Understanding the Influences of Network Gained from the International Trade Show on SME's Market Selection Stages*

Received: *September 8, 2018*
Revised: *June 28, 2019*
Accepted: *July 1, 2019*

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Abstract

Network is considered as one of the most important factors of SMEs' international business expansion. International trade show is a vital platform for developing network with foreign counterparts. Many studies have recently recognized the significance of network in the context of small firms. Nonetheless, the understanding of network gaining from participating in the international trade show is still limited especially in the emerging markets. Therefore, studies call for further research on the role of networks in the internationalization process of small firms. Besides, network can influence firm's internationalization especially market selection process. Since the international market selection process is significant to determine export success, thus, the purpose of this study is to understand the influences of network that SMEs acquire from international trade show participation on different stages of market selection, which are prescreening, in-depth screening, and final selection. The semi-structure interview twenty two sampler of Thai SMEs was conducted to find the impacts of different network types on international market selection stages. Three types of network, buyer, competitor, professional and government network were found to influence international market selection stages. The findings also indicate that network facilitates business development and affects decision making. Types and roles of network as well as network theory are discussed to reflect the influence of network on different stages of international market selection.

Keywords: 1. International trade shows, 2. Internationalization, 3. Network, 4. Market selection, 5. Small and medium enterprises

* This research aimed to examine difference types of network that small firms attained from exhibiting in international trade show. Four types of network: buyer, competitor, supplier, and government network are investigated to find the impact on different types of market selection stages.

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Introduction

SMEs use international trade show as opportunity to establish and strengthen relationships that can lead them to enter international markets. Trade fairs are seen as a networking platform that allow people to interact with each other and gives SMEs the chance to grow overseas (Meason & Campbell, 2015). However, research work on trade fairs mostly focus on selling and promotion, but have received little attention on network building perspective (Evers and Knight 2008). Therefore, for the case of emerging market, the study is even less. According to Axelsson and Johanson (1992, cited in Daszkiewicz and Wach, 2012), a network involves "sets two or more connected exchange relationships". The relationships among various group such as customers, suppliers, competitors, family will influence strategic decision. In addition, network involves resource exchange among its different members. Some research work view networking function is more importance than selling function especially for the newly or unknown international markets. Sometime, the firms are not selling at the moment of trade fairs but build relationships with potential buyers until they become customer later. To confirm this, Meason and Campbell-Hunt (2015) conducted 6 case studies and found that networking is the channel to sell in an unknown environment. And the trade fairs' role is to provide companies the opportunity to meet business partners and customers and conduct one-on-one meetings. However, the magnitude of networking change overtime. The deepen the relationship is more important as the time passes.,

This research aims at investigating how different types of network that SMEs acquire from participating international trade show as exhibitors influence on each stage of market selection. The final results are expected to advance international business theory particularly the network theory of internationalization. In addition, this study will also set ground work for the next level of research involved with SMEs from emerging countries.

Role of Network in Internationalization

Research pertains to network issues in the context of small firm is increasing. However, the context that integrate the aspect of international trade show is limited. Many studies supported that networks can influence on internationalization process, such as pace, pattern, market selection, and entry mode. Networking is considered to be an important source of SMEs business expansion to many countries. The accomplishment of internationalization requires good cooperation between related agencies (Senik et al., 2011). Internationalization can be considered as ongoing process of business firm in expanding its

business to foreign countries. Firm will have to transfer products or services across domestic boundaries to selected countries as well as medium of international exchange transaction scheme or entering strategy. The two dimensions: entry mode alternative and international market selection are the core strategic decision of firm's internationalization (Andersen, 1993).

