

Could Legitimacy through Corporate Social Responsibility be an Antecedent for Export Performance Enhancement: an Exploratory Study

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Abstract

The search for better legitimacy in an institutional context within social responsible decisions is the main focus of the present work paper. This strategic tradeoff could stimulate stakeholders' initiatives for ultimate cooperation with companies. The latter could leverage up resources managed by public institutions in order to develop better export performance. Social norms and institutional mechanisms are, however, fostered to raise legitimacy components. Thus, stakeholders use these norms and institutional processes to assess company's legitimacy. The exploratory study depicts the likely relationship between legitimacy and export performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are deemed to be legitimate; however, social actions are ignored by interviewers

Key words: Institutional process, social norms, legitimacy, corporate social responsibility, stakeholders' identification, marketing performance.

Determinism and voluntarism of companies toward environmental changes mark a strategic dynamic that guides them in the fog of uncertainty. The confusion between appearance and reality, and the difficulty of discerning what is appropriate make alliances, coalitions and refocus create attempts to reduce risks from environmental firms. Environmental change and industry pressures are constraints that impact on the companies' competitiveness, acting significantly on the

interaction between market players and stakeholders. It is in this regard the components of the institutional environment.

As market regulator, the political and public oversee the conduct of economic activities through public policy, which aims

to safeguard the public interest. Companies can not ignore this source of stress, which delimits the scope of their marketing efforts to protect the weaker parties in an institutional system. This is a central strategy for many companies, particularly in the areas of genetically modified food products, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, etc.

Participate in the same way as their competitors, institutions and pressure groups in the formulation of public policies has become a strategic imperative for companies seeking to improve their competitiveness. It also shows that relations between political authorities and public are designed through the legitimacy, whose mechanisms make it an exercise of power.

Legitimacy gives players the power to influence their stakeholders to validate their interests vis-à-vis public institutions

involved in the controversy or question of public interest. This contributes significantly to the effectiveness of lobbying strategies that concerned firms are considering implementation, because legitimacy emphasizes concerted actions through the creation of a potential dialogue.

Furthermore, companies are surviving in societies, which are more systematized than ever before. Indeed, the various stakeholders and social partners exert relentless pressure on companies because of hurdles to satisfy different needs. Governments, interest groups, consumers and associations representing various minorities are becoming increasingly suspicious toward marketing activities implemented by companies. Since socially responsible initiatives that stem from the industries are deemed to be imperatives for their survival and competitiveness.

We propose to analyze in this article the benefits of integrating social responsibility actions firms' marketing programs, thus raising our analysis to the underlying concept of legitimacy.

Corporate Social Responsibility: A Literature Review

Since the 50s, management literature has enriched the theoretical foundations addressing the social behaviour of companies (Bown, 1953) and social performance of the market players (Caroll, 1979), which therefore remain ambiguous concepts in the eyes of theorists (Wemefelt, 1984). Indeed, these concepts have been analysed particularly in sociology and management, creation a conceptual perspective evolution in the 90s. Therefore, it is important to note in this regard the semantics that have occurred in the literature in management and marketing deployed regarding social responsibility concept.

The corporate social responsibility (CSR) was seen in the early '50s as a social obligation, which among other is a constraint that all market participants must submit to align with the objectives and values of society (Bown, 1953). It is the

same in the 80s and 90s, in fact the theory of social responsibility as a social obligation has been advocated by several authors in management and marketing (Ackerman, 1975) (Caroll, 1979) (Rowly, 1997). This requirement comes in different forms (Caroll, 1979) (Wood, 1991), namely an economic obligation means that an economically viable and productive, a legal obligation and ethical values and conveys social norms and obligations referring to the philanthropic proactive actions to contribute to the preservation of the public interest.

Social responsibility was also seen as a constraint imposed by the stakeholders. The description as a social obligation has been questioned because the industries are not responsible for the social problems inherent but positive or negative impacts of their actions can positively or negatively affect the society (Maignan and Fereell, 2004) (Wood and Raymond, 1995). It appears that companies are required to take into consideration the needs and requirements of partners acting in the environment around the company. These partners are employees, consumers, suppliers, shareholders, governments and policy makers, communities and interest groups.

Social responsibility was also seen as an ethical orientation of the authors in management and sociology (Ackerman, 1975) (Swanson, 1995) (Wood, 1991). Indeed, the social initiatives of companies are driven by a motivation research interests. In other words, the social action is potentially successful only when particular interests are deemed to be positioned in relation to the general interests of society. It follows that a player sees its interests supported only when they conform to standards and goals of society. It is in this context the search for legitimacy to its social partners, which provides for the actor easier access to resources held by those who seized power (Ben Sedrine and Demil, 1996).

