

Innovations

Success Factors for Congolese SMEs in the International Context

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Abstract : *Internationalization is considered a growth strategy that contributes to the performance of SMEs internationally. With this in mind, the objective of this research is to identify the success factors of Congolese SMEs internationally. To achieve this objective, a qualitative prism is used, an interview guide is designed and submitted, through semi-structured interviews, to field actors working within the Hôtel Léon in the Republic of Congo. This methodology made it possible to collect data that rightly affirm that the success factors of Congolese SMEs internationally are explained by the profile of the manager, the culture at the antipodes of the values taught, the cumulative experience and the anticipatory monitoring. These results obtained in the field contribute significantly to the evolution of organizational strategies within SMEs. The theme of the result on anticipatory monitoring, being little studied in Congolese literature, constitutes the originality of our research and brings added value in the development of international strategies for Congolese SMEs.*

Keywords: *Success factors; SMEs; Congolese; Strategies; Internationalization.*

Introduction

Internationalization is a growth strategy that benefits from an undeniable position alongside specialization, diversification and vertical integration (Moloumba Mokango and Mzid, 2019). It is defined as an approach by which a company develops internationally (Sabiri, 2020). In the literature, internationalization is considered a strategy with a variable dimension whose modalities are multiple (Cocula, 2002). Two strategic approaches can circumscribe this multiple dimension in particular, export and establishment. The choice of an internationalization strategy is explained by the abysmal desire of a company to obtain more profitable markets internationally in order to strengthen its strategic positioning in its field of activity. To this end,

companies that decide to mobilize the internationalization strategy must have sustainable, unique and above all difficult to imitate capabilities in order to benefit from a sustainable competitive advantage and a defensible position in a specific area (Selhami and Alami, 2024).

The internationalization strategy is developed in several types of organizations. SMEs, which are not only the most numerous companies (Moloumba Mokango, 2021), but also those that create a lot of jobs and generate enough wealth (Moumou, 2018), generally call upon the internationalization strategy to protect themselves against the threat of market losses. This questioning of the internationalization strategy, in a global conception of the business strategy, is also explained by the desire to rationalize the positioning cycle of the SME, in relation to a new geographical space, at a particular moment in the growth of the company. The mobilization of the internationalization strategy, in a highly competitive environment, is also part of the anticipation to allow the SME to position itself differently on the international market for the purpose of sustainability (Moloumba Mokango and Nassè, 2024). In this respect, SMEs implement the principles of this anticipation by highlighting anticipatory monitoring which has become a decision-making tool (Chalus Sauvannet and Moloumba Mokango, 2023) for the success of this internationalization. Beyond this factual reality of SMEs, internationalization also draws its success from the ability of the SME manager to belong to a network of influence (Khayat, 2004). In this perspective, innovation (Karnowski and Kümpel, 2016), the consolidation of a position based on relationships (Selhami and Alami, 2024), new connections and cumulative experience (Johanson and Vahlne, 2017) in international business management are all variables that can explain the success of an SME internationally. In addition to these key success factors, which justify the competitiveness of SMEs through internationalization, technology is also added. It is in this respect, a determining lever that explains the success of the company internationally. Technology, as a resource (Barney, 1991) and a variable of success, contributes significantly to the creation of value that allows SMEs to launch internationally and to perpetuate themselves against any existing competitive swell.

In a continuum logic, some authors assert that the profile of the SME manager (Sultana, 2013) is a determining lever that explains the success of companies internationally. Assurance in the future, the fundamentals of team spirit, vision, motivational approaches, university level and the principles of better living together that constitute the profile of the manager characterize the success or failure of the internationalization strategy within an SME. In addition, each SME is distinguished by the customs and practices that govern its operation at the national or international level. As such, shared values, a results-oriented culture and competitiveness through performance (Charef and Figuigui, 2023) are foundations that help SMEs successfully expand into new international markets.

