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Development of International Market Entry Mode Decision Assessment Model (EMDAM): Strength and Opportunity (SO) Attributes

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Abstract
Purpose: The competitive and saturated construction industry has led many domestic firms to expand their businesses in foreign markets. In the early stage of strategic planning, construction firms use SWOT analysis by identifying their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) attribute prior to their decision to expand internationally. Thus, the aim of this study is to identify the important SWOT attributes to help the firms to manage and ease the inherent complexities and difficulties within international market environment.
Design/methodology/approach: The study adopts a quantitative method based on feedbacks from a survey administered to 30 managers involved in international projects.
Findings: A Pearson's correlation indicates a strong relationship between the strength and opportunity attribute ($r = .855$, $p < .001$). Based on the strength-opportunity (SO) attributes, the respondents indicate that their firms have acquired strengths namely, expertise based on previous similar project, international experience, ability to provide the necessary resources, with strong financial background. These strengths have encouraged them to seize various opportunities available in international markets to get more projects and gain more experience, to avoid saturated domestic market, to build network with other foreign firms, to establish good relationship with the host county and to maintain shareholders' interest and to gain their support in international construction business using various types of entry modes. **Research limitations/implications:** This study is limited to variables on strength and opportunity attributes based on a sample of 30 respondents with some international experience.
Practical implications: It is recommended that future study to look at the strategies adopted based on the identified strength, weakness, opportunity and threat attributes.
Originality/value: This initial study will lead to a development of an entry mode assessment model (EMDAM) to give practical guidance to interested construction firms in their preparatory works in making better entry mode decisions to internationalize.

Keywords: Entry Mode, International Markets, SWOT Analysis

Introduction

Around the world, the competitive and saturated construction industry has led many domestic construction firms to expand their business in foreign markets. Therefore, in today's global

industry, the construction firms must adopt a superior and an effective strategy to endure the increasing dynamics and uncertainties in the foreign markets. The international market expansion process involves a combination of many strategic entry decisions namely: entry location, entry timing and entry mode. However, the different dimensions of the entry mode decision and the assessment criteria which bear on mode choice have received little empirical investigation. It is important that suitable organizational structure is used by the construction firms to effectively manage foreign activities. In the early stage of strategic planning, one of the basic but important steps is the need for firms to identify their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) attributes prior to their international expansion. SWOT analysis has been in use since the 1960s as a tool to assist strategic planning in various types of enterprises including firms in the construction industry. While still widely used, the approach has called for improvements to make it more helpful in strategic planning. This paper focuses on entry mode decisions where firms can choose from among several entry modes including exporting, contractual agreement, acquiring an existing company, wholly-owned subsidiaries, joint ventures and establishing a wholly owned greenfield investment from scratch (Lin & Ho, 2019; Chen & Chang, 2011).

Literature Review

In the early stage of strategic planning, one of the basic but important steps is the need for firms to identify their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) attributes prior to their international expansion. SWOT analysis has been in use since the 1960s as a tool to assist strategic planning in various types of enterprises including firms in the construction industry. While still widely used, the approach has called for improvements to make it more helpful in strategic planning. Thus, Lu (2010) has contributed fresh insights into strategic planning by introducing rationally analytic processes to improve the SWOT analysis. Extensive research has been carried out by many researchers on entry mode decision in relation to SWOT analysis (Lin & Ho, 2019; Schwens, Zapkau, Brouthers & Hollender, 2018; Speckbacher, Neumann & Hoffmann, 2015; Mat Isa, Mohd Saman, & Preece, 2014; Lu, Ye, Flanagan & Jewell, 2013; Chen & Chang, 2011; Koch, 2001).

Lu (2010) developed an augmented SWOT analysis by using the mathematical approaches including the quantifying techniques, the "maximum sub-array" method, and fuzzy mathematics, one or more heuristic rules (HR) derived from a SWOT analysis. Koch (2001) developed market entry mode selection (MEMS) model and proposed that market selection and market entry mode selection (MEMS) can be looked upon as two aspects of one decision process. He found that experience is a major factor shaping market entry strategic decisions, company corporate culture and collective knowledge, or common wisdom. In addition, as study by Carlsson, Nordegren and Sjöholm (2005) shows that international experience from foreign countries was found to have positive impact the firms' performance in international business operations.