Networking can stem from prior owner/manager networks, personal, or business contacts (Hallen, 1992). Frequently, international relationships can originate from inward internationalization such as purchase of machinery, or import of raw material. These activities provide opportunities to network with foreign firms and allow domestic firms to learn about foreign trade and possibility to make outward foreign operations (Karlsen et al., 2003 cited in Freeman, et al., 2006). Based on existing research works, the impact of network on firm' s internationalization can be summarized into three types. Firstly, Network influences firm behavior**.** Network can influences behavior of the organization (Caviello and Munro, 1997). Networking development can help owner/manager learn from mistake in the past and tend to have better decision making (Gilmore et. al., 2001). Furthermore, decision making can impact choice of markets to enter. Secondly, network is a source of trust. Firm usually exchange basic information with first time meeting with buyers, while they tend to emphasis on trust building with the existing ones (Karabulat, 2014). Network create trust. Trust and respect are essential conditions for manager and customers from various cultural backgrounds (Cellich, 1995 cited in Rowden, 2001). Finally, network is a cause for knowledge. Without network, SMEs may not be able to attain importance knowledge within a rapid time interval. Network from customers, suppliers, and other international trade stakeholders provide knowledge that important to foreign market penetration (Falahat et al., 2013).

Trade Show as a Platform for Networking

Based on literature review, types of network obtained from international trade show can be categorized as follow:

a. Buyers network

Trade fairs usually brings various type of stakeholders from a particular or related industries to physically meeting. Undoubtedly, trade show allows sellers face-to-face contact with buyers. Trade show have significant influence to buyers. It was observed that 85 percent of trade show visitors have buying influence from trade show. The cost of per visitor is one-third of a personal sales call. (Herbig et al, 1998 as cited in Menon and Edward, 2013, p. 66). Therefore, the importance of buyer is substantial one.

Cobanoglu and Turaeva (2014) employed factor analysis method in analyzing trade show performance. The data is collected from SMEs who participate in three international trade show in Istanbul, Turkey in 2013. The research cited the "maintain and enhance existing relationship with existing clients" as one of the items in the main factor. It can be implied that trade show does not only provide opportunity to meet new buyers but enhance relationship with the current ones. It is consistent with Gilmore et al. (2001) that companies realized the importance of building relationship with customers. It is one of the vital elements in determining company's success and companies usually invest time and effort in maintaining this kind of relations. Although creating relationship will not generate sale immediately but it affects to trade show performance and increase their export eventually. In addition, Trades show is an important platform to meet key decision makers (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2011; Seringhaus and Rosson, 2004). Sarmento et al. (2015, p.590) indicated that trade fairs lead to relationship reinforcement, act as a source for relationship development and create trust in the counterpart's abilities (Hansen, 1999, cited in Sarmento et al., 2015, p. 590). Therefore, it can be concluded that trade show is not only a place to meet customers for buying and selling but extend to create greater relationship between stakeholders. Therefore, this research defines network from trade show as the acquisition of new customers, enhance relationship and trust from existing clients. This kind of network must be attained during the international trade show event.

b. Supplier Network

Meeting supplier can be one of the reasons to attend trade shows. Belussi et al. (2008), explained that term "fair-network" as the horizontal and vertical integration of value chain. The horizontal dimension include associations, partners, and institution. The vertical ones are customer and supplier. The synergy between horizontal and vertical resulted in acquisition of knowledge and network.

Not only meeting with supplier, Gottlieb Udo et al. (2014) mentioned about maintaining relationship with supplier. This implied different aspect in measuring supplier. In addition, Learn about new suppliers, service providers is another benefit that exhibitors able to receive (Menon and Edward, 2013). Suppliers are not customer as they do not buy product from firms. But they sell parts or components to firms. Developing relationships with suppliers can help facilitate internationalization of firms. Chen (2003) explained the situation of Taiwanese electronic firms entering foreign country, says, Malaysia and seeking new suppliers

locally by using local supplier networks. Initially, the firm utilized new suppliers from the supplier networks that were established before from MNEs rather than bringing suppliers from Taiwan. This study is a good example of how networking with local suppliers can benefit to overseas business expansion. This study propose that supplier network composed with meeting with existing input suppliers such as machinery, discussing business with them, and acquiring new suppliers that important to SMEs.

