

# **MARKET SEEKING & STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AND NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES: A TURKISH FAMILY BUSINESS EXPERIENCE**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to reveal the situation of small-scale family businesses that are looking for a market in Western and North African countries and want to realize their growth strategies in this region, and to develop solutions for their growth problems. For this purpose, the market development stages of the selected ABC Company<sup>1</sup> were evaluated within the scope of action research. One of the researchers worked in the company within the scope of UPEP<sup>2</sup> (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi -From University to the Market Ambassador Project) in the field to conduct action research, while the other researcher supervised the process academically. Inherent in action research is an approach to find a solution to the problem of the unit that is the subject of the research. The researchers analyzed the market search and development strategies of the company subject to the research and seek solutions for their growth problems. As a result of the research, it is concluded that the example ABC Company, which wants to be effective in these markets, will follow the stage model while opening up to international markets, and will be more effective in terms of penetration into the market. The literature that this result is suitable for small-scale family businesses that are in search of similar support has been supported.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Internationalization, Strategic Management, Action Research, Family Business.

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<sup>1</sup> In this research, private data of the firm such as company name, brand name, and names of the managers are anonymized due to ethical considerations.

<sup>2</sup> UPEP (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi -From University to the Market Ambassador Project) is an innovating program set up by the international trade department of Sakarya University to help foreign students getting work experiences, and also help the company to develop their international trade toward targeting markets.

## **Batı ve Kuzey Afrika Ülkelerinde Pazar Arayışları ve Strateji Geliştirme: Bir Türk Aile İşletmesi Tecrübesi**

### **Öz**

Bu çalışmanın amacı, örnek bir işletmeyi temel alarak, Batı ve Kuzey Afrika ülkelerinde pazar arayışı içinde olan ve büyümeye stratejilerini bu bölgede gerçekleştirmek isteyen küçük ölçekli aile işletmelerinin durumunu ortaya koymak ve büyümeye sorunlarına çözüm önerisi geliştirmektir. Bu amaçla, seçilen örnek ABC İşletmesi<sup>3</sup> nin pazar geliştirme aşamaları eylem araştırması kapsamında değerlendirilmiştir. Eylem araştırması yapabilmek için araştırmacılarından biri sahada UPEP<sup>4</sup> (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi) kapsamında firmada çalışırken, diğer araştırmacı sürece akademik olarak nezaret etmiştir. Eylem araştırmalarının doğasında, araştırmaya konu olan birimin sorununa çözüm bulmaya yönelik bir yaklaşım yer almaktadır. Araştırmacılar, araştırmaya konu edilen fırmanın pazar arama ve geliştirme stratejilerini analiz ederek, büyümeye sorunlarına çözüm aramıştır. Araştırma sonucunda, bu pazarlarda etkin olmak isteyen örnek ABC işletmesinin uluslararası pazarlara açılırken aşamalı modeli takip etmesinin, pazara nüfuz bakımından daha etkili olacağı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu sonucun, benzer arayış içinde olan küçük ölçekli aile işletmeleri için de uygun olduğuna ilişkin literatür desteklenmiştir.

**Keywords:** Uluslararasılaşma, Stratejik Yönetim, Eylem Araştırması, Aile İşletmesi.

### **1. Introduction**

Globalization and the development of technology have positively contributed to a large number of aspects in society (Archibugi & Pietrobelli, 2003). Companies that provide services to their

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<sup>3</sup> Bu araştırmada araştırmaya konu edilen işletmenin, şirket adı, marka adı ve yöneticilerin isimleri gibi özel verileri etik nedenlerle anonimleştirilmiştir.

<sup>4</sup> UPEP (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi) Sakarya Üniversitesi'nin uluslararası ticaret bölümü tarafından yabancı öğrencilerin iş tecrübesi kazanmalarına yardımcı olmak ve aynı zamanda şirketin hedef pazarlara yönelik uluslararası ticaretlerini geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmak için oluşturduğu yenilikçi bir programdır

customers are now not limited to their physical locations, being able to successfully conduct their operations on the internet. Various organizations in modern society, consequently, are also taking advantage of both globalization and technological development aspects (Hamdi, 2013; Ionescu & Dumitru, 2015). The companies that previously considered that they can work in one location only due to the additional difficulties that arise from managing several subsidiaries are now considering such decisions due to the increased simplicity of contacting regional managers they employ in other regions. Besides, if the aspect of whether the provided services are suitable for the international market was a concerning one, the globalization has positively influenced the awareness of the general population of a wide range of services (Auranen, 2013), providing almost every organization with a possibility of finding their target population in the new markets. Finally, as people in the modern society can travel and move from one country to another much easier than they could a century or several ago, the companies in the modern society are less concerned about lack of potential customers when they open subsidiaries in new locations.

On the other hand, even though a large number of aspects have contributed to the internationalization of the companies in the modern society, still such a decision cannot be made easily. The companies that are planning to start targeting foreign markets need to conduct thorough research and establish a sufficient marketing strategy for potential internationalization. Consequently, for the particular study, the Turkey-based family company, ABC, has been chosen. The purpose of the study is, therefore, to perform an analysis of the mentioned Turkish family business and assess the internationalization strategy it has chosen to target West and North African regions. The particular company has been chosen since one of the researchers has personally been working in the organization. He was admitted in the company through UPEP program (Üniversiteden

Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi -an innovating program set up by the international trade department of Sakarya University to help foreign students getting work experiences, and also help a company to develop their international trade toward targeting markets). With the duties, he has been assigned to being related to the internationalization of ABC in the mentioned regions. Therefore, as the researchers witnessed some of the problems associated with the internationalization strategy of the company in West and North African regions, the decision of conducting more thorough research on the issue of what aspects can be changed to make the internationalization strategy of the company more effective in the particular regions has been made.

The purpose of this study is to perform an analysis of a Turkish family business, represented by ABC, and identify whether the internationalization strategy chosen by the company to start targeting North and West African regions has been effective. It can be stated that despite the growing interest of researchers in the family business in recent years (Pukall & Calabro, 2014; Kontinen & Ojala, 2010; Zaniewska, 2013), there are still some gray areas in some aspects of its internationalization process. Consequently, both external and internal factors that influence the operational processes of the chosen organization will be analyzed, based on which the subsequent internationalization strategy will be created.