Mat Isa, Mohd Saman and Preece (2014) ranked the SWOT attributes which are: the ability to produce good quality products/services (strength), lack of research and development (weakness), mergers (opportunity), and policies, laws and regulations of host country (threat). The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between the opportunity and the threat attributes which indicates that the abundant opportunities are also accompanied by the inherent threats in the international markets. Sarpin et al (2019) highlighted few strategies to overcome and control various challenges in international markets through risk management and entry mode strategies.

Driscoll and Paliwoda (1997) found that resource commitment emerged as the most important dimension of entry mode choice, followed by the control dimension, while the three situational

determinants namely; socio-cultural distance, tacit knowhow and product differentiation have significantly influenced separate entry mode decision dimensions. In examining the direct effects of situational variables on entry mode decision, socio-cultural distance has significantly influenced the choice among export, contractual and investment entry arrangements. Thus, as socio-cultural distance increases, firms are more likely to choose contractual rather than investment modes.

A strong relationship between the current entry mode performance and future entry mode decision was found by Chen and Chang (2011), where the empirical results indicate that state dependence between current and past modes plays an important role in determining entry mode decisions. Further, Lin and Ho (2019) found that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with limited financial and personnel resources are likely to choose entry modes based on the resources available. Their findings indicate that innovation, product characteristics, advertising intensity, export intensity, and industry have positive effects on the high-level resource commitment in entry mode decision into international markets.

Another study by Speckbacher, Neumann and Hoffmann (2015) shows that when firms seek to enter a new business segment, they have to decide how to best gain access to the required resources. They studied on how resource relatedness influences a firm's decision between internal development and collaborative arrangement as modes of entry. They have distinguished between a firm's capacity to transfer its established resources to the new segment (resource transferability) and the integration and synergistic combination of current firm resources with target segment resources in day-to-day operations (resource complementarity). Resource transferability makes entry by internal development more likely, but this effect depends on segment characteristics. Synergies from complementary resources can be exploited more easily within firm boundaries than across an alliance interface. However, certain partner characteristics can substitute in part for belonging to the same firm.

Despite extensive research, the literature is unclear about the circumstances under which a firm makes assessment on the entry mode criteria to assist their decision to determine suitable entry modes to be used in their international projects. The different dimensions of the entry mode decision and the SWOT attributes which bear on entry mode choice have received little empirical investigation. Thus, the aim of this pilot study is to identify the important SWOT attributes to help the firms to manage and ease the inherent complexities and difficulties within international market environment. Survey questionnaires were sent to 30 respondents from Malaysian construction firms having international experiences.

Building on a literature review, this paper examines various entry mode decisions with four underlying dimensions of mode decisions based on SWOT attributes that influences on decisions as determined from the extant literature and the pilot survey data was collected from 30 managers with international experiences. The findings will lead to a development of an entry mode decision model to guide interested firms in making better entry mode decisions for their future international ventures.

Methodology

The study adopts an exploratory approach utilizing a quantitative method. This approach is particularly suitable when the aim is to understand the "what" significant attributes being considered by the firms in their strategic planning. This approach is being commonly adopted in many construction management and marketing studies (Deng, Liu & Jin, 2013;Polat & Donmez, 2010).

To capture individual responses from the population, structured questionnaires were designed. Section A enquires on the respondents' background, designation and international experience and the international business location. Part B solicits the respondents' opinions to evaluate

the SWOT attributes of their firms based on the level of agreement. Each opinion was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. (1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Moderately Agree; 4: Agree; and 5: Strongly Agree).

The respondents involved in this pilot study are from Malaysian construction firms those undertaking and completed projects in international markets. The selection is based on CIDB (2019) record with 59 firms registered as global players operating in more than 50 countries. Their involvements in international projects includes various sectors such as buildings, infrastructures, branches of engineering, mechanical and electrical, power transmission and plant, and oil and gas. For a pilot study, a sample size is an important consideration when a quantifiable trial is planned (Whitehead, Julious, Cooper, & Campbell, 2015). In addition, a sample size calculation is used to determine the minimum number of respondents needed in a clinical trial in order to be able to answer the research question under investigation. Upper confident limit (UCL) has been used in this pilot study, where it has been developed by Browne (1995). Hence, for this pilot study, 80% UCL approach to the sample size calculation and found that the sample size of the trial sample of 40 would minimize the overall sample size for the sample size of the main study from 368 corresponding to the standard effect size of 0.8. Therefore, the data for this pilot study is acceptable and consider as large (Browne, 1995).