Social responsibility was finally considered as an organizational process. Indeed, it is in this respect socially responsible behaviour

on the part of firms that are the culmination of organizational processes (Ackerman, 1975) (Swanson, 1995). These behaviours raise the interests of social partners in implementing their marketing efforts stimulating a positive impact on welfare and assessing the environment taking into account the requirements of stakeholders (Wood, 1991).

Due to the differences experienced by the conceptual integration of social responsibility in the management discipline, the major difficulty remains linked to the interlocking of economic and organizational perspective in that of social obligation. Indeed, the literature is still poor at conceptualization and empirical investigations because of the inadequacy of the two perspectives (social obligation and organizational performance). So it turns out that both perspectives can not be easily integrated due to the incompatibility of values, the influence of individual choices and close ethical orientation (Carroll, 1979) (Wood and Raymond, 1995) (Swanson, 1995). Because of the complexity of strategies, organizational turbulence and dynamic business environment, the social obligation and the economic performance remain at least two opposing concepts (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004). However attempts to develop theoretical interlocking of the two perspectives have been considering organizational decisions and principles integration (macro and micro) of corporate social responsibility (Swanson, 1995).

Social responsibility was introduced in the marketing discipline to try to measure its contribution to business performance in the marketplace. Several studies have been focused on the integration of social actions and marketing strategies that have revealed the impact of these on the competitiveness of firms in markets (Archibalt *et al*, 1990) (Barone *et al*, 2000). As a result social marketing emerged, which revolves around the contribution of marketing activity to socially accepted goals and behaviours. It is important to note however that the research work in this direction have failed to highlight the nature of the relationship between

corporate social responsibilities and marketing performance.

In this same context, socially responsible actions may be the antecedent favours enslaved by social partners of the company provided that the social norms and principles of these align with those of the firm. It is well recognized that environmental stakeholders to support each other by the congruence of social norms and principles (Handelman and Arnold, 1999). This congruence of norms and principles also creates an alignment of interests of different business partners, thus enhancing the cooperation activities and support them (Clarckson, 1995). It appears this is the birth of coalitions¹ to safeguard the interests of stakeholders that go beyond marketing goals (Handelman and Arnold, 1999). The actions support the company and its partners are moderated by social legitimacy, which in turn is partly explained by the social performance (Clarckson, 1995).

In what follows, we analyze the potential relationship between corporate social responsibility and legitimacy as the background for identifying social partners.

Social Responsibility and Legitimacy

It should be noted first the determinants of legitimacy and the importance of socially responsible behaviour in determining the process of legitimating. In this regard it is important to highlight the concept of legitimacy.

What is Legitimacy?

It is obvious that the survival of a business depends on acceptance of its existence by its stakeholders. This assumption is based on the idea that an individual must assume the legitimacy of its actions to ensure a territory in society (Grant, 1991). Similarly, companies are forced to adopt their goals

¹ This kind of coalition is not formal, it is pooling resources to cope with a potential threat (Bensedrine 1996),(Baron 1996)

and values to make its stakeholders consider its behaviour as fair and useful (Pfeffer and Slancik, 1978).

Thus, it is important for companies to appear legitimate with respect to its social partners to ensure a degree of acceptability of its actions in its surroundings. Therefore, the legitimacy concept refers to a continuous process which the firm is constantly struggling to prove the suitability of its proposals and attitude in order to gain acceptance by its interlocutors.

Legitimacy is crucial for the survival of the company in its environment. An organization that does not consider the legitimacy of its marketing actions could disappear quickly. Legitimacy is therefore a pillar of the company's survival through outside support necessary for smooth relations with its social partners (Baron, 1995). It follows from this analysis that the company should care regarding the looks worn by the actors in its environment to its attitudes, to ensure the sustainability of its competitive advantage in the market. This conception of legitimacy stems from the idea that it is an external management process of relationships with various environments (Bartha, 1990), found in the definition of legitimacy:

« Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” ((Suchman 1995: 574)

“Legitimacy is the key demand factor in assessing social fitness by creating socially accepted cultural accounts of channel relationships” (Radjeep&Ravi 2002: 84).

Partly determined by the dominant values of companies and their conceptions of what are the methods and performance standards of the institutional system, legitimacy is a subjective and varied attribute (Ben Sedrine and Demil, 1996). Indeed, its subjective aspect is the fact that

it is the product of different actors' perceptions of the environment. An organization may well seem legitimate part of its environment and not another. The key for now is to choose the environments where it is important to appear legitimate, ie its relevant social partners.

Since its stakeholders have resources and can impede access to these resources, companies are forced to seek legitimacy for their survival on the market (Robert, 1990). However, it is important to note the interaction between institutional actors and business in the process of seeking legitimacy. Indeed, pressure groups (or interest) may hinder the interests of an industry if they realize that firms implement actions that are not legitimate. As a result, companies lose accreditation of these groups, which could constitute a real threat to their survival. Companies can develop joint actions with these groups (Bartha, 1990) (Grant, 1991) (Suchman, 1995).