c. Competitors Network

As one of the main features of trade show is the event that bring seller and buyer to meet with each other. Thus, sellers or exhibitors will confront with each other for a certain period of time. Interaction with competitors occurs during trade show event (Belussi et al., 2008.) In addition, Tafesse and Korneliussen (2011) mentions three types of network in the trade show performance items measurement: meet key decision making, develop and maintain relationship with customers, and exchange information with competitors. SME owner/managers often communicate with competing firms and are supportive of each other. They are openly share information and have no reluctance to help or provide advice for each others. In some occasion, the companies even know their competitors and help each other for help or business advice. Another purpose of cooperation is that they want joint working as the project is too large for one company to finish, or if one company may enter into new field of work and require new skills to complete unfamiliar tasks (Gilmore et al., 2001). Therefore, many SMEs realized the advantage of maintaining relationships with competitors, thus, many of them attempts to create this type of relationship when they participate in trade show. Based on the literature, competitor network in this study is network occurred from meeting with competitors with exchanging useful knowledge. In addition, networking includes the aspect of working collaboration with competitors and support each other.

d. Professional and Government Agencies.

In emerging markets, government agencies can play a vital role in internationalization by assisting SMEs in export activities. Many of SMEs from developing countries relied on government assistance scheme from their local government. Hashim (2012) mentioned MATRADE, a Malaysian government agency that helps SMEs with investment, participation in international trade fairs and trade missions. Evers and Knight (2008) cited Freeman (1999) who stated that links to professionals and government agencies can help to provide information about foreign markets. According to Sarmento et al., 2015, network extend to not only buyers

and sellers but organizers, press, opinion makers. Other type of professional such as industrial leader was cited in research of Menon and Edward (2013) in the regard of objective of firm's participating trade show. In addition, trade associations, institutes, and professional associations likewise perceive trade show as an ideal place for meet each other. The benefit occurred once they meet and inform each other about general development within the industry (Gilmore et al., 2001). Participants gain various of relevance benefits from these types of relationship reinforcement and development. Base on the literature, this research defines professional and government network as the networking with government units, trade show organizers, press, media, industry leaders, trade associations, institute, and related professional associations.

Stage of International Market Selection

Papadopoulos and Martin (2011) define international market selection as the decision that firms selected market, regardless of a well define geographically or otherwise, in which to be presented. The selection of which market to entry is one of the most important decisions in international market entry strategy (Gorecka and Szalucka, 2013). According to Koch (2001), firms to enter three stage when making decision on market selection: pre-screening, in-depth screening, and final selection. The literature on market selection stages is limited. Pre-screening, in-depth screening and final selection stage are unclearly defined. Terminology for screening process is also different. Cavusgil (1985) employed the term screening, identification and selection, while Johansson (1997) used the term country identification for first stage and preliminary screening for second stage. Kumar et al. (1994) as cited in Koch (2001, p.67), mentioned that macro-level is the key indicator to screen countries that doesn't meet criteria. In addition, Gaston-Breton and Martin (2011) proposed only two distinct stages: screening and identification. The first stage, macro segmentation, is similar to other research works. The authors proposed micro-segmentation that emphasis on consumer level such as personal values and social values as the second criteria for countries selection process. It is noted that the model of Gaston-Breton and Martin (2011) was developed for only twenty seven countries of European Union.

Gorecka and Szalucka (2013) mentioned that market screening should begin with total set of available countries. In order to expand business overseas, firm need to go through process of five decision making. First clearly identified reason for involving in international business. Second, define products it wants to sell. Third, identified target market or markets which is known as international market selection. Forth, choose entry mode. Finally, firms