Based on the research objective of the study, several research questions have been identified. Since there is a necessity of analyzing ABC to develop a suitable internationalization strategy first, the experience of the company on targeting other regions need to be assessed, as some of the flaws of the company in its internationalization strategy can be identified based on its prior experience in such a matter. The internal and external factors that may have an influence on the internationalization process of the company have to be also assessed, reflecting the “performing an analysis of a Turkish family business, represented by ABC” part of the

research objective. In order to perform the “identifying whether the internationalization strategy chosen by the company to start targeting North and West African regions has been effective” part of the research objective, there is a need of assessing the effectiveness of internationalization strategies that were implemented by the other family and non-family companies in both the international market and West and North African regions specifically.

The issue of internationalization of a family company in West and North African regions is worth investigating. Researching the chosen issue of this study is important for both the chosen company and the researcher, as the former will be provided with an approximate assessment on how its internationalization strategy can be modified to be more effective, whereas the latter will have valuable experience in identifying the suitable internationalization strategies for the companies that are willing to target West and North African regions. More, this topic may open the target region market for thousands of Turkish companies willing to go to Africa and facing the same issue of how to make it and with which strategies. Also, although the chosen company, ABC, produces and provides salt-related goods to its customers, which can be considered as a product that is required in all the regions, there is a strong need of determining a whether the internationalization strategy used by the company to enter North and West African regions are effective.

### **1.1. Specifics of Internationalization of a Family Business**

The internationalization of family businesses, that traditionally operated in domestic markets, is developing into a significant year research area (Zaniewska, 2013). Since family firms differ from non-family firm's internationalization process of family companies should be investigated as separate entities. The presence of the family business in a decision-making process affects the number of networks, the speed, and the choice of some pathway of

internationalization (Rastorgueva, 2014). According to the research study conducted by Pukall and Calabro (2014), the internationalization process of family companies is often negatively affected by the aspect that "owning families try to retain as much control over the company as possible while preserving the wealth for future generations". Consequently, due to the fact the internationalization process presumes that a company starts operating in other geographic regions, family firms tend to ensure that such subsidiaries are sufficiently controlled by family members as well. The companies with a CEO being a member of the owning family also tend to be less risk-averse, compared to the companies who have employed non-family members as CEOs (Menschling et al., 2016). In general, it should also be mentioned that family companies tend to be less risk-averse compared to non-family organizations when making internationalization decisions. Mitter et al. (2014) have also conducted their study on the subject of the influence family ownership and governance have on the internationalization process of family organizations. The research results have revealed that in case the influence of the owning family on ownership, management, and governance boards is relatively high, such companies tend not to internationalize. On the contrary, when such influence is lower, the family organizations tend to be more internationally diversified, which supports Pukall's and Calabro's (2014) findings.

## **1.2. Specifics of Conducting Business in Africa**

Conducting business in African countries should be subject to thorough research due to the lack of investigation conducted on a particular matter. However, despite such an aspect, it can be stated that globalization has significantly affected the economic development of the region, making it a potentially attractive place for internationalization. Ayenagbo et al. (2012) have mentioned that the phenomenon of globalization has positively affected a large amount of business-related aspects in Africa, such as growth, average income, and employment. Jorem, Hansen, and Jeppesen (2014) have also

commented on the topic of increasing attractiveness of conducting business in Africa, stating that there are both external and internal factors that drive enterprise development in the mentioned region. Due to the relative improvement of political and institutional climates in Africa, the business environment in the region is more attractive for business opportunities. It should also be mentioned that some of the regions of the continent are rich with natural resources, which attracts a sufficient amount of investment to the continent. As for the internal factors, according to the researchers, the education standards of local business schools are constantly increasing, showing that the growing generations in the continent are more likely to be skilled for the performance of business-related duties on a sufficient level. The following analysis of the specifics of business conduction in the African region will be based on both external and internal contingencies that have occurred in the recent past and have influenced business performance in the particular region based on the structure used by Jorem, Hansen, and Jeppesen (2014) in their research paper. The external contingencies that have occurred in the recent past and have influenced business performance in the particular region based on the structure used by Jorem, Hansen, and Jeppesen (2014) in their research paper are Institutional factors, Market factors, Resource factors, and Competitive Factors. The internal contingencies that have occurred in the recent past and have influenced business performance in the particular region based on the structure used by Jorem, Hansen, and Jeppesen (2014) in their research paper are Entrepreneurship, Firm Size/Structure, Skills and Technology.

### **1.3. Internationalization Process of Companies That Started Targeting West And North African Regions**

It cannot be stated that sufficient and thorough research has been conducted on the topic of internationalization of companies in the

West and North African regions, however, some companies have decided to do so. Haier Company started its internationalization strategy in Africa and the Middle East by starting to export its products to such Middle Eastern countries as the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Lebanon (Bouyoucef & Chung, 2015), corresponding to the first stage of Uppsala Internationalization Model (Johanson & Wiedersheil-Paul, 1975). The company, however, did not follow the subsequent stages of the Uppsala Internationalization model, performing the process of internationalization differently. By the early 2000s, the company has also established joint ventures in two North African countries of Algeria and Tunisia and one West African of Nigeria to produce Haier's products. The establishment of joint ventures has resulted in an establishment of the company subsidiaries as time passed by based on the network created by Haier Company in Algeria, which provided it with the relationships with regional wholesalers and distributors. Based on the case of the internationalization process of Haier Company, it can be stated that the company managed to succeed from it because it rapidly entered African and Middle Eastern countries before its competitors, allowing the organization to receive an advantage of the first-mover (Bouyoucef & Chung, 2015.). The entry model of the company can also be described by an attempt to minimize shareholding in its Middle Eastern and African subsidiaries, which has provided Haier Company with such opportunities as the ability to quickly enter the target market, reduced costs of the internationalization process, and reduced risks of such a decision (Bouyoucef & Chung, 2015). It should also be mentioned that several product lines of the company have been adapted to match the market conditions of African and Middle Eastern consumers under the request of the local distributors. Such an aspect clearly shows that the assistance of local wholesalers and distributors is crucial in the internationalization process, as they may assist the companies in such aspects as different expectations from the products and buying behavior of the local customers. Both

