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## Which resources and competences are in favour of an international strategy? A case of Polish firms

**Abstract:** The objective of the study is to verify the way and the scope of the impact of resources and competences on the process of entrepreneurial internationalisation. In this paper we have presented a broad review of the literature, which shows that resources and competencies are two fundamental aspects that play vital roles in the internationalisation of firms. The novelty of this article lies in selecting Poland as a post-emerging economy, and such countries as being late comers to international business are still not well explored in the literature. The article uses own primary data based on a survey questionnaire. We used a quantitative approach. We applied simple and multiple logistic regression to verify the impact of resources and competences and their individual components on the creation of an international strategy in the firm. We have proved that resources and competences have a significant impact on the creation of an international strategy in internationalised firms from Poland. The results for specific individual resources and competences are no longer so clear-cut.

**Keywords:** competences; international strategy; international business; international entrepreneurship; internationalisation; Poland; resources

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## INTRODUCTION

Resource-based view (RBV) directly refers to Penrose's (1959) concept of growth of the firm. In the most recent literature of the subject we can observe an increasing attention ascribed to RBV. Models relying on the resource-based approach are sometimes divided into resource-based studies and capabilities-based studies of internationalisation

(Ruzzier, Hisrich, Antoncic, 2006), although obviously considering the output of management studies it is difficult to separate those two areas from each other in the strategic analysis, and the authors of those models refer in majority explicit (or at least implicit) to the strategic management theory. The models built in this stream explain internationalisation of the firm through the prism of competences and resources, especially the intangible ones the firm has, because they determine whether the firm is national, international or even global. They are particularly useful to explain internationalisation of firms, as they assume their heterogeneity related to high resource-based diversity of those entities (Chen, Hsu, 2010).

In the literature of the subject we can come across numerous resource-based internationalisation models, mainly due to the multi-aspect approach to resources and competences, which was emphasised before. Early research in the resource-based stream focused on two factors – a unique advantage of a firm and the characteristics of the person making decisions about internationalisation; then resource-based models were expanded by next factors, such as the adopted strategy of internationalisation or competences (knowledge, capabilities, attitudes) (Andersen, Low, 1998). With reference to emerging markets, Toulan (2002) proposed in his model a solution based on the classical management theory, analysing the relation between internationalisation of the firm and its resources (physical, human, financial, organisational and technological ones). Westhead, Wright, and Ucbasaran (2001) proposed an expanded resource-based model of internationalisation, considering five resource-based variables, namely human capital of the entrepreneur, human capital of the business, know-how of the firm management, industry professional know-how, a capability of raising financial capital.

The objective of the study is to verify the way and the scope of the impact of resources and competences on the process of entrepreneurial internationalisation. This article tries to answer the following four research questions:

**RQ1:** How do resources influence the creation of an international strategy of internationalised companies?

**RQ2:** Which resources are the most important to the creation of an international strategy of internationalised firms?

**RQ3:** How do competencies influence the creation of an international strategy of internationalised companies?

**RQ4:** Which competencies are the most important to the creation of an international strategy of internationalised firms?

There is numerous empirical evidence from well-developed economies as well as from emerging economies showing and proving the role of resources in internationalisation. The novelty of this article lies in selecting Poland as a post-emerging economy, and such countries as being late comers to international business are still not well explored in the literature. We follow the replication of empirical research in Polish context, which is postulated by various authors and editors (Hensel, 2019). What is more, the article uses own primary data based on a survey questionnaire, which is becoming more and more unique in the international business literature (Cerar, Nell, Reiche, 2021). We would like to combine also the resources and competences with the international strategy of the firm.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND PRIOR STUDIES

In the international entrepreneurship literature, there is an animated debate about the factors behind entrepreneurial internationalisation (Głodowska, 2019; Wach, 2017). According to the resource-based view (RBV), the researchers focus on resources as the critical elements to the highest effectiveness of the business on international markets. Hébert and Link (1989) defined entrepreneurs as persons coordinating and managing resources. Kumar (2012: 257) described the organisation as “bundles of resources”. In the concept of internationalisation, the RBV provides a solid theoretical framework to understand how businesses can achieve and maintain a competitive advantage internationally. The resource-based approach is visible in the traditional concepts of internationalisation – Uppsala model and its extensions (Wójcik, Ciszewska-Mlinarič, 2020; Wach, 2021) and contemporary models derived from international entrepreneurship (Wach, 2017; Maciejewski, Wach, 2019; Baltrunaite, Sekliuckiene, 2020). The latter especially emphasizes the role of the entrepreneur, and therefore focuses more on competencies and capabilities (Wach, Głodowska, 2021; Nasser, 2021; Matejun, Motyka, 2016).