must determine the timing of entry. Koch (2001) cited further that second stages involved in analysis of specific industry, level of competition, and entry barrier. Final selection focus on firm specific information, such as profitability and their products. The emphasis is on firm's prospect on business direction such as company goals and strategies rather than country.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore types of network and effects of them on international expansion especially stage of market selection The study focusses on process of firm in expanding international business. It is observing at the process of how the firm utilize input elements (networks) through different market selection stages. Qualitative method is more suitable for this study. Different types of qualitative approach of interviewing are structured, unstructured, semi-structured and group interview. The definition and element network obtained from tradeshow can be complex, the type of interview questions must be well prepared questions whereas they should provide some extent for interviewees to add their perspective or undiscovered elements that might not be mentioned in the literature. Therefore, qualitative semi-interviewing is selected to be a research strategy for Thai SMEs. Twenty two selected firms were then asked the example name of international trade show that they had direct experience in for further validity investigation. To qualify as sample for interviewing, candidate has to provide name of international trade shows participation. The names of international trade shows were cross checked at their official website. Respondents must own exhibiting booth in international trade show. The interviewees must act as executor in managing position especially position that directly involve with international business activities. In addition, they must be able to provide general background of the company. The question set are taken from existing similar questions and concept from literature review. Since the samples are Thai SMEs, it is best to conduct interviewing in Thai language in order to receive in depth information. The interviewing lasted between approximately 35 minutes to 50 minutes depending on answer of each respondents. An interview questions listed all the questions to be covered. Some questions required specific answer, however, most of the interviews included open-ended questions to enable interviewees to elaborate answer in as much detail as possible. Length of time interview and code of companies are presented in table 1. The interviews are transcribed. Results are assessed according to the research questions. This study undertakes thematic analysis approach to analyze result from interviews. The theme obtained from investigation of data will be presented. Each theme is evaluated in

accordance with the dimensions presented such as network types and three stages of market selection). The conclusion is extracted and presented with the purpose to identify themes that match the theories propose in the literature review.

Table 1 Length of time for interviewing

Number	Companies	Length of interviewing (minutes)
1.	C01-Jsnack	45.38
2.	C02-Sfruit	38.27
3.	C03-Pfood	36.04
4.	C04Sfood	35.12
5.	C05-Orice	36.04
6.	C06-Pmulberry	41.56
7.	C07-Ssrup	30.33
8.	C08-Rspa	50.56
9.	C09-Bspa	40.06
10.	C10-Aspa	40.06
11.	C11-Dspa	50.09
12.	C12-Npet	35.15
13.	C13-Cpet	46.47
14.	C14-Wdoorlock	31.21
15.	C15-Rjewelry	41.48
16.	C16-Tfurniture	31.42
17.	C17-Tplastic	30.44
18.	C18-Sbox	44.19
19.	C19-Ncoconutoil	31.11
20.	C20-Morganic	35.43
21.	C21-Sglassess	35.27
22.	C22-Ntraffic	36.09

The code C01 to C22 represents company 1 to company 22. The followed letter for each code gave to clue of main business that the company are currently operated in. For example, C01 export snack. Some SMEs from different product line can enter the same international trade show. For example, C18-Sbox, which manufactured plastic box for multipurpose, exhibited in the Bangkok International Gift and Houseware trade show, as well as, C08-Rspa and C09-Bspa, which offered spa products. However, they are in different sections in the same trade show. In addition, some of the sample SMEs such as C19-Ncoconutoil and C20-Morganic cannot be categorized in the traditional category. C19-Ncoconutoil offered coconut oil that can be use in various industries including food and cosmetic. Similarly to C20-Morganic that offered various type of organic products including detergent, baby cloth, soap, facial products, etc. The company can either enter to a number of related trade show industry such as gift and houseware, organic and natural products, or beauty supplies. Majority of SMEs participate approximately 2-3 times yearly. The lowest number is once a year, while the highest is as high as 6-8 times year round. The foreign markets that SMEs expanded to are vary. Every respondent report more than one foreign market. The highest range number of international operations is, as indicated by respondent, approximately 20 countries worldwide. Table 2 summarized the business of each respondent and brief of their business and international market background.

