian sample contradicts findings from some studies in Western contexts that have found diminishing returns from network investments [75]. This discrepancy may reflect the particularly crucial role of networks in emerging economies with weaker institutional environments, where formal market-supporting institutions are less developed, and informal networks play a more vital role in business success [76]. In the Indonesian context specifically, the cultural emphasis on gotong royong (mutual assistance) and kekeluargaan (family-like relationships) may further amplify the importance of network competence for business success. Furthermore, our multi-group analysis revealed that network competence has a stronger effect on export performance for smaller firms compared to medium-sized firms. This finding suggests that network competence may serve as a particularly effective compensatory mechanism for the most resource-constrained firms, enabling them to access external resources that offset their internal limitations. As firms grow and accumulate more internal resources, the marginal benefit of network competence may diminish, though it remains significant.

5.1.2. Market Knowledge Capability and Export Performance

Our results also demonstrate that market knowledge capability has a strong positive effect on export performance ($\beta = 0.514$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. The magnitude of this effect (nearly 66% larger than that of network competence) highlights the paramount importance of market intelligence for Indonesian SMEs seeking international success. This finding reinforces previous studies that have identified market knowledge as a critical success factor in internationalization [29, 32]. And extends this literature by quantifying the relative importance of market knowledge capability compared to network competence in an emerging economy context.

The strong relationship between market knowledge capability and export performance suggests that Indonesian SMEs that systematically collect, analyze, and utilize information about international markets gain significant competitive advantages. Market knowledge enables these firms to identify suitable target markets, adapt their offerings to meet foreign customer preferences, navigate complex regulatory environments, and respond effectively to competitive threats. Without such knowledge, Indonesian SMEs appear particularly vulnerable to market failures when venturing abroad, as evidenced by the historically high failure rates noted in previous studies [35, 39].

Our findings indicate that market knowledge capability provides an even greater contribution to export performance when firms have higher export intensity. This suggests that as Indonesian SMEs become more committed to international markets, their ability to leverage market knowledge becomes increasingly critical to their success. This finding aligns with the internationalization process theory by Johanson and Vahlne [19] which suggests that knowledge becomes progressively more important as firms deepen their international engagement.

From a resource-based perspective, market knowledge appears to be a particularly valuable and difficult-to-imitate resource in the Indonesian context. The significant knowledge gaps that have been documented among Indonesian SMEs Bhasin and Venkataraman [36] and Sarirahayu and Aprianingsih [37] suggest that firms that develop superior market knowledge capabilities gain substantial advantages over competitors that lack such capabilities. This knowledge asymmetry creates opportunities for market pioneers while posing significant barriers for followers.

5.1.3. The Non-Significant Moderating Role of Competitive Aggressiveness

Contrary to our expectations, competitive aggressiveness did not significantly moderate the relationships between network competence, market knowledge capability, and export performance, leading to the rejection of Hypotheses 3 and 4. This finding challenges some previous studies that have found positive effects of competitive aggressiveness in international contexts (Dadzie, et al. [44] and Shirokova, et al. [45]) and warrants careful consideration.

Several explanations may account for these non-significant moderation effects. First, competitive aggressiveness may be less effective in the Indonesian cultural context, which traditionally values harmony (kerukunan) and conflict avoidance. Indonesian business culture has been characterized as relationship-oriented rather than transaction-oriented Mangundjaya [77] suggesting that aggressive competitive tactics might disrupt the collaborative relationships that our findings show are vital for export success.

Second, as Crick [50] suggested, competitive aggressiveness may negatively affect the quality of interfirm relationships, potentially undermining the benefits derived from network competence. In the context of coopetition (simultaneous competition and cooperation), competitive aggression might create ambiguity about where cooperative and competitive boundaries begin and end, potentially leading to mistrust and reduced knowledge sharing [78].

Third, the international markets targeted by Indonesian SMEs may reward cooperative approaches more than aggressive competition. Many Indonesian exporters focus on niche markets or specialized products where collaborative value chain integration may be more important than direct competitive confrontation. The non-significant moderation effect thus suggests that Indonesian SMEs might benefit more from balanced relationship management than from aggressive competitive posturing.

While competitive aggressiveness did not function as a moderator, it did have a significant direct correlation with export performance ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that it may still play a role in internationalization, albeit not by enhancing or

diminishing the effects of network competence or market knowledge capability. This suggests that competitive aggressiveness might operate through different mechanisms than those hypothesized in our model, perhaps by directly influencing market entry decisions or resource allocation rather than moderating capability deployment.

5.2. Practical Implications

5.2.1. Implications for SME Managers

Our findings offer several practical implications for managers of Indonesian SMEs seeking to enhance their export performance. First, the strong positive effect of market knowledge capability on export performance underscores the critical importance of systematic market intelligence gathering and utilization. SME managers should invest in developing formal processes for collecting information about international customers, competitors, industry trends, and regulatory requirements. Given resource constraints, SMEs might consider:

1. Joining industry associations that provide market intelligence as a membership benefit.
2. Establishing relationships with overseas distributors who can provide market insights.
3. Utilizing digital platforms and tools that offer cost-effective market monitoring.
4. Participating in international trade shows and exhibitions as information-gathering opportunities.
5. Implementing customer relationship management systems to systematically capture and analyze customer feedback.