market and political acquaintance processes have also been effectively performed by Haier Company, which can be proven by such aspects as that the company was able to identify the existing market opportunities and establish affiliations with political actors in the chosen regions (Bouyoucef & Chung, 2015). Another Chinese company of Huawei also used the export method as an entry mode to first enter the North African market (Wu & Zhao, 2007). Such an aspect can be considered important, as the company used different methods for penetration strategies when entering foreign markets, such as a joint-venture method to enter the Russian market and contractual method and joint venture to enter Europe and North American markets. Consequently, as another Chinese company of Haier Company has also used the export method when entering the African market, it can be assumed that some factors, such as "industry factors/products and the host market environmental factors" (Wu & Zhao, 2007, p. 193). Cummins, Inc., an American manufacturing company, on the other hand, used the market-based approach when entering African markets in the Western country of Ghana (Addae & Addae, 2013). Because the particular approach is suitable in the situations when the targeted country does not have either a suitable partner for alliances or existing business operations, Cummins, Inc., has established its power generator division in the country. Consequently, instead of forming alliances with the local companies or purchasing existing operations in the market, Cummins, Inc., has decided using its experience of conducting business in other countries to occupy a share of the West African market (Addae & Addae, 2013). Joint ventures and partnerships can also be considered as frequently used methods for entry modes of the companies that are pursuing internationalization in other countries. For example, several companies have combined their efforts to establish the Jubilee Joint Venture to exploit oil natural resources at the Ghanaian cost (Addae & Addae, 2013). The particular joint venture consisted of Tullow Oil, a company that produces natural

resources in the United Kingdom, and many Ghana-based subsidiaries of global multinational enterprises so that both risks and costs of the internationalization plan for Tullow Oil have been reduced.

The literature review analysis of the particular study focused on several aspects, including specifics of internationalization of a family company, specifics of conducting business on the African continent, and internationalization strategies of companies entering North and West African markets. However, since no prior research has analyzed the internationalization strategy of a family company in the West and North African regions, the decision of conducting a study on the particular issue can be justified. For such a purpose, ABC, a family company operated in Turkey, has been chosen to identify what internationalization strategy will best suit the particular company for entering West and North African markets. Since the mentioned organization did not succeed in its internationalization process in the past, there is a strong need to determine which internationalization strategy will suit both the company and the needs of the market.

## **2. Methodology**

The main research methodology chosen for this study is the collaborative action research methodology. The qualitative methodology of action research presumes that it "seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it" (Baum et al., 2006, p. 854). Using the particular methodology, both researcher and participants, or the company in the particular case, are collaborating to improve some of the practices in the organization. The action research is often associated with several benefits, including that it "undertakes research to bring about positive change and improvement in the participants' social situation and generates theoretical as well as practical knowledge about the situation" (Burns, 2015, p.187). Moreover, the action research methodology presents the researchers with an opportunity to deal with practical

matters rather than theoretical ones, allowing the practitioners to work with the problems they are aware of or are personally interested in, based on which they can exercise their influence and contribute to positive change (Ferrance, 2000). Consequently, it can be stated that the mentioned methodology is especially relevant for the particular study, as the researcher has been involved with various internationalization-related issues while working as an intern at ABC. It should also be mentioned that as “action research represents a general methodology of involved, co-operative research rather than a single unified approach to research with an agreed set of specific method steps” (Parker, 2003, p. 25), several data collection methods will be used for the particular study. The purpose of the methodology section is to ensure that the chosen methods will be sufficiently able to answer the research questions established at the beginning of the study conduction.

## **2.1. Data Collection**

The methods of data collection for the study is based on action research methodology as it has been said previously and both primary and secondary literature will be used to collect the required data. The combination of both observations, experiences, and interviews will be used for the primary data collection. Working as an intern in the UPEP (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi) project of the “International Trade” program at Sakarya University, one of the researchers was able to personally observe various internal processes of ABC. In order to acquire more detailed information on the issue, an interview with the company supervisor has been scheduled. The interviewee was emailed and asked to participate in the study conduction. The interview has been conducted in the company office. The interview was semi-structured, which allowed me to ask additional follow-up questions when some information needed clarification. The interview was also audio-recorded, as

video-recording would probably have disturbed the research participant from being fully concentrated on the interview. The interviewee was explained that he was able not to answer any of the questions he may consider inappropriate or violating his confidentiality agreement. Besides, to ensure that all ethical considerations of primary data collection were observed, the name of the interviewee is not mentioned in the particular study. The combination of the observation and interview methods has been chosen to ensure that the required information about the company is received within a relatively short period. Being a former intern of the company, one of the researchers personally observed some of the operational processes in the company and shared his memos with the other researcher as his supervisor. However, as the usage of the particular method only cannot be considered as sufficient for the study conduction, the interview method has been chosen to increase the amount of available information on the issue. As the purpose of the particular study is to make a thorough analysis of a Turkish family business, represented by ABC, and identifying the suitable internationalization strategy for the company to start targeting North and West African countries, it can be stated that the mentioned data collection method ensures that the researcher receives reliable information to conduct the study, as the company supervisor possesses with a sufficient amount of knowledge to comment on the issue.

The secondary data required for the analysis were acquired from publicly available sources on the Internet. Due to the fact that all secondary sources of information were properly referenced in the References section of the particular study, it can be stated that all ethical issues of secondary data collection were observed.