In this same context, then legitimacy is an external variable to the firm's organization, assigned by his environment. It puts pressure on firms to adapt their behaviour in relation to culturally and socially accepted standards.

In this regard it is worth noting that the subjective aspect of legitimacy might be a battleground for a power development by means of control of economic and strategic market (Ben Sedrine and Demil, 1996). In other words, legitimacy can be managed, manipulated and used as a strategic weapon to advance the interests of firms at the expense of the general interest (Bartha, 1990). This mechanism of enhancement and strengthening of the legitimacy of corporate actions is by means of intensive communication strategies.

The study of Elsbach (1994) was inspired by communications of firms that are seeking legitimacy. The author shows that companies begin by recognizing the facts alleged by their surroundings then they refer to social norms. The latter is the

belief of stakeholders on actions perspectives developed by companies, what is the process of legitimating that we will deal later.

Ultimately, a company A trying to prove its legitimacy (or the legitimacy of its actions) through the acceptance of its actions by an actor B (stakeholders) at a time *t* during the relationship. Legitimacy is then taken as the image returned by the other actors.

Baron (1996) considers that the search for legitimacy is a primary step for the preparation of a potential concerted action. Indeed, the author shows that external support from a power that a company has managed to acquire during the process of legitimating which could help in the prospects for effective concerted action.

For purposes of this research, we will adopt Baron's framework (1996) and that of Bensedrine (1996) argued for a pragmatic conception of Suchman (1995), which states that legitimacy is a strategic process to enhance the acceptability with stakeholders in order to gain their support that the company needs for its strategic objectives. This applies to producers of genetically modified food, which are looking to date the legitimacy of their innovations by delivering messages to convince the public about the usefulness of these products in terms of fight against starvation and nutrient inputs in their consumption. This process of seeking legitimacy or legitimating is implemented to gain the support of stakeholders (the public, customers, suppliers, competitors, institutions, government policy makers ...) to achieve the effectiveness of collective to prevent the development of regulations that can thwart the production of GM products. This strategy has borne fruit for the producers of GMOs in abolishing any process of political decisions that result in international trade barriers especially for large markets such as North America, European Union, Japan and South-East Asia countries. However, a tax has been implemented by all countries of the world that provides for labelling products containing GMOs.

It may be noted from this study that there is an interrelation and complementarily between the concepts of the legitimacy and legitimating. Also, it important to study the behaviour of firms in a process of legitimating to fill examine the complementarily of both concepts for the development of a strategy to pressure (Ben Sedrine and Demil, 1996) (Robert, 1990). The next section will be a review of the literature of the concept of legitimacy.

Determinants of Legitimacy:

Management and marketing literature has ignored the influence of the institutional environment on behaviour, attitudes, interactions and marketing performance of companies. It is obvious here that the political and public authorities are a source of constraints to companies through the implementation of codes of conduct and defining appropriate behaviour as perceived by stakeholders. These codes of conduct are similar to institutional mechanisms that are directing the institutions' operations for the benefit of the political and public structure. The latter governs the relationships and interactions between different market players.

Radjeep and Ravi (2002) argued that public policy takes the form of regulatory, validation and attendance mechanisms. Indeed, the regulatory process (or control) results from the interaction between firms and regulatory institutions (government institutions, the legal system ...). These institutions provide stability, order and continuity of societies. Other institutions have the responsibility for maintaining the well-being, preserve or create conditions for fair competition and protect the weaker parties in an institutional system (Archibalt *et al*, 1990). Moreover, regulatory mechanisms operate through the imposing process and incentive process.

In an institutional system, the government can adopt binding measures when the interests of a company are in conflict with the interests of the most sensitive public interests (Radjeep and Ravi, 2002). In this case, the social response must create institutional elements reinforced by

coercion, which forms a heavy pressure on companies to interpret standards and canalize social behaviours and structures of firms in the market (Ackerman, 1975). It is the imposing mechanism.

During the process of evolution, a matter of public interest may not attain the status of a law or regulation. In this regard, the tensions between actors in an institutional system is very strong, the power dynamic undergoes unexpected alterations sometimes moving from one point to another in the same system. The incentive process proves when the political and public entities discern between the costs of incentives and benefits from the prosperity of some sectors. Institutions will then opt for an incentive policy.

Validation can be defined here as the ability of an organization to certify the conformity of acts developed by another on the basis of accreditation criteria (Baum and Oliver, 1991)². The validation mechanisms include processes that are at the level of interaction between the normative institutions such as trade associations, professional and businesses associations. The creation of such a type of institution aims to create a socially acceptable behaviour towards the various stakeholders.