While the internationalization of SMEs is now established in northern countries, the question of the success factors of African SMEs internationally still remains. This is the experience of Congolese SMEs, which are increasingly less likely to develop internationalization strategies to explore new markets in foreign countries. However, in this strategic void, there is indeed the Hôtel Léon company, which has opted for internationalization, with remarkable feats, which remain less valued in the literature of management sciences and management. This article aims to present the specificities that clarify the success of this SME internationally. From this scientific desire for clarification, the following main question emerges: “what are the success factors of Congolese small and medium-sized enterprises internationally?”

Creating an SME in Congo is not an easy task. Far from being an exciting adventure, it remains a genuine commitment fraught with pitfalls of all kinds, often subtle and difficult to discern. From this perspective, an SME's internationalization strategy is the expression that determines the manager's desire to position themselves differently in an international environment by conquering new markets. This article is intended as an essential compass to help SMEs navigate the good waves of international opportunities. This research highlights the factors that determine the success of African SMEs abroad. In this perspective, it fills the gap that exists in the literature on strategic human resources management. It is a serious work that eliminates the blind spot of internationalization in SMEs at the African level. Beyond the theoretical aspects, the success factors of Congolese SMEs internationally is an enriching decision-making tool for African managers who wish to export their SMEs. Its relevance is triptych because it answers academic, strategic and practical questions in the life of universities and businesses.

The scientific framework of this research consists of four parts. First, it presents the theoretical framework of the research. Second, this work is structured around the methodological postulate. Third, this article provides increasing details on the SME studied. Fourth, this article lists the research results, the fruit of our fieldwork, followed by a discussion of the results.

A literature review to clarify internationalization in an SME context

In the 1960s, through strategic management theory, several researchers truly focused on the urgent need to identify the motives that encourage managers of SMEs, and indeed other companies, to choose internationalization as a sustainable and defensible growth strategy (Alexandre and Ayed, 2024). During the 1980s, internationalization was considered a variable that expressed the strategic improvement of the company (Porter, 1980). In the 2000s, the desire to conquer new markets in foreign countries appeared as a strategic positioning retained by SMEs that aligned themselves with the logic of sustainability (Cocula, 2002). From these strategic trends, it emerges that internationalization is born from a market orientation

advocated by certain SMEs that call upon approaches of strategic monitoring and innovation (Chalus Sauvannet , 2002;and Moloumba Mokango, 2023) to better understand environmental trends in order to help managers decide early and at the right time. This orientation encourages these SMEs to learn more about foreign customers, to stimulate their desires and to penetrate their markets with products capable of satisfying their needs. Therefore, the internationalization strategy can be defined as the capacity of an SME to expand its activities in order to gradually move from the national market to the international market by offering goods and services to a specific clientele, in a particular environment (A ssyakhand M essaouidi , 2023) . SMEs that are oriented towards the logic of the internationalization strategy are those that can increase the complexity of their organizational structures and that have the assets to face dual competition, particularly national and international. Beyond simple complex structuring, SMEs that operate internationally also develop remarkable managerial arrangements to minimize conflicts of interest between, on the one hand, managers, and on the other hand, shareholders.

This first part, which constitutes the theoretical framework of the research, is structured around two main axes. The first axis addresses the elements of success of SMEs internationally and the second axis provides specific guidelines on the multiple facets of internationalization.

Elements of success for SMEs internationally

Several elements constitute the key success factor for SMEs internationally. The work of Mastour and Elhakmi (2024) mentions competitive intelligence, which gives SMEs the opportunity to collect relevant and reliable information that can help them better understand the international market environment. In doing so, SME managers rely on competitive intelligence to track down real information capable of helping them make strategic decisions for the sustainability of the company. Along the same lines, Chalus-Sauvannet 's (2021) research uses the concept of competitive intelligence to explain the success of SMEs in a different way. For this researcher, competitive intelligence is the attentive ear that contributes, through active and proactive listening, to capturing weak signals, even in foreign markets, to detect weak points and clarify opportunities from the environment, with a view to encouraging companies to invest in new horizons.