Table 2: General facts of interviewing companies

Company/ Business/ type	Industry	Interviewee position	Year of establish	Years of first exhibiting Int'l TS	Internationalsale percentage	Avg. exhibiting TS per year/ Example of Int'l TS	Example of current internationalmarkets
C01-Jsnack/ Crispy banana snack	Food	MD/ Owner	2012	2013	80%	3/ SAIL (France), ANUGA (Germany), NPEW (USA)	USA, Middle East, Europe, Estonia, Poland, Asia, South Africa
C02-Sfruit/ Snack	Food	Marketing manager (Family Business)	2001	2004	95%	3/ Thaifex, SIAL China, Shenzhen food fair, Guangzhou food fair	China, Middle East, Europe
C03-Pfood/ Process food, ready to eat, sauce, Frozen food	Food	MD/ Partner /Owner	1983	2000	95%	5/ Thaifex, Top Thai Brand	Japan, USA
C04Sfood /Ready to eat	Food	Owner	2015	2017	5%	2/ ACIEC (ASEAN CHINA Import and Export Commodities)	China
C05-Orice /Rice วุ้นเส้น	Food	Export manager	1993	2005	60%	5-6/ Foodex (Japan), SAIL (France), ANUGA (Germany)	UAE, France,South Africa, USA, Europe, Middle East
C06-Pmulberry /Mulberry Tea	Beverage	MD/ Owner	1998	2011	90%	Thaifex, Biofach (Germany)	Canada, Germany, USA, Slovakia, Singapore, Malaysia, Austria, Japan

C07-Ssrup /Syrup drink	Beverage	MD/Owner/ partner	2012	2016	Less than 5%	2-3/ Thaifex, Thailand Coffee Fest, Hotelmex Shanghai, SIAL Indonesia	China, Indonesia
C08-Rspa /Spa products	Spa/ Beauty products	MD/ Owner	2015	2017	90%	4/ BIG, Beyond beauty, Cosmoprof (Hong Kong)	China, Japan
C09-Bspa /Spa supplies Born global	Spa product supplies	MD/ Partner	2001	2001	50%	2/ Health and Beauty	Europe, USA, Africa
C10-Aspa /Spa products	Spa products/ Consult service	MD/Owner	2008	2012	15%	2/ China beauty expo, Style, Top Thai Brand (Shanghai)	China, AEC
C11-Dspa /Spa products	Spa products	MD/ Partner	2001	2001	10%	4/Health and Beauty, Cosmoprof (Hong Kong), Beauty world(Tokyo)	Japan, China
C12-Npet /Pet supplies	Pet supplies	Owner	2014	2016	60%	3-4/BIG, Korea pet, Interpet	Europe, Korea, Taiwan
C13-Cpet /Pet supplies	Pet supplies	Owner	2008	2008	30%	6-8, BIG, Korea pet, Interzoo (Germany)	Taiwan, Korea, Japan
C14-Wdoorlock /Door lock	Household/ hotel	MD	1978	1988	40%	5-6/ Guangzhou Fair, Myanmar Build, CAMbuild (Cambodia), WORLDBEX Philippines	China, ASEAN
C15-Rjewelry/Jewelry and jewelry service	Jewelry service	Marketing Manager	2005	2011	90%	1/ Australia	Australia, USA
C16-Tfurniture /Furniture	Furniture	MD	2000	2002	25%	2/BIG, TIFF, Hong Kong Furniture Fair	UK, Japan, Cambodia, Lebanon

C17-Tplastic /Plastic packaging	Packaging	Marketing Manager	2005	2006	60%	2/ Natural Product Expo West	Canada, USA, Mexico
C18-Sbox /Plastic box	Packaging	Business Development Manager	1977	2014	20%	3-4/Top Thai Brand Myanmar, Indonesia, The Philippines, ,BIG, Ambiente (Germany), Hong Kong Fair	Singapore, Japan, Middle East
C19-Ncoconutoil /Coconut oil	Multi-industries, food, cosmetic, etc	Marketing Manager (Family)	2013	2014	80%	Beauty World Dubai, Cosmoprof Hong Kong	China, Cambodia, UAE
C20-Morganic /Organic products in detergent, cosmetic, soap, etc.	Multi-industries, detergent, organic, etc.	MD	2011	2012	30%	3/BIG, Biofach, Natural Product Expo West, Natural Hong Kong	China, Malaysia
C21-Sglassess /eyeglasses lens	Eyeglasses lens	Head of business planning division	1962	1995	95%	1 / MIDA (Italy)	USA, Europe, Middle East
C22-Ntraffic /Traffic solution software	Software	MD	1998	2015	10%	4-5/ Rail Expo, ITS (Intelligence Transportation Systems)	Myanmar, Singapore

Analysis and Results

Based on the literature reviews, most of researchers tend to category stage of market selection into three stages. According to Koch (2001) used the term prescreening, in-depth screening, and final selection to categorized how the firm make decision toward market expansion. Interviewing results indicated that trade shows is the tool for small firms to make decision on market selection. During trade show event, small firms often going through different stages of market selection.