Second, the significant effect of network competence on export performance highlights the need for strategic network development and management. Indonesian SME managers should:

1. Map their existing network relationships and identify gaps in connectivity to key stakeholders.
2. Allocate resources specifically for relationship-building activities with international partners.
3. Develop relationship management protocols to ensure consistent engagement with network partners.
4. Invest in training to enhance staff capabilities in cross-cultural communication and relationship management.
5. Leverage digital platforms to maintain connections with geographically distant network partners.

Third, the non-significant moderation effect of competitive aggressiveness suggests that Indonesian SMEs should carefully consider their competitive posture in international markets. Rather than adopting highly aggressive competitive strategies, managers might benefit more from:

1. Focusing on cooperative partnerships that enhance value creation.
2. Developing distinctive competencies that reduce direct competitive confrontation.
3. Identifying niche markets where specialized offerings can command premium prices.
4. Building customer loyalty through relationship quality rather than aggressive pricing.
5. Balancing competitive actions with relationship maintenance to preserve network benefits.

5.2.2. Implications for Policymakers

Our study also provides insights for policymakers seeking to enhance the international competitiveness of Indonesian SMEs. First, the strong influence of market knowledge capability suggests that government agencies should prioritize programs that enhance SMEs' market intelligence capabilities. Specific initiatives might include:

1. Establishing centralized market intelligence services tailored to priority export sectors.
2. Subsidizing market research for SMEs entering new international markets.
3. Creating knowledge-sharing platforms where successful exporters can share market insights.
4. Integrating international market analysis into entrepreneurship education programs.
5. Developing sector-specific export guides that provide essential market information.

Second, the significant impact of network competence suggests that policies should support network development among Indonesian SMEs. Potential policy initiatives include:

1. Facilitating trade missions and international business matchmaking events.
2. Supporting the formation of export consortia among complementary SMEs.
3. Strengthening connections between SMEs and institutional actors such as embassies, trade offices, and international chambers of commerce.
4. Providing incentives for participation in international industry associations and trade shows.
5. Investing in digital infrastructure that enables virtual networking with international partners.

Third, the finding that competitive aggressiveness does not enhance the effects of network competence or market knowledge capability suggests that export promotion policies should emphasize collaborative approaches rather than aggressive competition. Policymakers might:

1. Develop programs that help SMEs identify collaborative opportunities in global value chains.
2. Provide support for joint ventures and strategic alliances with international partners.
3. Focus on developing Indonesia's national brand image around quality and distinctiveness rather than low-cost.
4. Create certification programs that enhance the credibility and perceived value of Indonesian exports.
5. Support industry clustering to facilitate knowledge sharing and collective efficiency.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this study provides valuable insights into the determinants of export performance among Indonesian SMEs, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design prevents us from making definitive causal inferences. Future research could employ longitudinal designs to examine how network competence and market knowledge

capability influence export performance over time, particularly as firms progress through different stages of internationalization.

Second, our reliance on self-reported data from single respondents may introduce common method bias, despite the statistical tests suggesting this was not a significant concern. Future studies could triangulate data from multiple sources, including objective export performance metrics where available, to strengthen the validity of the findings.

Third, while our sample was representative of Indonesian exporting SMEs, the findings may not generalize to other emerging economies with different cultural, institutional, and economic contexts. Comparative studies across multiple emerging economies would enhance our understanding of the contingent nature of the relationships examined in this study.

Beyond addressing these limitations, our findings suggest several promising avenues for future research. First, researchers could investigate additional capabilities that might enhance SME export performance, such as digital capabilities, innovation capabilities, or adaptive capabilities. Given the rapid digitalization of international trade, understanding how digital capabilities interact with network competence and market knowledge capability would be particularly valuable.

Second, future studies could explore the antecedents of network competence and market knowledge capability among Indonesian SMEs. Identifying the organizational characteristics, leadership attributes, and environmental factors that facilitate the development of these capabilities would provide deeper insights into how export success can be cultivated.

Third, researchers could investigate the potential dark sides of network competence and market knowledge capability, such as over-embeddedness in networks, knowledge overload, or paralysis by analysis. Understanding the potential curvilinear effects and boundary conditions of these capabilities would provide a more nuanced understanding of their role in export performance.

Finally, given the unexpected nonsignificant moderation effects of competitive aggressiveness, future research could explore alternative strategic orientations that might enhance the effectiveness of network competence and market knowledge capability. For example, entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, or market orientation might prove to be more effective moderators in the Indonesian context.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Indonesian SMEs can enhance their export performance through network competence and market knowledge capability while investigating the potential moderating role of competitive aggressiveness. Our findings demonstrate that both network competence and market knowledge capability significantly enhance export performance, with market knowledge capability exerting a substantially stronger influence. Contrary to expectations, competitive aggressiveness did not significantly moderate these relationships, suggesting that Indonesian SMEs benefit more from collaborative approaches than from aggressive competition.

These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the resource configurations that enable SMEs from emerging economies to overcome inherent constraints and build export resilience. They also provide practical guidance for SME managers seeking to enhance their international competitiveness and for policymakers aiming to support SME internationalization. By strategically developing network competence and market knowledge capability, Indonesian SMEs can navigate the challenges of global markets more effectively and contribute more substantially to national economic development through increased export success.

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