### **2.1.1. Action Research Framework**

As developed previously, action research can be defined as "an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in

the diagnosis of the problem and the development of a solution based on the diagnosis" Bryman and Bell (2011); in other words, one of the main characteristic traits of action research relates to collaboration between researcher and member of the organization to solve organizational problems. Action study assumes a social world to be constantly changing, both, researcher and research being one part of that change (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Action research is applied to improve specific practices and it is based on action, evaluation, and critical analysis of practices based on collected data to introduce improvements in relevant practices (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This type of research is facilitated by the participation and collaboration of several individuals with a common purpose and also focuses on specific situations and their context. Action research presents the advantage of a high level of practical relevance of the business research; it can be used with quantitative, as well as, qualitative data; and also give the possibility to gain in-depth knowledge about the problem (Tripp, 2005). The limits of it can be the difficulties in distinguishing between action and research and ensure the application of both; delays in completion of action research due to a wide range of reasons are not rare occurrences and also the lack of repeatability and rigor (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Action study is a participatory study consisting of a spiral of following self-reflective cycles that are: planning to initiate change; implementing the change (acting) and observing the process of implementation and consequences; reflecting on processes of change and re-planning; acting and observing; reflecting (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000). For the particular study, it has been assumed that both planning and acting stages were performed when the researcher was working at ABC before the immediate study conduction, whereas the last stages of observing and reflection have been performed for the particular study. The company was planning

its internationalization strategy into West and North African regions, implementing the strategy when it started operating there. As the researcher was directly involved in the internationalization-related issue of ABC in the West and North African regions, he was able to personally observe the results of the internationalization strategy implemented by the organization. The final stage of reflection has been performed directly during the study conduction, with the researcher assessing the results of the internationalization process. For the purpose of the particular study, only one cycle of action research spiral will be used.

## **2.2. Data Analysis**

The method of thematic content analysis has been chosen for the data analysis process. Since the only qualitative type of data was received with the usage of the chosen methods, the particular data analysis technique is especially useful, as it allows the researcher to "explore large amounts of textual information unobtrusively to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication" (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013). The particular method can be associated with the usage of coding to represent content with convenience for the analysis and the researcher symbols (Neuendorf, 2019). It should also be mentioned that the thematic content analysis is limited to textural data (Anderson, 2007), which, however, is not a complication in the particular case, as all the required data is presented either in form of interview transcripts or written description of the researcher's experience at ABC. Consequently, the analysis of the collected information will be divided based on the determined patterns and concepts, presenting a logically structured data interpretation.

## **2.3. Analysis and Findings**

As the purpose of the particular study is to perform an analysis of a

Turkish family business, represented by ABC, and identify the suitable internationalization strategy for the company to start targeting North and West African countries, the findings and analysis section is aimed at meeting such an objective. Answering the following research questions is also an important part of the study conduction:

- What are the development strategies of companies in the international market?
- What are the specifics related to the internationalization process and strategy development of a family company in the West and North African regions?
- How are the internationalization and market selection been conducted by ABC in North and West African countries?
- What internal and external factors may influence the internationalization process of ABC in the targeting market?

Consequently, the Analysis and Findings subsection will be divided into the corresponding parts, each aiming to provide an answer to a research question specified earlier and contribute to identifying which internationalization strategy should be used by ABC. As the development strategies of companies in the international market and the specifics related to the internationalization process and strategy development of a family company in West and North African regions do not require any primary data and have been described and analyzed in the previous section, the corresponding analysis of the aspect is eliminated from the Findings and Analysis section.

### **2.3.1. Presentation of ABC Company**

The following information for the presentation of the chosen company ABC, have been collected through the interview conducted

to the researcher with the manager of the company.

ABC is a private family company specializing in the production, distribution, and export of different categories of salt used in various fields. It is the result of the adventure and passion of a man (I.Y.) who in 1974 began the production and distribution of food salt in the region of Serdivan (Sakarya City) and its surroundings. Over the years, the company has expanded to other regions and has diversified these activities to other types of salt such as the salt used in the agri-food sector (different table salts, refined table salt and granular for the production of milk, cheese, olive), water purification and softening (refined tablets salts and others), dishwashers, snow removal, pharmaceuticals, the chemical and textile industry, and animal nutrition. To ensure the sustainability of the company, its values, and its transmission to future generations, the founder gradually integrated his sons into the management of the company in the 1990s.

In 1997, the company changed its national dimension by officially registering as a salt producer on the name ABC with the brand name "XYZ Salt". This period marked the beginning of succession from fathers to sons at the head of the company and the introduction of some expansion projects of the company. In the same year, the company permanently changed management direction and passed on to E.Y. (the second Son of the Founder) who thus became the Managing Director of the company in co-management with its two brothers A.Y. (the eldest of the family) responsible for logistics, distribution and accounting, and Y.Y. (the third sibling) in charge of national sales and accounting. Moreover, the fact that the company is operated by the sons of the founder of the organization means that the organization is controlled by the second generation of the family.

This change in governance within the company further affirms its nature and family character. Indeed, as said in the literature review, family businesses are different from other types of organizations in

that the presence in their capital, in their direction or their management of one or more family members, has an impact on their operational management and strategic processes (Chrisman, Chua, & Litz, 2003) their conception of time, culture and structure (Davis & Harveston, 1998), And governance (Mustakallio, Autio, & Zahra, 2002). The family business is a business in which members of one or more families have a significant ownership interest and significant commitments toward the business' overall well-being and a firm are said to be family-owned if a person is a controlling shareholder; that is, a person (rather than a state, corporation, management trust, or mutual fund) can garner enough shares to assure at least 20% of the voting rights and the highest percentage of voting rights in comparison to other shareholders (Chakrabarty, 2009). However, as the former owner of ABC is still alive and is closely related to the current managing personnel of the company, it can be stated that his influence is still significant when any decisions are made (Casillas, Moreno, & Acedo, 2010).

### **2.3.2. Past Internationalization Experiences of ABC And Its Effect On The New Process Toward West And North African Countries**

This particular subsection of the Analysis and Findings is based on personal observations of the coauthor during his internship at the chosen company and the information acquired from the internship supervisor in the company and the company manager. This data shared with the other coauthor to analyze. As recommended in an action research study, the past and present internationalization process of the company will be first presented as the subject statement base on observations, then in the second part, an analysis will be conducted following by results.

## **Past experiences**

With a new, very young, dynamic, and very ambitious direction, the ABC company launched an assault on the world with a process of internationalization that started timidly in the early 2000s through an attempt at an international approach towards the neighboring countries of Turkey and the Balkan. This attempt was made without a real commitment to internationalization or a great interest in foreign markets. According to what the manager of ABC said through the interviews with the researcher, the internationalization process started only in 2011 unexpectedly with the export of salt to some European countries.