Table 3 illustrated the influence of different types of network on stage of market selection. Each firm has its own characteristic in market selection process. Not every type of network form trade show contributes to screening process. The first stage of market selection

process is prescreening, which describe in chapter two that firms usually take macro-level indicators to eliminate countries that do not meet criteria.

Table 3 The influence of network to stage of market selection

Network	Stage of Market Selection		
	Prescreening	In-depth Screening	Final selection
Buyer	C08-Rspa C16-Tfurniture C20-Morganic C21-Seyeglasses		C09-Bspa C02-Sfruit C01-Jsnack C12-Npet C13-Cpet C14-Wdoorlock C05-Orice C22-Ntraffic C18-Sbox C16-Tfurniture
Competitor		C22-Ntraffic	C05-Orice
Government	C05-Orice C21-Seyeglasses		C12-Npet

Different type of network from international trade show are assimilated into different stage of market selection. Three types of networks: buyer, competitor, and professional and government are found from the interviews for their contribution on stage of market selection.

a. Buyer network and prescreening stage

Different type of network influence stage of market selection differently. Four small firms including C08-Rspa, C16-Tfurniture, C20-Morganic, and C21-Seyeglasses are found that networking with buyers support firm's market prescreening process. For example, C20-Morganic presented that:

> *"Especially natural or organic products, these products are quite expensive, and, when the price is expensive, our targets are quite niche. We could be able to learn how much money our targets have to spend, we need to interact be able to discuss pricing with them. We also need to have a certificate. Presumably, we could roughly screen that, for European market, we're not ready. Sometimes, we even send them*

with conditions, they would say "On, no. We can't take this. The pricing is not right or something". Sometimes, they would mention about the ingredients that require certificates or something like this, we need to add this and that, you know, from what I have talked with them."

Based on the excerpt, C20-Morganic received two sources of input for decision making: macro-level about target market, and direct buyer network from attending international trade show. Initially, the respondent prescreened markets by using perception of high national income countries as a main criteria to select market, therefore, European was in consideration. However, direct buyer network induce firm to realize the complexity of countries' rule and regulations related to product importing. The firm finally abolished high income countries and emphasis on nearby markets. In this case, network relationships did not help business unit to achieve sale target. But SMEs use such network to improve market penetration strategy, in this case, switching focusing target markets. The interaction between buyer and seller generates knowledge. The market knowledge attained from buyer network pertains to the requirement of product that does not fit with product line that firm offer (Koch, 2001). The European customers demand several product certificates that company found difficulty in delivering.

b. Government and professional network and prescreening stage

Government units plays an important role in assisting SMEs in developing countries to expand their connection with international partners. It is found that government was not only randomly recommended SMEs but offer help in screening process in term of classification importers divided into countries. C05-Orice explained that:

"Thai trade center (Thai government export assistant agency) helps us a lot. They print out importer list classified by countries."

The company added:

"They sent list of importers to us. We sent out email to those whom we want to invite them to our booth. We told them our booth number... Do you want to go to this trade show? It's like...when we got the name list, we will tell them that we will exhibit in the show. We also look at countries and select whom we think we want to meet. Then we will make appointment with them. (C05-Orice)

As for country selection, C05-Orice mentioned that:

> *"SIAL and ANUGA trade show, they are in European countries. They will come. It's not like ANUGA is in Germany and only German will come. No. There will be visitors from the Netherlands, British, Italian, Swedish. They will come. We interested in what countries, we will send invitation."*