Reliability analysis with Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the variables measuring the same dimension to provide evidence of reliability. The greater the degree of consistency and stability in an instrument, the greater its reliability where value greater than 0.70 was considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The Cronbach's alpha for the SWOT dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Test on SWOT attributes

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Strength	7	.953
Weakness	7	.975
Opportunity	7	.966
Threat	10	.967

Thirty (30) respondents participated in the pilot survey representing 23 firms in construction industry. They held various designations, such as Project Manager (n=1), Head of Department Infrastructure Engineering (n=1), Senior Manager QA (n=1), QA/QC Engineer (n=1), Senior Engineer (n=6), Engineer (n=13), Quantity Surveyor (n=1), Safety Officer (n=1) and other managerial posts (n=5). Figure1 depicts the percentage of respondents' designation.

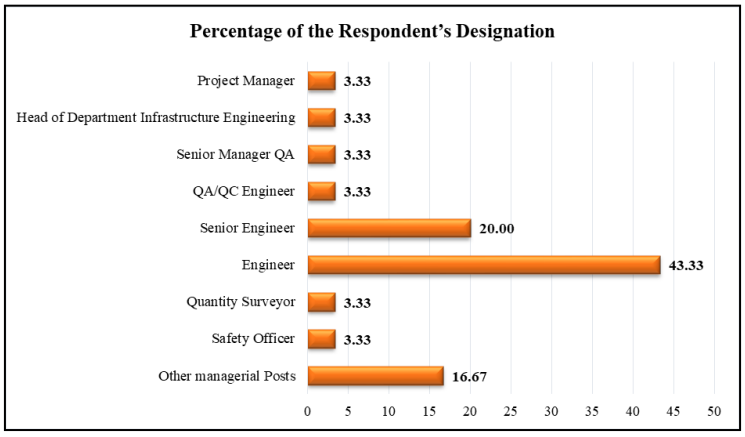


Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondent's Designation

Figure 2 shows percentage distribution of the respondents' years of international experience. The results show that that 80% of the respondents have acquired less than 6 years of international experience, 20% of the respondents have experience between 6 to 10 years and none the respondents have experience more than 10 years.

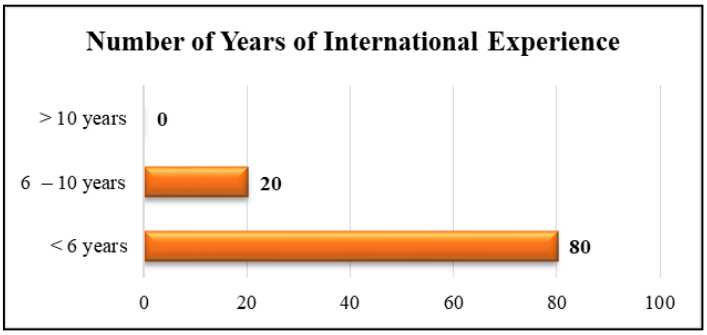


Figure 2: Percentage Distribution based on Respondents' Number of Years of International Experience

The respondents are given a list of ten (10) different entry modes listed. They are required to select any of entry modes undertaken by their firms. The ranking and frequency of the chosen entry modes by the respondents are as follows: joint venture company (14); branch office/company (7), joint venture project (6), licensing (6), Build-Operate-Transfer (5), representative office (4), strategic alliance (3), local agent (2), sole venture project (1) and sole venture company (1).

Figure 3 shows the percentage frequency based on different types of entry modes chosen by the respondents' firms.