The interaction between enterprises, professional associations and governments is based on the protection of the weaker stakeholders who may be negatively affected in a transactional process. The efforts of these associations have combined to promote the interests of weaker parties (Radjeep and Ravi, 2002). They can exert pressure on firms in an industry to comply with standards considered in the context of socially responsible behaviour. Moreover, trade or professional associations create accreditation standards of the profession in the sector in order to canalize the actions of corporations to protect corporate interests.

Radjeep and Ravi (2002) identify the mechanism to validate the authorization

process and those of acquisition. The first type of process is the order and set a code of conduct that guides the behaviour, attitudes and business structures in an appropriate procedural legitimacy (Clarckson, 1995) (Suchman, 1995), while the second designate the type of process change and organizational transformations and structures that will have direct impacts on marketing strategy of the company. These changes are the result of a development consistent with the dynamic environment. However, it is noteworthy that these structural and strategic changes are mainly designed for a better organizational performance in the market, while seeking the effectiveness of their activities by means of legitimacy. It follows from that fact that firms develop organizational structures that have enjoyed success in relation to social issues attracting stakeholders' interests (Maignan and Ferrell, 2004). The organizational ability to respond to pressure from interest groups according to several authors is a performance criterion of social responsibility of firms (Ackerman, 1975) (Clarckson, 1995).

Institutional mechanisms have relentless pressure on firms' behaviour in the market. Indeed the processes of validation and imposition structures draw their political and social norms from relevant stakeholders that are involved in these processes implementation. As a result, the legitimacy of market players including companies is valued on the basis of organizational direction to these institutional mechanisms. Handelman and Arnold (2001) identify legitimacy on the basis of marketing socially responsible actions. Marketing actions being aligned with the standards of rivalry and loyalty is designated as improving pragmatic legitimacy of the firm in question³.

Export Performance: An Operationalization Proposal

² P 201

³ Authors recognize these actions as 'Performative actions'

Differences in measures of export performance generate difficulties of comparison between the contradictory results of various researches. This is mainly due to the independent variables heterogeneity and the diversity of scales to measure export performance (Zou and Osland, 1998). This conceptual disagreement export performance has led some authors to worry about the adequacy of export performance construct compared to the dimensions attributed to the concept. This leads us to believe that export performance has many facets, which leads to the ultimate impact on the external validity of the concept, in a way that a single dimension is attributed to insufficient reliability of the assessment (Shoham, 1998).

To deal with this methodological problem, we will rely primarily on the work of Katsikas et al (2000) and Sousa (2004) to assess and highlight the relevant aspects of performance measures to export.

The study Katsikas et al (2000) has increased on a reading of 93 research works developed through the analysis of export performance. Indeed, the approach taken by the authors articulated through the counting and assessment approaches and operationalization of the concept of empirical investigation of export performance through the protocol methods for encoding assessment through criteria established by researchers in export marketing (Katsikeas *et al*, 2000)⁴.

Moreover, the study of Sousa (2004) reveals the problem of the dominance of objective criteria on those subjective. Based on a reading of 43 works produced in export performance, the study provides five indicators of performance significantly solicited by the work designated: The export intensity, growth of export sales, the export profitability, Market share in export and growth in export sales. These criteria are used as topics during the interviews that we conducted with company's managers and public institutions executives.

Methodology

The objective of the present work is to highlight the institutionalized behaviour of export companies and to discuss the reasons for which firms interact with institutions, and with what standards the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are aligned in order to develop their legitimacy? We opted for a qualitative study to develop an understanding of strategic behaviour of exporting firms with respect to some specialized agencies, which aim to promote exports. The methodology aims to highlight the views and experiences of Tunisian exporters and their interactions with the three institutions: The Centre for Promotion of Exports (CEPEX), the Desktop Access to Export Markets (FAMEX) and the Fund Export Promotion (FOPRODEX) and the Industry Promotion Agency (API). It is important to note also the role of professional associations, such as federations within the Tunisian Union of Industry and Commerce (UTICA).

We initially opted for in-depth interviews with semi-directed leaders of these three institutions as well as with presidents of some federations, such as federations of metallurgy, the federations of plastic products and derivatives in order to highlight the criteria through which these institutions consider the legitimacy of each exporting firm. Then, in a second step, we have conducted in-depth interviews with export managers from 15 exporting companies located in Tunis and Bizerte. The interview guides were developed based on the results of interviews with leaders of institutions. Each interviewee is encouraged to give us his views on the decisions taken within the company vis-à-vis social and environmental standards (measures of health and safety of employees at work, reductions in emissions of pollutants and waste ... etc.) and program development or export assistance (Upgrade Program, the Industrial Modernization Program) implemented by public institutions such as the Agency for Industries, Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Commerce. In addition, the interviewee is asked to provide his views on the reactions of his company in respect of other programs that have been

⁴ P 494

developed by institutions of export assistance, to test the degree of adaptation of the firm relative to the institutional requirements. All interviews were focused mainly on changing decisions of export marketing, such as (transforming an indirect export to a direct export, exploration of markets outside the European Union, participation in international fairs other European specialties, development of new products according to different standards to those of the European Union, New distribution contracts signed with distributors in Asian markets ...).