This is an indication that networking with government facilitate prescreening process. C05-Orice attend an international trade show in France every year. The company managed to make connection with Thai Trade Center, Paris (a representative of Thailand ministry of commerce office in France) during trade show event. The mentioned government representative provided potential clients list classified by country as well as related information upon request for the benefit of company's next visit. The company subsequently prescreen the list and countries before sent out the invitation. The above illustration also hinted the potential countries that the company expected to meet with during trade show. This indicated that a relationship with government unit during trade show facilitated prescreening the countries in favorable of the company. Therefore, network help providing data and assessment that firm can use to prescreen markets.

c. Competitor network and in-depth screening stage

Competitor analysis is one of the elements that firm consider during in-depth screening stage. The earlier prescreening stage lead to short list of country market that small need to investigate more in detail. Various factor related to industry-specific data will be evaluated in this stage (Koch, 2001). From the interview, it is found that the evidence of competition analysis was occurred caused by networking with competitors. Such network obtained from interview is C22-Ntraffic. As the company stated that:

> *"...which makes me realize that in some countries or some of our target groups...umm... we aren't...umm the first in some countries...I'll just make this up ok? So umm our customers umm our competitors are A and B. B is our competitor...umm...let say, in the Philippines, B is more famous than us, therefore, since we know that B has already developed in this particular thing, their chance to sell in the Philippines is easier, because when the customer...umm... this country has already used the software by our competitor. When the competitor then sell their advancement, most of the time, the customer will buy from those who they are familiar with first."*

Prior this statement, C22-Ntraffic mentioned that the industry is limited. But conversation between people from different exhibiting booth emerged from time to time, even if, as the respondent cited, not explicitly. Competitors provide substantial information in term of industry competitiveness. For this case, the company cited that customers in target market already familiar with competitor's product. Although, C22-Ntraffic did not explained the result from obtaining such information. But it is clearly facilitated competition analysis in target market.

Business relationship determine level of SMEs' knowledge about customers, distributors, and competitors. Motivation and facilitation are two main impacts that network created (Musteen and Butts, 2014). Different type of network impacts on knowledge acquisition differently. One of them is that it provides opportunity to identify competitors and strategies that they occupied to compete in foreign market. For small firms, this evidence showed that trade show is not only the place to find customers but activities extend beyond that conventional level. It acts as an effective network infrastructure for creating relationships for understanding different perspective of interested industry in foreign market.

d. Buyer network and final selection stage

Based on the interview, networking with buyers can provide most richness of information on final selection stage. C01-Jsnack, C02-Sfruit, C09-Bspa, C12-Npet, C13-Cpet, C14-Wdoorlock, C05-Orice, C22-Ntraffic, C18-Sbox, and C16-Tfurniture expressed the relevant information on how network contribute to final stage of market selection. Base on the notion that this stage pertains to firm-specific information analysis. A close connection with potential customer can expected to receive insightful information for selection approach. C02-Sfruit provide an example that:

> *"When we go (to trade show), there will be customer who have same expectation…from 10…there will be like 3, who has same interest. Then we will talk in depth that…Ok! you help find the right market. You want our product to place on shelf like this or this."*

The above illustration explained that the discussion involved examining counterpart's business objective. The detail of sale direction and strategies was described. It is difficult to accomplished without close connection with partners. C02-Sfruit expressed precisely that there was a need to discuss extensive in details about marketing strategy. The

detail illustration on relationship network and business counterpart's business practice. The company were searching for foreign business partner with the same line of products and compatible strategic marketing direction. C01-Jsnack, after using macro-level to prescreen market, investigated further in-depth information of potential partner by, for example, searching website and discuss with them closely. In this case, general networking cannot influence on foreign partner's selection but trust or tighten level of business relationship.