Handoyo et al. (2021) confirm that resources and competencies are two fundamental aspects that play vital roles in the internationalisation of firms. Belniak (2015), following the resource and competency approach, analyses resources and competencies as internal factors of internationalisation. She points out *stricto sensu* resources or extends this term to include competencies, treating them as *sensu largo* resources (Belniak, 2015). In other studies, resources and competencies are used interchangeably or complementarily (Ibrahim et al., 2016). In general, resources can be understood as stocks of available tangible and intangible assets owned or controlled by the company and transformed into the company’s products and services by engaging other resources and bonding mechanisms (Ruzzier et al., 2006). There are various classifications and typologies of resources in the literature.

Competences can be understood as fundamental attributes of a business (knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes) (Andersen, Low, 1998; Wach, 2012). They can also be viewed as well-defined routines that, when combined with specific resources, fulfil particular functions of a firm. One of the creators of the competence-based view (CBV), Pelikan (1989), defined competencies as economic information on which the transferability of other scarce resources depends. Competencies are also understood as a set of distinguishing resources and opportunities related to the structure of a given firm, the technologies used, and intra-organisational relations (Kožuch, Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, 2013). According to Shetty et al. (2020), competencies play a more prominent role at a higher level of aggregation next to resources. Competencies can determine different resource management. Following this line of reasoning, it can be explained why two companies with similar resources and within the same ecosystems achieve different results, which depends on their competencies. Competencies can be divided into organisational and managerial ones, or in other words, organisational-level and individual-level (Lahti, 1999; Daszkiewicz, 2018). The former is independent of the skills of the members of a given enterprise, while the latter covers the skills and knowledge of the management staff (Bencsik et al., 2019).

In many studies, competencies are treated as complementary or equivalent to resources. It can also be noticed that competencies are more dynamic. Therefore they are

associated more with action rather than possession, as in the case of resources (Andersen, Low, 1998). They are often associated with the company's capabilities. We can say that competencies are the company's capability to use resources, usually combined with organisational processes, to achieve the desired goal. Kabue and Kilika (2016) believe that resources are the source of the company's ability, but competencies enable the effective use of resources to obtain economic rent. We can identify the so-called core competence or critical competence. For example, learning from experience and skills acquired over the years is a core competence (Fauzi et al., 2021). Current market conditions and the dynamics of changes in the international environment require the continuous development of competencies and new ones to adjust the company's specific capabilities to market needs (Ayegba, Lin, 2020). According to Suchayo et al. (2020), building competencies is a product of organisational culture and values that shape the behaviour of companies.

According to Wach (2012), research on internationalisation in the resource-based stream initially focused on two factors: 1) the unique advantage of the company, 2) the decision-maker characteristics. Over time, this research was expanded to include elements such as the adopted internationalisation strategy or competencies understood as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In general, the study confirms the positive and even fundamental impact of resources on various dimensions of internationalisation and areas of the company's activity on the international market. The resource profiles vary between internationalised and non-internationalised firms indicating greater resource bundles for the firm operating internationally (Ruzzier et al., 2006). Hitt et al. (2006) assessed the importance of two firm's resources, namely human capital and relational capital, and confirmed their positive impact on internationalisation. Tseng et al. (2007) analysed how company resources influence changes in the internationalisation process, proposing a framework that consists of knowledge-based and property-based resources. Arroteia and Hafeez (2021) verified that experiential knowledge and social skills influence the decision-making process of internationalised companies in a sample of technology-based businesses. At the organisational level, these are primarily human and financial resources. Sirmon et al. (2007) believe that company resource management aims to build capacity and use those abilities to create company value. Bianchi and Wickramaseker (2016) emphasize the importance of resources to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage on the international market. Firms with valuable and scarce resources achieve a competitive advantage and better performance in a short time. To maintain these advantages over the long term, these resources must also be unique and irreplaceable (Kabue, Kilika, 2016). Resources must also be heterogeneous and immobile throughout the industry. The lack of these features implies appropriate knowledge and managerial skills to develop competencies that will allow achieving a competitive advantage.

Knight and Kim (2009) identify international business competencies as intangible, valuable resources developed over time and impossible to obtain from the external market. They also believe that these competencies are not perfectly mobile in various organisations, and therefore are a source of sustainable competitive advantage for the company on international market. According to Urbano et al. (2013) entrepreneurial competencies, innovation and resources influence the central mechanisms of an organisation's decision-makers. They help recognize and exploit opportunities and identify and use external resources (Wach et al., 2022).