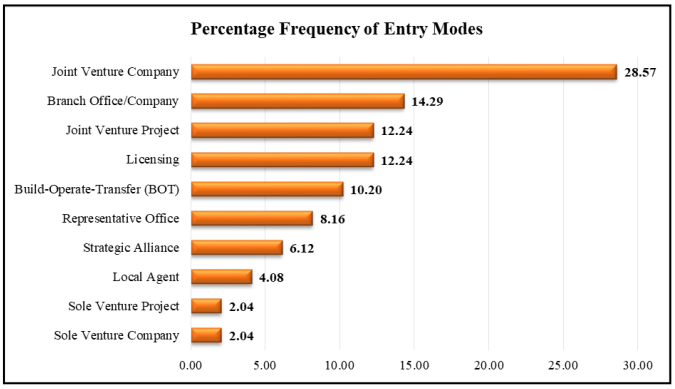
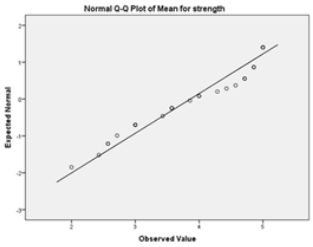
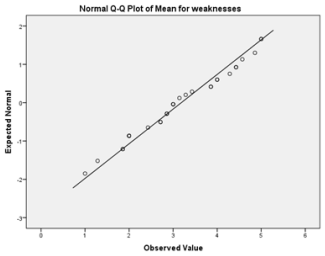
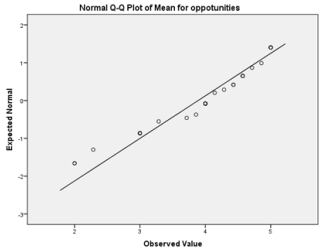
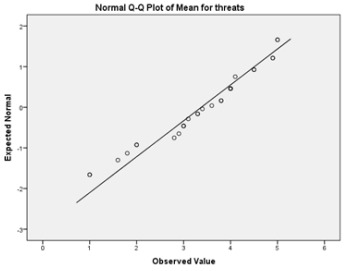
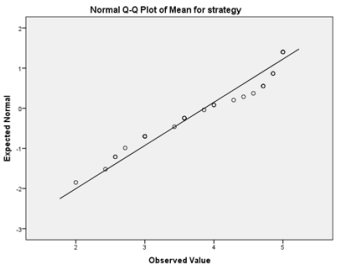


Figure 3: Percentage Frequency of Different Types of Entry Mode

Normality Test

A normality test was performed in order to meet the assumption of normality using the information on Skewness and Kurtosis statistics and also normal Q-Q plot from descriptive statistic. Table 2 indicate thats SWOT attributes are approximately normally distributed since the values of Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients for all attributes are in the range of ±1.0.. The normal Q-Q plots also indicate the normality of the variable where majority of the observed values (smaller dots) lies on the straight line in the plots. The normality assumption for each variable was me, thus SWOT attributes are normally distributed

Table 2: Normality Tests using Skewness & Kurtosis and Q-Q Plot

Variable	Skewness	Kurtosis	Q-Q Plot
Strength	-0.305	-1.208	
Weakness	-.044	-.810	
Opportunity	-.692	-.361	
Threat	-.558	-.325	
Strategy	-.643	-.386	

The following section explains the analysis and discussion based on the descriptive analysis and using statistical analysis tools (SPSS20).

Analysis and Discussions

The mean values and standard deviations were extracted from the SPSS results and presented based on the level of agreement for the SWOT attributes agreed by the respondents. Table 4.1 shows the measures and descriptive statistics presented by the ranked mean values (M) and the associated standard deviation (SD) for the SWOT attributes related to the international market

expansion. The highest ranked attribute is the opportunities available in the construction market (M=3.8905, SD=0.162), followed by strength (M= 3.8619, SD=0.170), the threat attributes faced during their international operation (M=3.3767, SD=0.207) and finally by the weakness attributes that the firm faced (M=3.1857, SD=0.202) as tabulated in Table 3. The overall mean score of 3.579 on a five-point rating scales for the all attributes suggests that the respondents' level of agreement lies between "Agree" and "Strongly Agree".

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation

Attributes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strength	30	3.8619	0.170
Weakness	30	3.1857	0.202
Opportunities	30	3.8905	0.162
Threat	30	3.3767	0.207

Pearson Correlations

The Pearson correlation was used to analyze the main data of the results of the questionnaire from this study. Correlation analysis is used in this study to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between variables (Pallant, 2011), in this case the SWOT attributes. Hence, the analysis determines not only whether a relationship between variables exists, but also the degree of the relationship between them. In this study, the level of measurement is designed for the interval level (continuous). Since, the nature of the data is normal, a parametric test is used. The procedure for obtaining and interpreting a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) is presented since, the Pearson r is designed for interval level variables which are used in the questionnaire design. The value gives indication of both the direction (positive or negative) and the strength of the relationships, taking on values from –1.0 to +1.0. Hence, in a positive correlation the trend in both variables go in the same direction, whether that is to increase together or decrease together. In a negative correlation they are going in opposite directions. Different authors suggest different interpretations; however, based on Cohen (1998), Pallant (2011) suggests the following guidelines as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Coefficients (Cohen, 1998)

Pearson coefficients (r)	Value	Strength of Correlation
Between .10 and .29	Small	Poor relationship
Between .30 and .49	Medium	Medium relationship
Between .50 and 1.0	Large	Strong relationship

Correlation Analysis for SWOT Attributes

Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and outlier cases and have reduced that sample size to 30. Table 5 shows the relationship among the four groups of SWOT attributes using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and outlier cases which have resulted in N = 30.