The literature recognizes the role of the manager's profile in the success of SMEs internationally. Indeed, the publications of authors Alqoh and Yaouhi (2024) argue with increasing precision that successful SMEs are those whose managers have capabilities irreversibly oriented towards foreign markets to circumvent the competitive swell imposed by national markets.

As another success factor, studies conducted by Reda et al. (2024) call upon the cumulative experience variable of the SME manager. This factor is, according to these

authors, the set of capabilities accumulated by the company over the years. It constitutes the base on which the SME focuses to define its major strategic orientations internationally. Cumulative experience is not only the keystone of SMEs abroad, but also remains the determining factor in the emergence of new companies within new international markets (Zucchella et al., 2007).

Corporate culture also plays a key role in the internationalization of SMEs. Studies conducted by Deysine (2010) rightly affirm the need to consolidate corporate culture in order to easily establish oneself in a foreign country. With this in mind, SMEs that wish to establish themselves internationally invest tirelessly in understanding the shared values of the country concerned in order to prepare their human resources, align their products and limit the risks of offending certain sensitivities. Without being exhaustive, this section consists of presenting certain factors that determine the success of the internationalization strategy of SMEs. In the following lines, we will address the issue of the multiple facets of internationalization to better understand their implication in the competitiveness of SMEs.

The many facets of internationalization

Internationalization is a multi-variable growth strategy. These facets can be grouped around two main orientations, namely export strategies and implementation strategies (Cocula, 2002). The work of Baghdadi (2024) recalls that exporting is the most recurrent form that is mobilized when managers seek to export their SMEs internationally. Indeed, in the major concern of minimizing risks in terms of investment, SMEs seeking to establish themselves in a foreign country begin their operations with a strategic alliance strategy that involves export companies to transport raw materials to distant destinations. These companies, which are often made up of intermediaries, seek to work with SMEs interested in the international market to benefit from a commission. The work of Cocula (2002) affirms, by principle of complementarity, that SMEs wishing to go international can also opt for the direct route by working with foreigners operating in the country where they wish to invest. They must still take the costs inherent in any commercial activity in a foreign country. Various findings in the literature rightly attest to the need to take into account quality productivity in the perspective of this export facet (Jiang and Sekkel, 2024). These scientific observations demonstrate that only SMEs that achieve a level of quality productivity can align themselves in an internationalization strategy with its export facet.

Royer's works (2024) state that exporting, which is considered as marketing its products or services outside its geographical borders, brings significant benefits to the sustainability of SMEs. Within its export aspect and as demonstrated by the research of Pietrovito and Pozzolo (2021), financial resources remain a favorable stimulus to the decision to export.

In the literature, we find another component close to the export facet. These are organizational factors combined with dynamic capabilities (Tsapi and Garandi, 2020) and human resources (Moloumba Mokango, 2021) which must be analyzed judiciously before embarking on the export strategy.

The size of SMEs, long considered a handicap for investing abroad, has become a facet of success when they rely on a network of influence and trust capable of facilitating the establishment of the company in a specific foreign geographical area (Erdilek, 2008). In short, exporting plays an important role in the internationalization of SMEs. Its choice depends on the volume of trade and can only be made by taking into account a cost-benefit analysis. In the following lines, we will address the issue of establishment.

Indeed, implantation is another method used by SMEs to establish themselves in a foreign country in order to produce and market goods and services to make a return on investment. This implantation strategy is based on a process approach that begins with strategic alliances to move towards a real implantation. This process is particularly relevant for SMEs (Dominguez, 2017) and contributes significantly to their success. The publications of authors Aymard et al. (2020) call upon the concept of experience to explain the abysmal willingness of SMEs to settle in distant countries. As such, SMEs that have accumulated experience are full of assets capable of minimizing risks and continuously and consciously tracking uncertainties to consolidate the strategic islands hard-won by SMEs internationally.