Indeed, the winter season 2010-2011 was one of the coldest seasons in Europe. Huet (2011) in his article published in the liberation newspaper, affirmed that "The winter 2010/2011 on metropolitan France was colder than the average", "December 2010 is the coldest month of December of these last forty years, ahead of December 1970 (-2.6 ° C) and December 1975 (-2.4 ° C). Three cold episodes accompanied by frequent and sometimes abundant snowfall followed one another." The snowfall was frequent, and the snow often held on the ground and such snowy conditions in December had not been observed for at least 30 years in many regions, particularly in Ile-de-France " (Huet, 2011). This situation had led to very strong demand for snow removal salt from all over Europe (a demand whose European production was unable to satisfy) and it required a massive import of the product from abroad. Europe's largest supplier of snow removal salt at that time was Egypt. Unfortunately for Europe, Egypt had experienced a political revolution in 2011 that had put all the economic activities of the country to a standstill. Europe had to find another supply market to deal with the crisis. It was in these circumstances that Turkey had emerged as an ideal substitute market for Egypt given the geographical proximity to Europe and large product availability. Even though prices are higher than in Egypt, the Europeans were ready to put the price it takes to get the

product. Thus, there has been a strong demand for snow removal salt from Europe for Turkey. ABC, being a major player in the field in Turkey, the company has been approached by Turkish intermediaries living in Europe for the delivery of salt on the continent. Thus, without almost any experience of the international market and without preparation for such adventures, the company ABC began its process of internationalization by indirect export to Europe through various intermediaries. For this first internationalization approach, the company entered the market through export.

The first foreign market entry mode, which is the low-commitment one, is exporting. Indeed, Exporting can be conducted in two ways that are: direct exportation and indirect exportation. Direct exporting applies when a home-based company either contracts with intermediaries such as distributors and agents located in a foreign country to accomplish export functions or conducts the exporting activity itself (Sharma and Erramilli, 2004). Indirect exporting means contracting with intermediaries such as an Export Management Company or a Trading Company located in the firm's home country to perform export functions. These intermediaries help the company to find customers in a foreign country, ship products and get paid. Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) define exporting as the best method of reaching the foreign market for companies that do not have yet any international experience because it will cut down the risk of international operations.

From this first experience on the international market, the company decides itself start an internationalization process by exporting its products directly to Europe. In addition to snow removal salt, it has tried to introduce other types of higher value-added salts (dietary salt, industrial salt, and salt pellets for water treatment) into the market and to target other types of customers. But, despite the

commitment of its leaders, the company could not conduct a single operation on the market for two years. According to Mr. E.Y. CEO of ABC, this first failure can be explained by a lack of direct experience in the international market, lack of qualified personnel for an internationalization process, low allocation of human and financial resources for the process and the high price of the product (because at that time, the exchange rate of Turkish Lira (TL) to the euro and the dollar was very high compared to the exchange rates of the currencies of competing countries like China and Egypt added to a very weak labor cost in these countries, which made the competition very complicated for Turkish companies on the European market). After these two years of unsuccessful attempts to enter the European market, the company decided in early 2013 to use another approach to be more competitive. Thus, under the proposal of a Turkish intermediary living in Belgium who had made a fortune in salt, ABC agrees to enter into a joint venture and to create a salt production unit in Egypt to export it to Europe and other countries. The company is not very competitive on the European market partly because of the high price of the product, the idea according to Mr. E.Y. was to relocate the production towards a country making them more competitive. Indeed, in the field of salt, Egypt is a country with all the advantages identified by Dunning (1998) to explain the choice of the mode of entry to a foreign market and the reasons. As defined in the literature review, these advantages are:

- The specific advantage A firm's ownership advantages are reflected by its size, international experience, and the ability to develop differentiated products (Rastorgueva, 2014). The size of the company shows its capability to cover costs of marketing, for achieving economies of scale, and therefore, larger organizations can favor high commitment entry modes than low commitment ones (Rastorgueva, 2014). ABC is one of the pioneers of the salt field in Turkey, it has the capacity and experience to develop a good variety of the product on the market, to allocate the resources it takes for a

good business strategy in Egypt and a good commitment to the market.

- The advantage of localization Company's location advantages includes market potential and investment risk, which characterize market attractiveness, and generally, firms tend to prefer investment modes when they enter high market potential countries because they can provide long-term rents (Rastorgueva, 2014). Egypt has one of the largest reserves of salt ponds in the world and was the European consumer supply center. From this point of view, it was for ABC the ideal choice for an investment to conquer the European market (because it allowed it to relocate to a country with an abundance of raw materials and cheap labor which can enable it to significantly reduce its production costs). Also, there is a great cultural and social similarity between Egypt and Turkey that dates back to the time of the Ottoman Empire. The 2011 revolution and the democratic advent of 2012 brought to power a regime that was politically and ideologically very close to the Turkish authorities. This situation had led to a great rapprochement between the two countries and further encouraged Turkish decision-makers to invest in Egypt.
- The advantage of internalization Internationalization advantages refers to contractual risk. On the one hand, when a firm chooses low control entry mode it can benefit from the scale of economies of the specific marketplace, while not considering bureaucratic drawbacks. But on the other hand, when a firm prefers high control entry mode it will have higher costs in comparison with assets and skills integrated within the company in a case when the owner or management team has difficulties in predicting future events and activities in the situation of uncertainty or a case when there are no good opportunities in the specific market (Rastorgueva, 2014). The great political rapprochement between Egypt and Turkey during this period had created a great Egyptian empathy towards the

Turks. This translates into a very warm welcome from the Turks in the country, putting at their disposal all the information necessary for good market research and a good investment, acceleration, and support of the State in carrying out the administrative procedures and legal for the installation of a production unit, etc. All the signals were green for the choice of an investment in the country, and the risks seemed manageable.