Table 5: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for SWOT Attributes

Variables		Strength	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Strength	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	30			
Weaknesses	Pearson Correlation	**.526****	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003			
	N	30	30		
Opportunities	Pearson Correlation	**.855****	.367*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.046		
	N	30	30	30	
Threats	Pearson Correlation	**.771****	**.729****	**.779****	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	30	30	30	30
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Table 5 shows the relationship among the two variables by using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and outlier cases and have resulted in N =30. From the Pearson's Correlations table, it can be seen that the strength and opportunities Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) equals .855, indicating a strong relationship in terms of correlation. p< .000 and indicates that the coefficient is significantly different from 0. It means that if the strength attributes increase, the opportunity attributes also increase and vice versa. We can conclude that these strength attributes are required by the firm to grab and handle the opportunities available in the international market. However, Mat Isa, Mohd Saman & Preece (2014) ranked the SWOT attributes which are: the ability to produce good quality products/services (strength), lack of research and development (weakness), mergers (opportunity), and policies, laws and regulations of host country (threat). The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between the opportunity and the threat attributes which indicates that the abundant opportunities are also accompanied by the inherent threats in the international markets.

A strong strength positive correlation was also found between the weakness and threat attributes. It means that if the weakness attributes increase, the threat attributes also increase and vice versa. Thus, these weakness attributes must be minimized by the firms to reduce the inherent threats in the international market. It was surprising that a stronger positive correlation also was found between the threat and opportunity attributes r (30) = 0.779. Thus, if the threat attributes increase, the opportunity attributes also increase and vice versa. Conclusively, these threat attributes were anticipated and experienced by the firm in order to handle the greater opportunities in the international market. Hence, this proves that there exist interrelations that signify between the four attributes. Most importantly, in order to maintain international operations, the firms must be able to face the threats and always being on the lookout for opportunities and working hard in order to grow the firm and sustain competitiveness (Kaur & Sandhu, 2014).

Strength Attributes

The respondents have given their feedbacks based on 5-point likert rating using level of agreement on five (5) statements related to the strength of their firms on entry mode decision. Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6, Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the percentage distribution of the respondents' level of agreement on the strength attributes as discussed below.

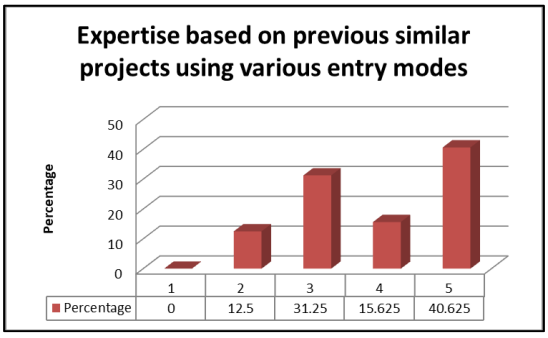


Figure 4: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Expertise based on Similar Past Projects Using Various Entry Modes (S1)

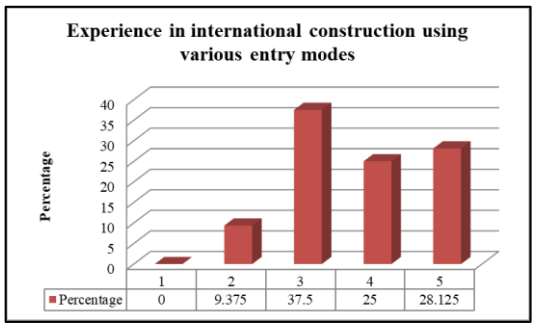


Figure 5: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Experience Using Various Types of Entry Modes (S2)

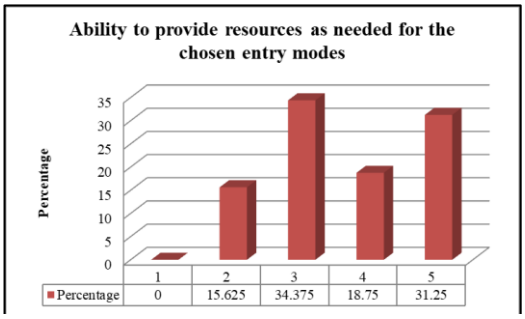


Figure 6: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Ability to Provide Resources for the Chosen Entry Modes (S3)