Resources also play a significant role in the success of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the internationalisation process. Korsakiene (2014) believes that this is the main force of the competitive struggle between SMEs and larger companies. Various researchers emphasize that the lack of sufficient resources is considered the main barrier to the development of SMEs internationally (Michael et al., 2016; Buzaivaite, Korsakiene, 2019). Jafari-Sadeghi et al. (2021) believe that in such a situation, SMEs rely more on intangible-individual resources such as managerial resources, expertise, experience, innovation, etc. Lack of resources (e.g. financial) and appropriate competencies are also indicated as the main source of failure of specific types of sensitive entrepreneurship, e.g. women or migrants (Maj, Kubiciel-Lodzinska, 2020; Mroczek-Dąbrowska, Gaweł, 2020; Gaweł, Głodowska, 2021).

Resources, their quality, and quantity determine the decisions made by the firm at various levels of international operations management, especially those accompanied by strategies for their practical use. In turn, according to the strategic approach, the international strategy and its content at various levels is the driving force of internationalisation (Belniak, 2015). Therefore, it is indisputable to appreciate the resources' influence on the decision-making process. Having an international strategy may affect the speed and scope of internationalisation (Głodowska, Pera, Wach, 2019). The strategy can be formal or informal. The internationalisation itself can be understood as the process of adapting the strategy, structure and resources of the enterprise to the international environment (Johanson, Mattsson, 1993). It is not only about going to the international market and developing the company there, but also about changing the management of the firm as a result of the planned process of adapting to the conditions of the international market included in the company's strategy. The firm's resources, all its assets, capabilities, organisational processes, attributes, skills, attitudes and knowledge controlled by the firms enable the development and implementation of an international strategy. However, there are few studies in the literature that would indicate in more detail which resources and competences are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy of companies. Taking RBV and CBV as the basis and identifying a research gap in prior research, we formulated two main hypotheses, which were supplemented by sub-hypotheses. Sub-hypotheses concern particular types of resources and competences:

**H1:** Resources have a positive impact on the internationalisation of firms through the creation an international strategy

H1.1: Financial resources are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H1.2: Human resources are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H1.3: Physical resources are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H1.4: Information resources are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H1.5: Intangible resources are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

**H2:** Competences have a positive impact on the internationalisation of firms through the creation of an international strategy

H2.1: General managerial knowledge is of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H2.2: Professional industry knowledge is of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H2.3: Conceptual skills are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H2.4: Social skills are of the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H2.5: Proactive attitude to opportunities is the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

H2.6: Proactive attitude to decision-making process is the greatest importance for creating an international strategy.

When attempting to verify and prioritize the importance of individual resources and competences, each sub-hypothesis is put against the remaining alternative ones. It means that confirming one sub-hypothesis entails rejecting the others at the same time.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the empirical part of our research we aim to verify the relationship between resources and competences and the internationalisation process of Polish firms. We used a quantitative approach based on a survey. The questionnaires and selected variables allowed to calculate statistical relations and to verify hypotheses. Our research sample was selected from the REGON register, which includes all businesses registered in Poland. Initially, we drew 7100 businesses to whom we addressed our survey questionnaire. Of these businesses, only 355 agreed to take part in the survey (5%). A stratified random sampling was applied according to the following criteria (Głodowska, Maciejewski, Wach, 2019; Głodowska, Pera, Wach, 2016; Wach, Głodowska, Maciejewski, 2022). The research sample includes only internationalised businesses (at least exporters). The research sample contains businesses of different sizes but reflecting the research needs, i.e. (a) with a small share of microenterprises as the least internationalised, although they constitute the most numerous group in the investigated population, (b) with a relatively small share of large enterprises, which – although they constitute the smallest group in the population – are the most typical research objects in the subject of internationalisation, with the assumption that each of these groups should constitute approximately 10–15% of the research sample, (c) with a relatively large proportion of both small and medium-sized enterprises, which according to the assumptions should amount to 25–45% of the sample.

The survey was conducted in Poland as the post-emerging economies using the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) technique. The questionnaire was divided into six thematic sections, namely: (i) business characteristics, (ii) forms and scope of internationalisation, (iii) internationalisation patterns and strategies, (iv) resources and competences, (v) domestic and foreign environment, (vi) entrepreneurial orientation, and (vi) entrepreneurial characteristics.

A number of variables (Table 1) based on the survey questionnaire as well as Statistica 13.3 computer software were used for statistical calculations. We applied two statistical tests:

- simple logistic regression to check the impact of resources and competences on an international strategy in the firm;

- multiple logistic regression to verify the impact of individual components of resources and competences as independent variables on the creation of an international strategy in the firm.