All interviews were recorded on MP3 media, and have been transcribed literally in an epistolary form. Then, WordMapper8.0 software has been used to merge all the 15 texts together, thereby controlling the information from the records of responses. This software contains powerful classification algorithms developed for text analysis, and allows us to:

- To combine words into homogeneous classes (Cluster);
- To select phrases or segments of texts that refer to the same theme (calculated density);
- Identify the different contexts of use of a word (determination of the centrality);
- To cross the textual information (qualitative) with information placed in fields closed (quantitative).

Results of interviews with experts:

We have requested from the Director of Industrial Promotion Agency (IPA), the Director General of the FAMEX, the director general of CEPEX, three representatives of professional associations, and some faculty members in sociology, management and political science to communicate the words that come to their minds, thinking of the concepts of legitimacy and institutionalized behaviour. It should be noted that we have made the explanation of the problem of this work, to facilitate the contextualization of

words chosen (Gulfand, 1999)⁵. It is in this context of creativity or brainstorming methods through which the interviewees are not only express their minds before the subjects of the concepts conveyed, but also to talk while leaving an analogy that the words chosen to represent their views. The selection of teachers and researchers from different disciplines and experts was in aim of finding more words that can help us later to set the themes appealing to interviews with exporting firms. Subsequently, we counted the words which were repeated, because the repetitive contents are considered more prevalent (Guelfand, 1999). The results of this method are presented in Table 1⁶.

For the concept of legitimacy, the results of association study reveal the full association with the word "compliance" which was repeated in all situations of brainstorming (see Table 1). This shows the strong association of conformity with the institutional legitimacy, we will further develop with experts and entrepreneurs. Similarly, the "acceptability", "alignment" and "institutional integration" are words often spoken by the interviewees.

It is clear in this regard that in referring to the opinions of experts and researchers, we can then define the terms that will guide us towards determining the themes we will try to develop through a second series of depth interviews. It is worth mentioning that the use of a method of association of ideas or opinions is very useful for the operationalization of new concepts in the marketing discipline (Guelfand, 1999).

⁵ This technique is frequently used in clinical studies or opinion in order to facilitate the understanding of what happens as inference in the minds of respondents. We are based on the book Guelfand (1999)

⁶ The study was conducted with six teachers and researchers in sociology, two lecturers in political science and director of CEPEX FAMEX director, an official responsible for promoting exports, four representatives of professional associations in UTICA

Table 1 : Outputs of Word Associations with Legitimacy

Concepts	Evoked Words	Number of times repeated	Pourcentage (%)
	Acceptability	13	87
	Alignment	9	60
	Institutional Integration	10	67
Legitimacy	Conformity	15	100
	Adequacy	4	27
	Influence	7	47
	Instrumentalism	3	20
	Validity	8	14
	Norms	4	27

Therefore, we conducted a second qualitative study based primarily on depth interviews with directors of some public institutions specialized in export, such as CEPEX, FAMEX and FOPRODEX, as well as representations of some professional associations specializing in exporting⁷. In addition, we conducted interview sessions with manufacturing exporters who have already benefited from funding from the API for the renewal of technological equipment to enhance their competitiveness in export markets, or export subsidies granted by CEPEX or FAMEX, or information from the international market research developed by these agencies in collaboration with international market studies offices⁸. These interviews were conducted in order to discuss with business leaders regarding the

⁷ The number of these associations is 40. They are in constant relationship with export agencies to defend the interests of exporters from public institutions

⁸ The latest study was funded by the FAMEX with a consultancy to study the Canadian export potential for a number of craft products. Several professional societies have been involved UTICA to benefit from the results of this study (from the director of the FAMEX)

actions implemented by their companies in terms of seeking legitimacy.

Content analysis of interviews:

Based on the opinions held of expert researchers and entrepreneurs, we may be able to outline their arguments, if correct, the choice of themes appealing to dimensional concepts. In this same sense, the lobbying of exporters in Tunisia took place in the following situations:

- ❖ Potential threats: it is such institutional decisions that may affect the interests of an industry;
- ❖ Opportunities held by political institutions and public resources such as such as funding, grants and information from market studies;
- ❖ Opportunities seizures because of the unavailability of resources;
- ❖ Minimize conflict and build cooperation and partnerships with government or public institution.