In a profoundly changing environment, characterized by competition that crosses borders, the accumulation of experience gives SMEs the possibility of optimizing all the resources mobilized abroad over the long term (Tapia Moore and Meschi, 2010).

The entrepreneurial literature on SMEs, in a continuum, asserts that the experience of SMEs is often the result of the profile of the SME manager. Indeed, in traditional SME management, the top manager is often at the heart of its success. The experience he has capitalized on, in his ecosystem, gives him the skills to establish himself abroad in order to give the SME a competitive advantage by obtaining considerable market shares internationally (Ribau et al., 2018).

Other authors focus on learning to justify the choice of setting up an SME internationally. These researchers in particular (Blomstermo et al., 2004) assert, by analogy, that the learning model finds a favorable echo in the success of the establishment of SMEs abroad. They argue that many SMEs seek to invest abroad to better understand, through the learning process, international markets, benefit from defensible advantages and strengthen the company's positioning. Ultimately, the theoretical grounding was instrumental in clarifying internationalization strategies within SMEs. This theorization was based on success factors and internationalization methods. In the following section, we will address the issue of research methodology, in accordance with the customs and practices of management science.

An exploratory study through a qualitative prism

Qualitative methodology is used in this scientific research. This methodological postulate is explained by the fact that it gives us the opportunity to identify the words spoken by the actors interviewed in the field (Taylor et al., 2015) concerning the success factors of the internationalization strategy within new international markets. To our knowledge, no study concerning the success factors of the internationalization strategy has been conducted in the Republic of Congo. The work of Pelaccia and Paillé (2009) affirms that exploratory research is the responsibility of qualitative methodology. Our study is carried out within a specific SME that exercises a particular profession abroad. It is a question of understanding the how and why of the factors that explain the success of the internationalization strategy in a new and particular environment. This understanding is the fundamental expression of qualitative methodology (Wacheux and Rojot, 1996). The qualitative paradigm is invited in this research because it allows us to identify the level of mesostructure which represents the space where the internationalization strategy is developed within the Congolese SME studied (Strauss, 1987).

As part of the operationalization of this qualitative methodology, we designed an exploratory interview guide that was proposed to actors in the international services field. Thus, a sworn consultant, an operations manager, a marketing and sales manager and a general manager were interviewed. At the end of these interviews, which were organized in advance, to better understand the functioning of the international business sector, a definitive interview guide was developed. This interview guide includes the presentation of the company, the concept of internationalization strategy as well as the variables of internationalization success. It was submitted to a target population of fifteen (15) field actors, in the form of semi-structured interviews. These interviews lasted on average 1 hour 05 minutes per participant, in the company's premises, at the request of the general manager of the SME. This primary data collection was supplemented by secondary information collected through the life story of the owner of the Hotel Léon, taken from a video posted on social networks.

Thematic content analysis (Bardin, 1977) was used to process the qualitative information collected in the field. To this end, the data collected were first recorded in the tape recorder and transcribed (Paillé and Mucchielli, 2012) in our notebook at the end of each interview. Then, we began a floating reading to better understand the responses offered by each fieldworker. Finally, we carried out conceptualized coding based on the themes previously selected in our interview guide. This conceptualized coding (Miles and Huberman, 2003) allowed us to identify trends before obtaining a provisional grid of results. Given our sample, the analysis was done manually and impartially.

The Léon Hotel: a special case, in a special area

Located in the heart of Brazzaville, the Léon Hotel offers high-quality services to its guests. With staff trained in a results-oriented, customer-oriented culture, this hotel is an expression of Congolese pride internationally. It is presented as follows:

Table 1: presentation of the Léon Hotel

Creation	2003
Promoter	Gervais Milandou
Staff	100
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Accommodation; ✓ Restoration; ✓ Shuttle.
International	Kinshasa, DRC, 2012

Source: Authors, 2024

In the main concern of conducting our study on the success factors of small and medium-sized Congolese enterprises internationally, fifteen (15) semi-directive interviews were organized. The actors interviewed present themselves in accordance with the following table:

Table 2: Actors interviewed

First names	Positions held	Experiences	University level
Christ	Assistant Accountant	4 years	Bachelor's degree in accounting
Driany	Concierge	10 years	Third year of high school
Archely	Accountant	8 years	Master's degree in accounting
Brucci	Manager	11 years	Degree in HR Management
Ristani	Governor	11 years	Professional bachelor's degree in electricity
Life Luck	Stock and Sales Manager	11 years	Master's in entrepreneurship and innovation
Belvie	Vallet	13 years	Higher technician's certificate
Yanick	Cashier	12 years	Third year of high school
Ardity	Room manager	12 years	A'levels in accounting
Welcome	Head of maintenance department	11 years	Junior certificate
Crumb	Beer chef	6 years	Third year of high school
Longinus	Master server	12 years	First year of high school

Darcela	HR Manager	9 years	Master's degree in private law
Talian	Treasurer	4 years	Bachelor's degree in accounting, control and auditing
Verney	Bartender	8 years	A'levels

Source: Authors, 2024

This table presents three variables, namely function, experience, and academic level. The first variable allows us to identify the strategic positioning of the actor, while the second rightly justifies the experience acquired in operationalizing the strategy internationally. The third explains the strategy's implementation skills.

Presentation of results

From the dexterity and skill of fieldwork, through data collection, to finally reaching the scientific climax with the processing of relevant information, certain results were identified. Gradually, the simple data collection was directed towards the interior of the SME studied for a more global understanding of the phenomenon of the success factors of internationalization within Léon Hôtel.

From this exploratory study, in an unknown environment, the results clearly appear as follows:

The manager's profile : a key factor in the success of Congolese SMEs internationally

In a profoundly changing environment, characterized by abysmal unfair competition, the profile of the manager is considered a determining factor that contributes to the success of Congolese SMEs internationally. Thus, the profile of the manager within Congolese SMEs seeking to invest abroad cannot be understood without the integration of a temporal dimension that continuously takes into account the achievements that the owner of the company has benefited from in terms of decisive competitive advantages. Studies conducted on the Congolese field rightly attest that managers who have an internationally oriented vision, to conquer new markets by positioning themselves in promising sectors, have assets to successfully penetrate markets outside their respective borders. Specifically, this vision is not the fruit of an overactive imagination. It is the result of an experience nourished by the sap of participatory management that leans on the support of human resources, considered as the primary raw material of an organization. This vision of the owner, in Congolese land, is strongly illuminated by those who are on the other side of the veil and guide, continuously and permanently, the steps of SME managers, for a confirmed success internationally. This profile of the manager includes among other things the

perception of the manager, the acquired knowledge, the shared values, the university level and the environment in which the latter works for an unfailing success in a sphere littered with crocodiles of all kinds.

This result is confirmed by the following verbatim statement: *"The success of our company abroad is simply explained by the qualities of our boss who always has a good vision for his business"* (Chance-vie). Supporting the conception of the manager's profile as a factor in the success of SMEs internationally, the actor Ristani affirms *"The CEO has a good vision for the company and he knows what he is doing to promote his hotel abroad and more precisely in Kinshasa where we are established outside Brazzaville."*

Culture at odds with the values taught

Organizational culture is considered a set of principles, norms, and practices that guide organizational life. It is central to social development and contributes significantly to the social acceptance of an actor within a given group and even in a specific environment. The clear desire not to honor the shared values that govern a given social environment is the true expression of social deviance in African countries that remain intimately linked to customs and traditions. The attitude aimed at positioning oneself at the antipodes of the values conveyed is not only social murder, but also suicide within traditional societies. However, the manager of Léon Hôtel aligns himself with the antipodes of the values shared by his community and thus distinguishes himself through his creative performance measured by his ability to establish himself internationally. Far from being a weakness, detachment from the culture taught constitutes, on the contrary, a lever for success and a centrifugal force that explains the success of the Hôtel Léon abroad. The legitimate advantages that an SME can derive from its detachment from shared values are obviously not exhaustive, but remain profitable for the purposes of return on investment.