Table 1. Applied variables in the survey questionnaire and statistical calculations

Variable	Measure	Scale	Source
Resources (RES)	Self-evaluation of entrepreneurs/managers of five different resources	7-point Likert scale (standardised average* for resources in total)	Own construct
	1: physical (e.g. buildings infrastructure, equipment, technology and innovation, modern machines, favourable localisation of production),		
	2: human (e.g. employees speaking foreign languages, knowing foreign markets and different cultures, activeness of the management board and its expansiveness, leadership),		
	3: financial (e.g. equity, creditworthiness, venture capital, grants, profits),		
	4: information (e.g. sources of information about international markets, forecast, business intelligence),		
	5: intangible resources (e.g. goodwill, reputation, brand, intellectual capital, knowledge capital, know-how, creativity, entrepreneurship).		
Competences (COMP)	Self-evaluation of entrepreneurs/managers of six different competences (1: managerial knowledge, 2: professional knowledge, 3: conceptual skills, 4: interpersonal skills, 5: market opportunities exploitation, 6: proactive decision-making).	7-point Likert scale (standardised average* for competences in total)	Own construct
International strategy (STRAT)	Having at least informal internationalisation strategy	dummy 0/1	Own construct

\* Please note that we ensured adequate internal consistency of the measurement scale for the transition from simple items to synthetic measures requires

Source: authors` own study

The empirical data was collected within the project no. 2012/07/B/HS4/00701 financed by the National Science Centre of Poland and realised by Cracow University of Economics in the years 2013–2018. The research sample consisted of 355 internationalised firms operating in Poland. The characteristics of the sample is as follows (Maciejewski et al., 2022):

- size of firms: 14% micro-, 43% small, 30% medium-sized, 13% large enterprises,
- age of firms: Q1 = 14 years, Me = 20 years, Q3 = 25 years, Min = 1 year, Max = 183 years,
- ownership: 60% only domestic, 20% mixed, 20% foreign capital,
- sector of the economy: 58% manufacturing and construction, 40% trade and services, 2% agriculture,
- familiness: 45% family firms, 55% non-family firms,
- sex of respondents: 78% males, 22% females,
- position of responders: 18% owners, 45% CEO/directors, 37% other managerial posts.



## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the first step, we used simple logistic regression to check whether the assessment of the importance of resources and competences result in the creation of an international strategy in the firm. Whether or not the firm “has” such a strategy was assumed as the dichotomous dependent variable. The study was conducted for all (355) analysed firms. First, for both the resource and competence categories, we used a simple regression model with one explanatory variable (Resources/Competences), the value of which was determined by determining the arithmetic mean for the components of both categories (Table 2–3).

The resource-strategy model (Table 2) is statistically significant. The  $p$ -value for the Chi-square test is 0.00008, which means that the estimated model is a significantly better fit to the data than the null model containing only free expression. Resources proved to be a factor with a statistically significant effect ( $p=0.0003$ ) on international strategy formation in the firm. The odds ratio of 1.5828, which tells us that an increase in the rating of the importance of resources in the firm by a unit results in a 58.3% increase in the probability of having an international strategy.

Table 2. The impact of the resources (in total) on the creation of an international strategy in a firm

Statistics	Model: Logistic regression (logit)	
	Final loss: 165.567184 Chi2(1)=15.673 p=0.00008	
	Const.	Resources
Estimate	-3.7910	0.4592
Standard Error	0.6792	0.1249
t	-5.5812	3.6757
$p$ -value	0.0000	0.0003
Wald's Chi-square	31.1497	13.5104
$p$ -value	0.0000	0.0002
Odds ratio	0.0226	1.5828

Source: authors' own study ( $n = 355$ )

The competence-strategy model is statistically significant. The  $p$ -value for the Chi-square test is 0.01965, which means that the estimated model is a significantly better fit to the data than the null model containing only free expression. Competences proved to be a factor with a statistically significant effect ( $p=0.0248$ ) on the creation of an international strategy in a firm. The odds ratio of 1.3798, which tells us that an increase in the rating of the importance of Competencies in the company by a unit increases the probability of having an international strategy by 38%.

In the second step, we built a multiple logistic regression model for the resources and competencies categories, in which we took the individual components of both categories as independent variables in order to determine which resources/competencies have the greatest influence on the creation of international strategy in the firm (Table 4–5).