Unfortunately for ABC, after about seven months of presence in the country, an unexpected political event completely changed the situation. Indeed, on July 03, 2013, after days of demonstrations in Cairo, a military coup d'état came to overthrow the regime of the president of the time. This coup d'état followed several weeks of security, political, social, and economic instability in the country. The arrival of the new regime in power had completely degraded the political and economic relations between Turkey and Egypt so much that the Turkish authorities formally advised the country to its nationals. According to Mr. E.Y. Director of ABC, I quote "We have witnessed a total and radical change of behavior of the population and the authorities towards us. The Turks who were once welcomed as kings in Egypt were now perceived by many pro-regime Egyptians as enemies of the nation. We often see acts of vandalism on our premises and even most of our employees do not do their job properly. The administration procedures suddenly became very heavy and slow". It was necessary to give bribes at each level of the administration to obtain papers. Faced with this situation, the company was found after 1 year and a half unable to carry out these activities (even though on a purely commercial and economic aspect the activity was about profitable and promising). Thus, it has decided to withdraw gradually from the Egyptian market while trying to recover part of its investment. In 2015, the company liquidates the entire industry to a group of Egyptian businessmen and leaves the country permanently.

The company seeing the situation deteriorated in Egypt had

somehow try between 2014 and early 2015 to implement such a structure in Iran to develop its international activities. This time the target market for export was the Russian market which had developed a very strong demand for salt on the Iranian market. But the political and economic conditions of Iran with the rest of the world (especially its diplomatic relations with the United States) were not at all favorable for such an adventure according to Mr. E.Y. faced with the growing demand of the Russians, the ABC company also had to try a less risky commercial strategy, which consisted of exporting Iran's salt to Russia using local producers without a physical presence on the territory. Despite a successful conclusion of the process and an agreement with Russian customers and Iranian partners, the operation was not successful due to the US embargo on international remittances from a third country to Iran by the intermediary of a bank.

After the various failures registered since 2011 by the company on the international market in its attempt to implement a process of internationalization by itself, the company has completely changed its strategy by moving towards a step-by-step model. Thus, in early 2015, the company decided to invest in its human resource by staffing itself to lay the foundations for a good international process that is manageable, efficient, and low-risk. She recruits a first agent (a foreigner of Arab origin studying at the Sakarya University) in charge of the export in its structure. Although he did not train in international trade, he was able to allow the company to make its first direct export from Turkey to abroad by selling 4 containers in Algeria. This success can be explained by its perfect knowledge of the Algerian market and its culture because of its Arab origins. But, unfortunately for personal reasons, this agent had to leave the company to go back to his country. After him, another agent from the eastern countries, also studying at Sakarya University (but not having a degree in international trade) was recruited to replace him and to

follow his quest towards the Arab countries and the African continent in general. He remained in society for about one year without being able to perform a single operation. This situation could be explained by a low or almost no knowledge of the target market and aspects of international trade. In early 2016, the company recruited a third element (Turkish nationality without commercial training but with a mastery of English and having a little experience in the field) as head of the international trade department of the company of which he is the only staff. Despite some successes in Eastern Europe, he had difficulty integrating into the African market (due to language barriers and market mastery) which was defined as a priority target market by the ABC management. Thus, the company found itself in need of recruiting a second staff in its international business department having the assets it needs to allow it to integrate the target market again. For this, the company moved closer to the university to have a student from the International Trade Department, having the strengths he was looking for. Coincidentally, at that time the International Trade Department had set up an innovative, pioneering and very ambitious pioneering program called UPEP (Üniversiteden Pazar Elçiliğine Projesi) which had the dual purpose of initially allowing its foreign students to work in the local societies to gain practical experience in their academic studies and secondly to allow companies like ABC to have staff that can enable them to start their international process. This is how the researcher was sent to society.

## **Present experiences**

The personal experiences of the researcher with the company ABC started on 01-Aug-2016 as an intern in the UPEP project of the "International Trade" program at Sakarya University. He was admitted to the company as a trade officer responsible for the Africa and Francophone countries of the world in the Import-Export service, which had only one agent.

As soon as he arrived, he set up an online-only commercial prospecting strategy. Thanks to websites such as [www.kompass.com](http://www.kompass.com), [www.europages.com](http://www.europages.com), and [www.lespagesmaghreb.com](http://www.lespagesmaghreb.com), he has compiled a list of approximately 300 companies in the company activities field with all their contact information by target country. Once the list was established, he then proceeded to send an exploration mail introducing the company and its products to each of the companies. He then made phone calls to these companies to convince them to work with ABC. After a timid start of a two-weeks, he got his first positive response with a company in Tunisia that was astounded by the company's products and wanted to make an initial test order of 2 containers to test the quality of the products and services. After 15 days of negotiations, they had an agreement on prices and delivery conditions. But unfortunately, they had disagreements about the payment method. The customer refused any pre-payment before delivery of the merchandise and also the opening of a Letter of Credit (LC) due to the banking fees associated with it. He wanted a 100% payment by CAD (Cash Against Documents) which showed no guaranteed payment in the eyes of ABC manager. So, the payment method was the element that made his first export within the company fail in his first month.

During the month of September, he recorded 5 positives responses from Morocco and 4 others from Tunisia for business collaboration. Negotiations lasted all month with these companies and on 25 September they were able to reach a total agreement with what was the first client of ABC in Morocco, Casa Merchant for an order of 3 containers of our products. The company prepaid 30% of the total amount of the invoice and the remaining 70% paid for documentary remittances. With the Tunisian companies, they faced the same problem as the first one, which was the method of payment. As a family corporation, the director alone could not afford to take such a risk with a method of payment that did not provide a full guarantee

of recovery. Also, since CAD is a payment method based on mutual trust between buyer and seller without a bank guarantee, the risk is very high to grant it to a customer from the first transaction without really knowing him well.