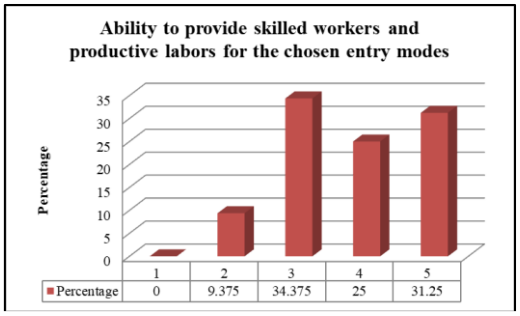


Figure 7: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Ability to Provide Skilled Workers and Productive Labors for the Chosen Entry Modes (S4)

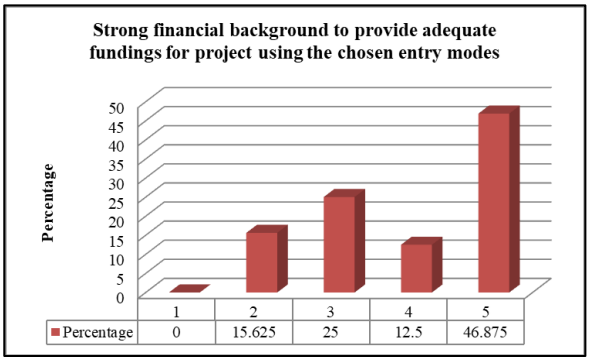


Figure 8: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Having Strong Financial Background to Provide Adequate Funding for the Chosen Entry Modes (S5)

Opportunity Attributes

Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure 12, Figure 13 and Figure 12 shows the percentage distribution of the respondents' level of agreement on the six (6) opportunity attributes as discussed below.

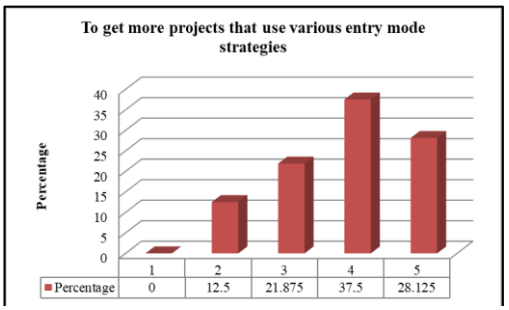


Figure 9: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Strategy to Get More Projects that Use Various Entry Modes (O1)

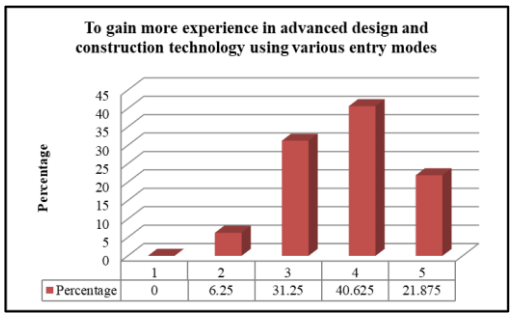


Figure 10: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Gaining More Experience in Advanced

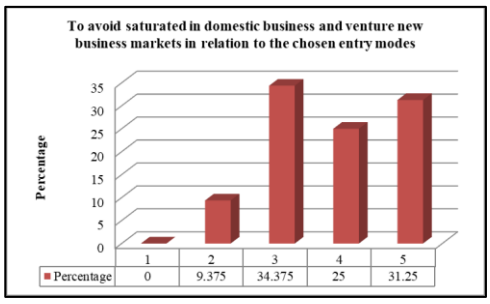


Figure 11: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement in Avoiding Saturated Domestic Business and Venture New Business Markets in Relation to the Chosen Entry Modes (O3)

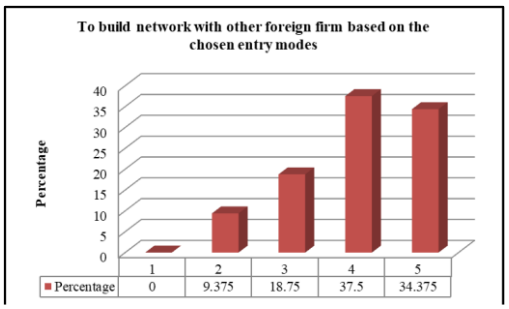


Figure 12: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Building Network with Other Foreign Firm based on the Chosen Entry Modes (O4)