From the interview, it is obviously indicated that one of the key constraints in selection most suitable customers is lack of comprehensive information. Trustworthy communication can alleviate such obstacle. Relationship trust plays a vital role for final market selection stage. The information required in this stage involve sale forecasting and firm's resource allocation. Therefore, comprehensive detail is necessary for evaluation. Trade show act as the meeting point for buyer-seller to create social interaction. The development of relationship created trust.

e. Competitor network and final selection stage

As presented earlier that participating in international trade show will bring competitor network since exhibitor will have opportunity to interact with their own competitors, or alliances. confronting with competitors and exchange relevant information and previous experiences (Belussi 2008; Cobanoglu, and Turaeva, 2014). Evaluation is this stage involve e.g. company objectives, profit analysis, etc. with particular foreign counterparts (Koch, 2001; Johanssen, 1997). Therefore, any insights information about potential customer would considered essential for firm's decision making. As C05-Orice expressed that:

> *"If you ask whether they are our competitors, yes, because they didn't buy from us and we don't buy from them, so, we are competitors. But, relationship wise, we are all Thai. When we go to fairs, it wouldn't be like, we don't look at each other, we don't talk. No. Nothing like that."*

C05-Orice added that:

> *"Sometimes, the booth next door would say something like Oh, this one. I heard they have a financial problem."*

Respondent had opportunity to discuss with other Thai exhibitors. Presenting in trade show together allow them to mingle and exchange information. As stated above, C05-Orice receive information from same category exporter who exhibited nearby about financial issue of potential customer. C05-Orice decided to abandon that buyer due to concerning financial status. The network presented was acquired through direct contact with competitor which normally occurred only during tradeshow official hour or operation (Belussi et al., 2008). The leakage of information about financial status of unknown importer was an essential information to every exporter. Network have brought people from various clusters and spread to identifying international market scenarios (Zhou et al., 2007). The information was finally comprehended once the company travel back to home country. International market selection in final stage is an extensive process that small firm choose their business counterpart carefully. In this case, the export manager of C05-Orice was required to undertake discussion within the company in order to final conclusion.

f. Government network and final selection stage

Data from interview shows that government network provide more than just information for exhibitors but act as medium to shorten long process of market selection in the final phase.

> *"For example, when we go to fairs, for example, there are organization such as the Department of Export promotion or something like this. They will provide us with information and invite businessmen to visit our products at the fair. They will host rather a Thai pavilion or a meeting room to invite our prospect customers for us. They might have checked our basic information prior to their visit, and when they see us in person, they would be like..ok.. they can decide what they want to buy. There are clients from two countries who usually come and make an order right away."*

C12-Npet added further that:

> *"However, there is one thing that there are two customers who talk to us. The first one comes and ask for an exclusive, while the other will buy as samples. For nan, I would take a look at the client and find out what they are doing, before deciding which one I would go for."*

Government role in final stage of market selection involve identifying foreign market partners and initiate export motivation. C12-Npet clarified that the firm met Thai government representative in an international trade show. Importers were selected from government unit, however, the decision to undertake business deal emerged during trade show official hour with exporter. Government unit need to understand company profile from both side in order to initiate business deal. In this case, government can be considered as infrastructural network provider. Firm utilize government network to access further buyer network. Social relationship developed with government at trade show become channels for information and opportunity for business activities. Government encourage firm to trigger their relationship with potential partners. The trust between small firm and potential importer emerged accordingly. It can be concluded that government network act as accelerators of final phase of international market selection. The problematic in final selection stage such as searching for compatible of company objective was alleviated by government recommendation. Government act as important accelerator for newly export business unit that pre-existing international network and experience was limited. Small firm intend to enter in highly established internationalized network to accelerate foreign market expansion. Therefore, government network provide shortcut that assist firm selecting market that suitable for them.

Conclusion, limitation, and future research

This study concluded that not every type of network contributes to each stage of selection. This study emphasis only on those that are acquired from international trade show. Buyer network provide fruitfulness details when discussing market selection in final stage. Informants use network to gain trust and specific internal information in order to justify markets and conclude the selection in the last phase. The empirical data confirm that trade show lead to relationship enforcement, create trust among counterparts (Hansen, 1999, cited in Sarmento et al., 2015), and influence choice of international market expanding (Johanson and Vahlne, 2003). The limitation is that the data were collected from only one developing economy, Thailand. For future research, it is interesting to separate sample into different groups categorized by, for example, business sectors or type of internationalization, and/ or other countries. As for network, the four types of network can be further conducted to see the magnitude in different stage of market selection scenarios.

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