Table 3. The impact of competences (in total) on the creation of an international strategy in a firm

Statistics	Model: Logistic regression (logit)	
	Final loss: 170.68211813 Chi2(1)=5.4436 p=0.01965	
	Const.	Competences
Estimate	-3.1963	0.3220
Standard Error	0.8048	0.1428
t	-3.9716	2.2545
p-value	0.0001	0.0248
Wald's Chi-square	15.7739	5.0830
p-value	0.0001	0.0242
Odds ratio	0.0409	1.3798

Source: authors' own study ( $n = 355$ )

The resource-strategy model (Table 4) is statistically significant. The  $p$ -value for the Chi-square test is 0.00001, which means that the estimated model is a significantly better fit to the data than the null model containing only constant term. Human resources ( $p=0.0467$ ) and information Resources ( $p=0.0014$ ) were found to be statistically significant for international strategy formation in the firm. The odds ratio of 1.2903 and 1.4472 tells us that an increase in the importance rating of human resources and information resources in the firm by a unit results in an increase in the probability of having an international strategy by 29% and 44.7% respectively.

Table 4. The impact of the particular resources on the creation of an international strategy in a firm

Statistics	Model: Logistic regression (logit)					
	Final loss: 158.10497373 Chi2(5)=30.598 p=0.00001					
	Const.	Financial resources	Human resources	Physical resources	Information resources	Intangible resources
Estimate	-4.2628	-0.0512	0.2548	-0.0528	0.3696	-0.0163
Standard Error	0.7791	0.0812	0.1277	0.0840	0.1146	0.1174
t	-5.4714	-0.6310	1.9958	-0.6279	3.2246	-0.1384
p-value	0.0000	0.5284	0.0467	0.5305	0.0014	0.8900
Wald's Chi-square	29.9367	0.3982	3.9832	0.3943	10.3983	0.0192
p-value	0.0000	0.5280	0.0460	0.5301	0.0013	0.8899
Odds ratio	0.0141	0.9501	1.2903	0.9486	1.4472	0.9839

Source: authors' own study ( $n = 355$ )

Although the competence-strategy regression model (Table 5) is within the limits of statistical significance ( $p < 0.10$ ), but none of the listed competencies proved to be statistically significant for the creation of an international strategy in the firm.

Table 5. The impact of the particular competences on the creation of an international strategy in a firm

Statistics	Model: Logistic regression (logit)						
	Final loss: 168.07112695 Chi2(6)=10.666 p=0.09932						
	Const.	1: managerial knowledge	2: professional knowledge	3: conceptual skills	4: interpersonal skills	5: opportunities exploitation skills	6: proactive decision-making skills
Estimate	-3.6128	0.1880	0.1241	0.1479	-0.0813	0.1854	-0.1875
Standard Error	0.9770	0.1551	0.1822	0.1956	0.1734	0.1573	0.1309
t	-3.6981	1.2125	0.6812	0.7560	-0.4685	1.1792	-1.4329
p-value	0.0003	0.2261	0.4962	0.4502	0.6397	0.2391	0.1528
Wald's Chi-square	13.6757	1.4702	0.4641	0.5715	0.2195	1.3904	2.0532
p-value	0.0002	0.2253	0.4957	0.4497	0.6394	0.2383	0.1519
Odds ratio	0.0270	1.2068	1.1322	1.1594	0.9220	1.2037	0.8290

Source: authors' own study ( $n = 355$ )

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the empirical results and statistical calculations we can prove that resources have a significant impact on the creation of an international strategy in internationalised firms from Poland (H1). In contrast to resources in total, the results for specific individual resources are no longer so clear-cut. Among the resources, human resources (H1.2) are of some importance, while information resources (H1.4) are of greatest importance for the development of the international strategy (which means that out of all sub-hypotheses only H1.4 is clearly confirmed).

We have also proved that competences have a significant impact on the creation of an international strategy in internationalised firms from Poland (H2). When disaggregating to the level of individual competences, no statistical significance was confirmed for any of the variables for the development of an international strategy in Polish companies.

This study may be of a cognitive, but also application-like nature. However, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, it is a study conducted on a sample of Polish firms, and the results of the research cannot be generalized due to the research sample selection. Future empirical studies may go towards identifying the impact of resources and competences on other aspects of the internationalisation process, such as early internationalisation (Maciejewski, Wach, Głodowska, 2022). Secondly, it is a cross-sectional study that makes it impossible to fully verify the cause-effect relationships between the studied variables, which is only possible when conducting dynamic studies. In subsequent research in this trend, it is therefore worth paying attention to other approaches to resources and competences and to determine how they affect the internationalisation process (e.g. explicit and implicit knowledge, organisational culture, entrepreneurial knowledge).

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