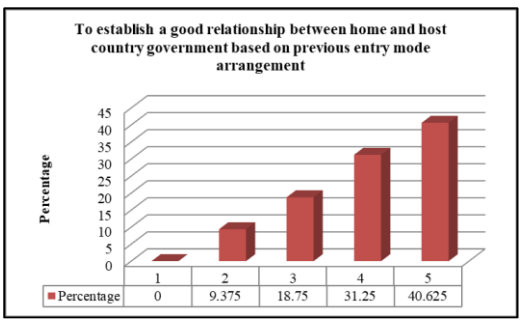


Figure 13: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Establishing Good Relationship between Home and Host Country Government based on Previous Entry Mode Arrangement (O5)

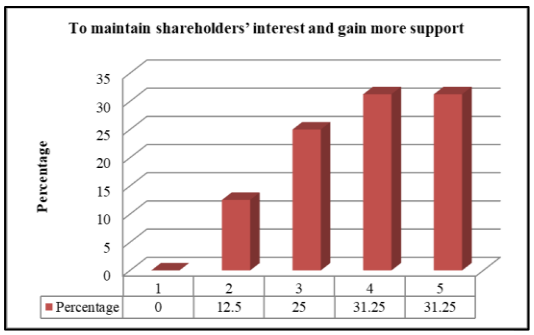


Figure 14: Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Level of Agreement on Maintaining Shareholders' Interest and Gaining More Support (O6)

Correlation analysis shows Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) equals .855, indicating a strong relationship in terms of correlation between strength and opportunities. The following discussions are based on the integration between the strength and opportunity attributes agreed by the respondents which are supported by and compared with previous studies.

S1 (Expertise) & S2 (Experience) +O1 (win more projects) &O2 (gain more experience)

S1: Expertise based on Previous Similar Project & S2: Experience Gained in International Market using Various Types of Entry Modes

Figure 4 shows that 87.5% agreed that their expertise in using various entry modes chosen by their firms are based on previous similar projects, while 12.5% indicates otherwise. Thus, majority of them gained their expertise in using various entry modes based on previous similar projects in international markets. Similarly, firms increased their experience on international projects using various types of entry mode. International experience is commonly measured in years, of international operations. Figure 5 indicates that about 90% agreed that their firms have gained experience in international construction using various types of entry modes, while around 10% indicates otherwise.

O1: To win more projects using various entry modes & O2: To gain more experience in advanced design and construction technology

About 87.5% of the respondents agreed that international construction provides opportunity for them to win more projects using various types of entry modes as shown in Figure 9. As shown in Figure 10, about 93% of the respondents show that international construction provides opportunity for them to gain more experience in advanced design and construction technology using various types of entry modes.

Expertise gained from previous similar projects is very important especially when there is a high competition in winning new projects. Firms usually seek opportunity by winning more projects through their new ventures in foreign countries. Thus, most firms rely on low bids to seize the opportunity to win new projects where they are flexible when negotiating terms of the contract based on different entry modes (Ling & Lim, 2010). In order to win more projects and gain more experience, a good relationship should be established by the firms with the previous clients from the past similar projects (Ling & Lim, 2010). Findings from this study show that the firms believed that they have acquired the expertise and gained experience in international construction. International experience from foreign countries was found to have positive impact the firms' performance in international business operations (Carlsson, Nordegren & Sjöholm, 2005). Similarly, Koch (2001) found that experience is a major factor shaping market entry strategic decisions, company corporate culture and collective knowledge, or common wisdom.

Another important opportunity to the firms is exposure to advanced design and construction technology. The importance of project management expertise in international construction was observed by many researchers. It was evident that the American contractors won contracts abroad, not only because of their experience with advanced technologies, but also because of their organization and management skills (Gunhan & Arditi, 2005). Therefore, international construction provides great opportunity for the firms to gain experience in advanced design and technology as shown in the previous study, where the international Korean contractors gained experience through competitive technology in building and road and internationally specialized technologies in a few business segments (Lee, Jeon, Kim, & Kim, 2011).

S3 (resources) & S4 (skilled workers) + O4 (build network) & O5 (good G2G relationship)

S3: Ability to provide various resources for the chosen entry modes & S4: Ability to provide skilled workers and productive labors

Figure 6 shows that about 85% of the respondents agreed that they have the ability to provide resources such as technologies, machineries and equipment needed based on the entry mode chosen and only 15% indicate otherwise. Figure 7 shows that majority of the respondents (90%) that they have the ability to provide skilled workers with productive labors for the chosen entry modes while only 10% indicates otherwise.