In addition, respondents showed their interests toward the relationships of their firms with public institutions that are sources of export opportunities. Indeed, the integration of public policy requirements in

their firm's organizations is a pivotal element in determining their acceptability among government policy makers. This acceptability depends heavily on the complying of export marketing actions with institutional requirements, which strengthens the legitimacy. The content analysis of speeches, conducted with business leaders reveals that there is a strong association between the concepts of legitimacy and that of the lobbying activity. Indeed, legitimacy is significantly represented by terms that are in close proximity to each other, such as "true" and "trust", "requirements" bodies "etc..." (See Appendix 1). This explains, a priori, that the concept of legitimacy is associated with a pragmatic line, which shows through the quality of products, equipment, technology, competitiveness and certification, while the institutional legitimacy is revealed by means of participation in programs established by the government through public institutions, such as programs

Upgrading and Modernization Program of Industries. As a consequence, the legitimacy of a company is stronger when its strategic plans tend to develop behaviours consistent with the values of public institutions. Moreover, the pattern of speech carried by respondents converges towards two key words to find the export business and new markets conquered. This brings us to the ideas that arise in the minds of the interviewees that are moving directly to export performance and the search for new markets (See Appendix 1)

Based on the distribution factor of density and centrality (see Appendix 2), the results obtained through factorial dimensions of word classes allow us to identify emerging themes. Regarding the legitimacy, WordMapper outputs reveal classes or clusters⁹ of words that allow us to highlight relevant themes (see Appendix 2). It is important to note that the weights of the clusters are measured by their densities, calculated through the following formula (Guillard, 2006).

$$D = \frac{\Sigma \text{ Internal Co-occurrence of the cluster}}{\Sigma \text{ Co-occurrence between words in the cluster and all other}}$$

The density of the cluster represents the degree of autonomy and specificity of the cluster. Each cluster is a separate theme, which will be analyzed later. Classes proved to be as follows:

- (Business line) support;
- (Organisms possess);
- ((Makers important) favor);
- (Trust (expand ((production products) quality)));
- ((Advanced Technology) (competitiveness));
- (((Customer relations) (Fairs operations)) (foreign (financial information)));
- (((Help coalitions) request) (business associations))

- (Federations (form (include professional)));
- (Receive (CEPEX FAMEX)) ((export markets) new);
- Administrative decisions (made) requirements;
- (((Benefits institutions) exercise) pressure

⁹ A cluster consists of words that have often been at together. Parentheses explain the words of the central cluster, a word is enclosed in parentheses and is considered pivotal theme in question (Guillard 2006)

The definitions of Jean-Pierre Courtial (1990)¹⁰ concerning the density and centrality classes are a contribution to theme identification and analysis. Indeed, the author defines the centrality of a cluster as the sum of external links. He identifies clusters corresponding to themes such as "choke point", explaining thus the links between the subjects and others. If a text contains a corresponding theme it is supposed to treat others. This theme is designated by strategic theme.

However, the density of a cluster means the average value of internal links (between words in the cluster). It helps to identify the clusters corresponding to topics where the associations are strong; it is an expression of a consensus around this theme. The centrality and density issues are represented graphically by two orthogonal axes (see Appendix 2). On the x-axis are represented the values of the centrality classes. The values of the density classes are represented on the y-axis.

It is in this regard to distinguish between the different classifications of classes according to their densities and centralities. Indeed, WordMapper (Guillard, 2006) identified four classifications of clusters. Each classification comes from one of the quadrants released from the centre lines drawn from the median values of the axis of the density and centrality. The median values for each axis in this case corresponds to the value of 6 (see Appendix 2). By raising the median axes, we will construct four quadrants whose meanings are presented as follows¹¹:

- Classes or themes that are highly dense with a high centrality (upper right quadrant): These classes are called focal themes of discourse organizers;

- Classes or non-dense central themes: what are the themes of discourse junctions (sort of context);
- Classes or dense non-core themes: they are specialized topics;
- Classes or no central theme or dense: they are frontiers and peripheral areas.

Based on this classification, we identify the different types of themes of this research:

- 1 - Themes focal discourse organizers:
 - Administrative decisions (made) requirements
 - (((Benefits institutions) exercise) pressure
 - (Receive (CEPEX FAMEX)) ((export markets) new)
 - (((Help coalitions) request) (business associations) (Federations (form (include professional))))
- 2 - Non-dense central themes are the focus for this speech:
 - (((Customer relations) (Fairs operations)) (foreign (financial information)))
 - (Trust (expand ((production products) quality)))
- 3 - no topics or dense core, which are border areas or devices:
 - (Organisms possess)
 - (Business line) using
 - ((Makers important) favor)
 - ((Advanced Technology) (competitiveness))

Referring to Appendix 2, no central theme is dense in the upper left quadrant.