This reasoning is supported by the following statements: *"My parents told me not to take money from the bank. I was always told not to trust the bank. It, that is to say, the bank, is not there to support you, but to destroy you. I trusted the bank and I was able to internationalize. Between my parents and me, who was right?"* (Gervais). Along the same lines, the same actor states in his life story: *" My parents built houses to live alone, I did the opposite by building a hotel where I can have a room to sleep and also accommodate those who were passing through and who had nowhere to sleep. I started Léon Hôtel. Again, who was right, my parents or me?"* (Gervais).

Cumulative experience: another factor in the success of the internationalization of Congolese SMEs

In essence, an SME in its traditional evolution includes launch, growth, maturity, and decline. At each stage of an SME's life, it benefits from a competitive advantage and

competitive positioning that constitute learning moments for it to accumulate experience. From this perspective, the experience that a manager or an SME can build is at the heart of its success. Indeed, experiential knowledge acquired at the national or international level constitutes the foundation for successful internationalization. It is a lever on which the manager relies to internationalize. SMEs that have capitalized on experience are more successful than those that are in their early stages, particularly during the launch period. The experience accumulated by SMEs is an unrivaled resource that allows them to easily establish themselves internationally. In this regard, the accumulation of knowledge of managers, on the one hand, and that of human resources at different levels of management, on the other hand, are not only indicators of success, but also sources of competitive advantages for Congolese SMEs that are committed to internationalization. To this end, the SME that has benefited from specific experience at the national level in its field of activity and that is full of international capabilities has the assets capable of building a market penetration network in foreign countries.

This speech is corroborated by the following thoughts: *"The experience that our boss was able to benefit from with the stores he has allowed him, I suppose, to adapt this in the hotel industry to better succeed abroad"* (Darcela). In the background of the thought evoked by the previous actress, another participant maintains in a logic of discontinuity in continuity " *The boss shares his vision with us, we discuss this vision and he decides on the implementation. He is someone who always takes our ideas into account before deciding because we constitute a family"* (Bruci).

Anticipatory monitoring: an essential success factor for the internationalization of Congolese SMEs

Anticipatory monitoring is a strategic approach that allows SMEs to collect data that contains relevant information to help managers make decisions early and at the right time and to be part of a sustainable approach. All SMEs that wish to internationalize in search of new opportunities must make anticipatory monitoring a key success factor. In the context of Congolese SMEs, anticipatory monitoring is not only a reflex, but also remains a practice that benefits from a dominant position in the effective life of international companies. In a constantly changing economy, characterized by multifaceted crises as well as abysmal competition that seeks to pierce the lines of defense of companies, Congolese SMEs that succeed internationally are those that have understood that neither intelligence nor strategic brutality can help SMEs internationally, but anticipatory monitoring can since it allows them to calculate international markets while still being at the national level. By leveraging anticipatory monitoring, Congolese SMEs have the assets to identify uncertain environments, understand turbulent niche markets, and clarify the sources of uncertainty that could prevent market penetration in a distant country. Through anticipatory monitoring,

Congolese SMEs operating internationally are able to clarify sensitive sensors, detect weak signals, and position themselves differently to benefit from a defensible competitive advantage.

This argument is strongly supported by the following statements: " *We seek to better understand an environment before internationalizing ourselves through a mechanism that we have within our company*" (Bienvenu). In this same vein, another actor states: " *The CEO took the time to settle in Kinshasa, to start other activities and to better establish himself before launching his activity in the hotel industry*" (Christ).