After this first operation in September in Morocco, the researcher concentrated its efforts during the month of October on the Moroccan market, since for that country they did not have the handicap of the method of payment presented by the Tunisian and Algerian markets. Indeed, the central banks of both countries prohibit any importer to make a prepayment before delivery of the goods and impose the use of bank payment tools like LC. This is a form of import barrier imposed by these countries to better promote local production. Towards the end of October, they recorded two new customers from Morocco including one that offered them a long-term collaboration based on an exclusive contract for one of the company products on the Moroccan market. In early November, they had completed a new export of 3 containers for a new client in Morocco and had advanced in the exclusive negotiations with the second customer. In December, they recorded several positive responses for their products in both Morocco and Tunisia. But still, they did not manage to enter the Tunisian market because of the method of payment at the same time as they had two new purchase intentions in Morocco. Two Tunisian companies were so interested in their products that they agreed to open an LC to the company. But due to the slow pace of banking operations in Tunisia, the complexity of opening an LC, and the costs associated with this operation, both companies were forced to abandon the opening of the LC and stop their orders.

To address this problem, the Director asked the researcher to prepare a trip for business exploration and meeting with clients in Tunisia and Morocco for early 2017. The main objective of the trip was to be able to penetrate the Tunisian market (a market for which they had received a lot of favorable responses for the products, but

which remains inaccessible to them because of the payment method barrier) by meeting with a large number of potential partners, getting to know them well and trying to resolve the payment method problem. They also wanted to strengthen their existing business relationship in Morocco and meet with other partners to convince them to get involved with them. The duration of our adventure in the Maghreb was set for 7 days from February 27, 2017, to March 05, 2017.

After the trip, they spent 2 months of very intense activity with potential partners they met in Tunisia and Morocco. Among these partners, some have confirmed their collaboration commitments with the company and placed orders, and others have not responded positively. The company exports have increased fourfold over a four-month period. But they had to lose 2 out of 5 of our major partners because of the poor quality of the products and packaging they received for their test orders. Indeed, in recent years, ABC has outsourced a large part of its production to Turkey's largest salt producer. This company obviously did not respect the qualities demanded by the customers. It has not also cooperated in satisfying customer complaints in terms of compensation. This situation highlights one of the company's weaknesses in the international market. The problem of product quality has caused the company with a lot of concern. They had to make a lot of commercial discounts every time to keep the other customers. As complaints became more and more numerous, the Director was forced to cancel his cooperation with the subcontractor for another to solve the problem. This load has stabilized the situation and provided some reassurance to customers.

In August 2017, the researcher made another trip to West Africa alone for prospecting and market research to find new potential customers. The trip took him to Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Being from

Benin, he had a mastery of the business approaches of this region and also of its culture. In this region, the most important element in the consumer's purchasing process is the price of the product. Indeed, the stagnation, even the regression of household incomes and the lack of financial resources (D'Almeida & Alleman, 2010) have a considerable impact on the purchasing power of consumers in this region. But, despite these conditions and the various difficulties of the populations, there is a great creative vitality in these regions. ABC price competitiveness in this market has been very low compared to our competitors from Senegal, Ghana, China, and India. Chinese and Indian products are the best-selling products despite their low quality due to their very affordable price. Since ABC outsource some of its production, he does not have the ability to reduce product quality and adapt to this market. So, it was very difficult for them to enter this market as it stands.

After these two inspection trips, the ABC company was able to build a good customer base enabling it to have regular and constant operations on the international market. It has been able to retain customers with whom it continues these commercial relations until now. From time to time, it organizes trips to its customers to collect their concerns and find ways and means to satisfy them. Also, with this experience gained on the African market, the company is opening the doors of other markets in Europe and the Middle East. It has also diversified its international activities by importing salt-based products (namely lamps and salt soaps with therapeutic properties, cosmetic products, etc.) from India and Pakistan to offer its local market. This means according to E.Y. "the company succeeded in establishing the two main axes of the international trade namely Import-Export."

## **2.4. Analysis**

Based on the international process of the ABC company described above, it has been found that the company has had to implement the

two market entering models and strategies of internationalization presented in the theoretical framework of this study such as Stages models of internationalization process (Uppsala Internationalization Model) (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009) and Global Models of internationalization process (Born Global Model and Born Again Global) (Oviatt & McDougall, 1997; Bell, Mcnaughton, & Young, 2001). The company first applied Global models when entering the Egyptian and Iran markets, and with the failure of these models, he secondly applied the Stage models for his new international process.

### **First Process Analysis**

Indeed, as developed in the literature review, the global models' companies are international in scope from birth or almost (Oviatt & McDougall, 1997). These firms have a proactive international strategy, offer unique products and services; they are willing to take risks and frequently such companies are firms that produce highly specialized technology-intensive goods and occupy a narrow specific market niche (Rastorgueva, 2014). According to Oviatt and McDougall (1997), these are "companies with links to other countries (e.g. sales, investments) in a short period conventionally accepted after his training". The global models are grouped into two categories namely the born global and the born again global. The Born Again Global present similarities with Born Global in their internationalization process. Indeed, although late, the internationalization of Born Again Global is at a steady pace (Bell et al., 2001).

ABC, after a long period of absence on the market, suddenly became interested in the foreign market and developed in less than two years a joint venture operation in a foreign country. This approach corresponds exactly to the model born again globally. Indeed, as mentioned previously in the first part of the study. In order to internationalize rapidly the global models' companies, use such

factors as founder-entrepreneur's knowledge (Oviatt and McDougall, 2000) and network of contacts (Crick and Jones, 2000) and their corporate relationships with public and private agents (Simoes and Dominginhos, 2001). The success of this approach depends on good market-specific knowledge, well-structured coordination, human resources, financial resources, active scanning of new opportunities, technological development, and a strong network.

Obviously, by rushing to enter a joint venture in Egypt, the leaders of ABC did not take the time to comply with the aforementioned conditions for success in the target market. Deeply good market research was not conducted to have good market-specific knowledge and avoid or be prepared for the change that can come over later; the activities coordination was not well-structured and also, they were having a big lack of competent human resources. Base on that, it can be said that the company had very badly evaluated the risks of the market, the political or economic facts which could positively or negatively influence such a step of internationalization. All this can explain the failure of ABC on the Egyptian market and we will be able to conclude that the company did not have the assets that were needed at this time for an internationalization process based on a global model.