In this regard, we note the characteristics of each quadrant of topics. Indeed, the focal themes allude to lobbying activities implemented by export companies toward public institutions cited in the speech. Thus, the focal themes quadrant shows the relationship between the words "pressure", "benefits" and "Institutions". Finally, the same quadrant identifies the co-occurrences of the words "audience", "benefit" and "administrative".

¹⁰ Quoted by the guide WordMapper V8, Grimmersoft (available www.grimmersoft.com): Jean-Pierre Courtial (1990): "Introduction to sientométrie, bibliometrics to technological" *Economica*

¹¹ Guide WordMapper V8 available www.grimmersoft.com

Importantly, the combination of the words "benefit", "export markets" and "new" in the same cluster. It follows that respondents associate cognitively strategies institutional approach with the advantages and benefits sought from public institutions dedicated to export and that the ultimate goal of the interaction of the exporting company with its institutional environment is seeking new export markets.

In this connection, WordMapper offers users view the subtopics and the co-occurrences of the component words. In this regard, Appendix 2 presents the compositions of the cluster "business line, help" sub themes¹².

In referring to classes of words, opinions of experts and literature, the concept of legitimacy raises a number of themes that we propose as follows:

- Actions of legitimacy toward the institutions of regulations:

- **Theme 1:** Compliance marketing efforts of the company relative to the regulation
- **Theme 2:** Compliance marketing decisions of the exporting company to government programs: Upgrade, Industry Modernization Program and adoption incentives of government programs, participation in institutional programs incentives for export activity.

- The actions of legitimacy vis-à-vis the institutions of accreditation:

- **Theme 3:** Involvement of the company in trade and professional associations, which are designated in this case by the federations UTICA: it is the professional integration;

- **Theme 4:** Organisational changes caused by the search for legitimacy, and their

¹² Clicking on a cluster, we reach a second level graph to visualize the joint sub-themes that comprise the cluster. From this second level of the graph, we can list the sentences belonging to the cluster (Guillard 2006).

impact on export marketing decisions (adoption of new processes, new organizational procedures ...)

It should be noted here that the last theme was not explicitly mentioned by the interviewees. We have seen, a priori, that exporting firms adopt a strategic approach in their process of institutional integration. The organizational implications were not in the opinions held by business people interviewed. However, we shall consider the theme of organizational change and then test its statistical reliability.

Outputs displayed by WordMapper never presents words in the homogeneous classroom linked to social and environmental standards (such standards of health and safety of employees, management of harmful emissions to the natural environment) and export performance. Conversations with business people interviewed were focused on compliance activities with the public policies of institutions dedicated to export. The alignment of their activities in relation to institutional programs is of paramount concern to develop their legitimacy. Indeed, from measurements of density and centrality of terms given at in-depth interviews, we see full well the strong links between the terms "audience" Coalition "ask" enterprise associations "federations" and "coalition" while indicating a strong density and centrality of these terms. It appears that these words are frequently delivered together and contained within a single lexical convergence of speech (See Appendix 2). In addition, it should be noted that these terms are strongly associated with the term "benefit" win "CEPEX" FAMEX "export" market¹³ It also remains the words "activities consistent" key decision makers "Help" ... etc...

The frequency of the words spoken is represented in parallel with the convergence of speech. This will allow us to say that most interviews begin with a speech about government agencies to

¹³ In Appendix 2, there is a strong links between the two points that have high densities and centralities (top right)

export, and then it tends to prove the compliance of companies' marketing activities with policies for export development. Then, it is important to note that respondents showed a special interest in export performance and the search for new markets through government assistance (See Appendix 2).

Managerial Implications:

The search for greater institutional legitimacy is based primarily on the alignment of the marketing policy for export of Tunisian SMEs with the public policies implemented by the institutions designed for export. It shows that the environmental and social standards are never considered in the context of seeking a better export performance. Moreover, the interviewees did not mention a lexical link between socially responsible decisions and export performance. It follows that the legitimacy process foundation of a business varies from one institutional context to another.

Discussion and Conclusion:

The field study was mainly export-oriented industrial enterprises (Steel, Plastic, wiring, Mechanical / Metallurgical). These are under pressure from competition in export markets like the EU market where Asian companies (including Chinese) nibble market share because of their competitiveness in terms of costs and attempts catching up in terms of quality. We can see through the results of the study the behaviour of institutionalized entrepreneurs to enhance their competitiveness and face the uncertainties of the international environment. We will present a summary of opinions voiced by experts and business leaders.

- The CEPEX FAMEX, FOPRODEX, API as organizations that have funds and information. Companies see these institutions as sources of development of competitive advantages. Indeed, those who manage to forge relationships with government decision makers can access certain information especially those which focus on export opportunities and international public procurement.

Additionally, companies perceive that familiarity with these institutions is a boon in terms of financing of export operations and assistance in international fairs. Ultimately, these institutions are as sources of competitiveness, sustainable solutions to exporters to cope with competition.