Discussion of results

Following the founding principles of management sciences and management, this study shows that the profile of the manager is a distinctive factor that contributes to the success of Congolese SMEs internationally. This point of view is strongly supported by the work of researchers Alqoh and Yaouhi (2024) who explain that the profile of the manager of an SME is a determining element that can justify the success of SMEs internationally. Managers who have a distinctive profile stand out internationally and manage to give their structures a competitive advantage. In this vein, managers of Congolese SMEs, with a unique profile, based on the involvement of human resources, improve their production at the national level and establish themselves, ipso facto, internationally by offering very high-quality services. The vision that characterizes SME owners, the environment in which these owners operate, and the academic level they represent are all levers that can express the success of Congolese SMEs in different horizons beyond national borders. Thus, the focus of these results on the profile of the Congolese SME manager is justified by the fact that at the national and international level, they remain at the heart of the growth of their entities.

Our results also show that cumulative experience is an essential factor for the success of Congolese SMEs abroad. The work of Reda et al. (2024) supports this idea and explains, in a distinguished style, relevant to strategic art, that the experience capitalized by an SME at the national level is a vector that gives the latter the possibility of gaining strategic islands at the international level. This experience encourages SME managers to establish themselves internationally to consolidate their financial cushion through returns on investment from foreign countries. By capitalizing on an experience that is at the origin of their international investments, the managers of Congolese SMEs go beyond the stage of national micro managers to reach the stage of real managers capable of competing with intelligence and skills working in different spheres. Furthermore, this study enriches the research by showing that the cumulative experience of Congolese managers of SMEs is the result of the multiple crises that the country has experienced, from independence to the present day, thus consolidating their strategic focus in the ability to internationalize.

This exploratory work rightly attests that the success of Congolese SMEs internationally is based on a culture that is the opposite of the values taught. This result is corroborated by Deysine(2010) who stipulates that organizational culture is at the heart of the organizational performance of SMEs internationally. A results-based culture as well as customs and practices based on the valuation of human capital, the primary raw material of an organization, are all variables that demonstrate the willingness of SMEs to internationalize. These results support the literature by explaining that the lessons received by veterans of the profession can constitute obstacles to success, unlike modern values that are part of the path of managerial principles.

Ultimately, our work asserts that anticipatory monitoring is a decision-making tool that creates the conditions likely to push SMEs to listen to changes in order to better monitor the international environment, identify threats and clarify opportunities with a view to making a relevant decision. This argument is accepted by the work of Chalus-Sauvannet (2021) who argues that anticipatory monitoring is the compass that explains the performance of SMEs both at the national and international levels. However, Nassè (2019) found that fair practices significantly affect performance, in contrast to Carbonell-Launois et al. (2021) who found that adaptation, efficiency, and strategic positioning affect performance. This study, in a Congolese context, has made it possible to understand that even in countries with high continuous tension, anticipatory monitoring remains the keystone of SMEs internationally.

Conclusion

This article sheds light on the internationalization of SMEs by examining the success factors of Congolese SMEs abroad. Based on this, we sought to list the factors that explain the success of SMEs abroad in a developing country, and more specifically in Central Africa, a geographical area that has been little studied until now. This study rightly asserts that the manager's profile, accumulated experience, a culture that is at odds with the values taught and anticipatory monitoring are all variables that explain the success of Congolese SMEs internationally.

The main contribution of this study lies in its central research question which aims to clarify the key success factors of SMEs in a southern country whose publications on the subject are not prolific. This contribution opens, all other things being equal, the doors to another blind spot which constitutes the brakes of this internationalization. On the theoretical level, this research has provided the opportunity to define and contextualize the concept of SME which is defined differently from one country to another. In view of our results, this article contributes to the theorization of the concept of internationalization in an SME environment. On the managerial level, this article remains a decision-making tool for practitioners as well as managers of SMEs

who are interested in internationalization. In this vein, insights can be provided to help managers make decisions early and at the right time.

Our contributions are also subject to limitations since they only concern a study conducted in Congolese soil, in a specific sphere of the hotel industry, with exceptional endogenous particularities. They should not, therefore, be considered as the alpha and omega of research. It is rather desirable that other research be conducted in other African countries, with a view to confirming the existence of these factors at the sub-regional level.

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