## **Second Process Analysis**

According to the Uppsala model or stage models opposite to global models, the process of internationalization is incremental and cumulative, in which international engagement follows a sequential order centered on experiential learning (Coviello & McAuley, 1999). The role of the market-specific knowledge achieved through its own experience is especially important. Experience generates business opportunities and constitutes a driving force in the internationalization process (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990). In this logic, as applied by ABC in its present internationalization process, companies begin their process of international orientation through

the export, then using foreign commercial agents, followed by the establishment of commercial subsidiaries and finally production subsidiaries. The particular internationalization model also presumes that the main obstacle presented to the companies pursuing internationalization is the limited knowledge of foreign markets, which, on its turn, limits the possibility of expanding the business to a wide variety of international markets, as only the ones with similar cultures and perceptions are chosen (Nouria & Abdelkader, 2016). Such a limitation has been named as psychic distance with the definition of "the sum of factors preventing the flow of information from and to the market" (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), with differences in business practices, languages, levels of education, and culture being considered as the main examples of it. In order to reduce the risk of failure, research and pre-testing should be done by companies. Before going to a selected foreign market, a company should increase market-specific knowledge, which includes knowing local competitors, customers' attitude to the problem, a company solves, and purchasing power. One of the ways how to get market-specific knowledge is to have personnel with international experience. While possessing good market-specific knowledge then there will be a low probability of market risks and the market commitment will be stronger (Rastorgueva, 2014)

These obstacles were observed in ABC's international process when it had failed early in its process with two of its employees possessing these psychic distances with the African market. Thus, the presence within the company of personnel who can master this distance can be identified as an important element of the installation of a process.

Another important issue within the Uppsala model is a market commitment, which is closely related to market knowledge and is composed of all tangible and intangible assets that a company accumulates in the individual country and the degree of commitment.

The degree of commitment is high if there are more specialized resources in a particular market (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). This market commitment is based on the decision of the company to commit a certain amount of resources and performance of current business activities. In this case, ABC has allowed the needed resources to develop in activities in the target market. The various investments made in its staff and the various trips to its customers testify to this commitment.

## **2.5. Results**

The analysis of the past and present internationalization process of ABC, allowed us to witness how the internationalization and market selection has been conducted by ABC in North and West African countries. Indeed, there is a large number of aspects that influence the success of internationalization strategies of such organizations. A large number of factors, such as the willingness of a company to commit resources to internationalization, good market knowledge of the company, and also finally its knowledge in internationalization-related aspects and international orientation need to be taken into account to ensure that the internationalization strategy is exercised successfully. It has been finding that the failure of the first internationalization process of ABC base on the global model can be explained by the non-respect of these factors. Also, the company had very badly evaluated the risks of the market, the political or economic facts which could positively or negatively influence such a step of internationalization and that the company did not have the assets that were needed at this time for an internationalization process based on a global model

For its second process, the company has acquired enough level of knowledge about internationalization from the first process that allowed it to step a more efficient process. Even though such an attempt was not successful, the company CEO believes that market conditions and ways of conducting business in the company have

sufficiently changed to suggest that the second attempt of entering North and West African markets is successful. Based on such a finding, it can be stated that the company currently has two out of three determinants of a successful internationalization of a family company that are company commitment and knowledge (Casillas, Moreno, & Acedo, 2010). As for the penetration strategies of the companies that entered North and West African markets, it can be stated that the export entry mode is more effective in the case of ABC as it has been a witness in its second process. The particular entry mode presumes that the company can start operating in the chosen regions of North and West Africa with reduced risks of the internationalization process and increased levels of commitment towards the continuation of the business process in the region. Based on the mentioned aspects, it can be stated that for such a risk-averse family company as ABC it is better to use the export penetration strategy, combined with the fact that the previous attempt of the company to internationalize did not turn out at being effective.

Thanks to its new internationalization process base on a good market commitment and market knowledge, the company has significantly increased in the last three years its exportations and business relations in the targeting markets. Base on this aspect, the gradual move from the absence of regular export activities to performing such a process with the help of various agents can be witnessed. Consequently, it should also be mentioned that so far ABC implements the first steps of the Uppsala Internationalization Model, using the export mode for penetration purposes. Further determination and analysis of the internationalization strategy used by ABC will be presented in the following subsections.

## **2.6. Conclusions & Recommendations**

The previous sections of the particular study have presented an analysis of the theoretical framework and existing literature,

accompanied by the findings and analysis of the subsequent study conduction. Based on the conducted study, it can be stated that the purpose of the research of performing an analysis of a Turkish family business, represented by ABC, and identifying whether the internationalization strategy chosen by the company to start targeting North and West African regions is effective has been fulfilled. It has been determined that from the failure of its first internationalization approach when using the global model, ABC step up a new process for its second approach by using export penetration that is near to the original Uppsala Internationalization Model, which can be considered as sufficiently applicable in the particular situation. Such an internationalization model choice will provide the company with reduced levels of risk, aiming at not repeating the failures of the previous internationalization strategies, and will ensure that the process of internationalization flows gradually. Also exporting would be an effective strategy when there is a high political risk. A firm can benefit from exporting because it increases its profits, sales, and economies of scale. Another advantage is that exporting a company widens its customer base and decreases the dependence on the home demand. Also, with the help of exporting a firm can stabilize fluctuations connected with the seasonality of products or services and economic cycles. Moreover, exporting is a low risk, low cost, and the most flexible entry mode. It does not require any investment in foreign production facilities. Most of the costs related to exporting can take the form of marketing charges. The answers to the research questions have also been provided in the subsequent theoretical framework and Analysis and Findings sections of the study.

Based on the collected results, the company can be recommended not to internationalize at a high speed to analyze all the factors influencing its operations and ensure that the internationalization strategy choice has been successful. The company can also be recommended to establish as many business connections in West and North African regions as possible to be able to compete sufficiently

with the local competitors.

Future researchers on the topic of the process of internationalization of family companies can be recommended to use a larger number of internationalization theories, as the particular study used only the Uppsala Internationalization Model and Born Global Models, which relatively limited the assessment of the internationalization strategy applied by ABC. Researching the particular issue in the future is of especial importance due to the insignificant amount of prior research that has been conducted on the aspect of the internationalization process of family companies, with no studies being investigated on the internationalization of family companies in West and North African companies.

### **Kaynakça**

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