O4: To build network with other foreign firms for knowledge sharing, technologies improvement, innovations, etc) based on the chosen entry modes & O5: To establish a good relationship between home and host country government

Having good networking with various stakeholders in construction industry is very important both at local and international level. Figure 11 shows that about 90% of the respondents show that international construction provides opportunity for them to build network with other foreign firms through knowledge sharing, technologies improvement, innovations, etc. on the chosen entry modes. As shown in Figure 13, about 90% of the respondents show that international construction provides opportunity for them to establish a good relationship between home and host country government based on previous entry modes arrangements.
Firms' entry mode decision is very much related to the availability of resources acquired either internally or externally. As highlighted by Driscoll and Paliwoda (1997), resource commitment has emerged as the most important dimension of entry mode choice. Thus, when firms seek to enter a new business segment, they have to decide how to best gain access to the required resources. A recent study by Speckbacher et al, (2015) shows how resources influence a firm's decision between internal development and collaborative arrangement as entry modes. Resources include provision of skilled and productive workers for the chosen entry modes. Shortage of skilled labor is found as one of the Malaysian firms' weaknesses in international construction (Mat Isa et al., 2013), while for Chinese construction firms, cheap labor appears to be their strength (Ling & Lim, 2010).
Malaysian firms are encouraged to network so as to form good working relationship with clients, consultants and other contractors. However, as networking may lead to bribery and corruption, the policy especially for public sector organizations should be in place (Ling & Lim, 2010). Indonesia is one of the members of ASEAN organization, thus this may facilitate penetration of the firms into other ASEAN countries through Government to Government relationships (Utama, Chan, Zahoor, & Gao, 2014) vice-versa. Mat Isa, Mohd Saman, Preece, Mohd Nasir and Abdullah (2016) found that the significant country factors influencing international market entry decision were related to the host and home government's attitude and support.

S5 (financial) +O3 (saturated market) &O6 (shareholders' interest)

S5: Strong financial to fund the project, transportation, materials, etc. for the chosen entry modes

Figure 8 shows that almost 85% of the respondents agreed that their firms have strong financial background to adequately provide funding on transportation, materials etc. for the project using the chosen entry modes.

O3: To avoid the saturated domestic market and to venture into new business markets & O6: To maintain shareholders' interest and to gain more support

Firms ventures into foreign firms mostly due to saturated domestic market. Firms in small construction market like Malaysia are constantly dealing with this issue. Figure 10 shows that about 90% of the respondents show that international construction provides opportunity for them to avoid the saturated domestic market and to venture into new business markets using various types of entry modes. Figure 14 shows that about 88% of the respondents show that international construction provides opportunity for them to maintain shareholders' interest and to gain more support from them.

Many previous studies show that financial aspect is the most important strength for firms to operate in foreign markets. Chinese construction firms are financially strong because their headquarters are backed by the Chinese government and thus have the ability to bid for large projects and achieve high success rate in exporting (Ling & Lim, 2010). Diversity plays an important role for construction firms in achieving growth, profitability and sustainability through supporting business strategies (Che Ibrahim, Ayub, Ahzahar, & Hassan, 2009). The ability to maintain shareholder' interest in terms of profit and returns is very important for business sustainability. This finding supports previous study which identified the maintenance of shareholders' returns as a major reason for operating overseas, thus shareholder support is important to venture overseas markets.

Discussion and Conclusion

This objective of this study is to examine various entry mode decisions with four underlying dimensions based on SWOT attributes that influence the decisions. A pilot survey data was collected from 30 managers with international experiences. This paper discussed only the strength and opportunity attributes as indicated by a strong correlation by Pearson's Correlation. Majority of the respondents agreed that their firms have acquired strengths namely, expertise based on previous similar project, international experience, ability to provide the necessary resources (materials, machineries, human and financial) and have strong financial background. These strengths have encouraged them to seize various opportunities available in international markets namely to get more projects, to gain more experience, to avoid saturated domestic market, to build network with other foreign firms, to establish good relationship with the host county and to maintain shareholders' interest and to gain their support in international construction business using various types of entry modes. These preliminary findings will lead to a development of an entry mode assessment model to give practical guidance to interested construction firms in their preparatory works in making better entry mode decisions to internationalize. This study is limited to only strength and opportunity attributes based on a sample of respondents with some international experience. Future study is recommended to look at the strategies adopted based on the identified strength, weakness, opportunity and threat attributes.

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