- The influence of the institutional environment on the exploration of new export markets and improving the quality of products for export. In fact, exporting firms are dependent on relevant public institutions that offer more cooperation such as the implementation of programs of research and development to co-produce goods that meet the standards that vary from one market to another. This type of co-production of the involved institutions will be public and the business in an industry represented by a federation.
- The search for legitimacy and the behaviour of mimicry. To build relationships with these institutions, enterprises are required to develop their legitimacy. Indeed, they must implement marketing activities that align with the public policy of the state, especially in the development of exports which constitute a strategic sector. As a consequence; the protection of the public interest gets carried away in search of the fulfilment of personal or private interest. The relevant institutions seek to improve the export activity by protecting corporate interests. Thus in order to forge a place in the institutional system (institutional integration), companies have had to adopt in their organizations, public policy instruments such as government programs: Program Upgrade Program, Upgrading Industries. The adoption of these tools enables companies to develop legitimacy because it is an external signal from the alignment of marketing efforts.

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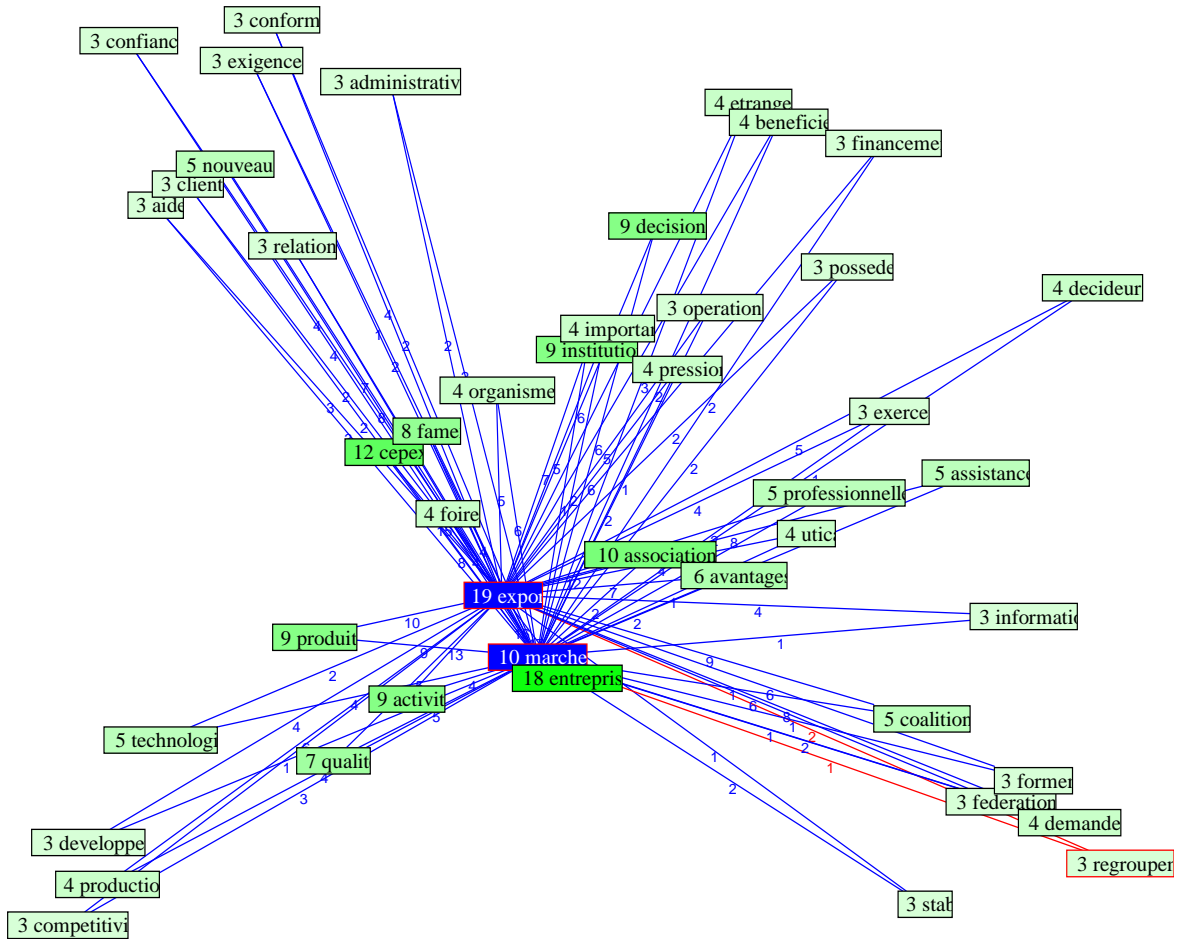
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APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

