

## Article

# The Influence of an Export Manager on Export Marketing Policies: Evidence from Exporting Olive Oil Companies in Crete

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**Abstract:** Cretan olive oil is known for its premium quality worldwide. In the post pandemic international environment, the rising demand for olive oil due to its health benefits has generated greater competition amongst traditionally non-producer and producer countries. Olive oil exports affect both the financial growth and stability of companies that trade it and the economic prosperity of the Crete prefecture. Various factors can influence a company's export performance, and of those it is widely agreed that the presence of an export manager yields a positive impact. The aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of an export manager on export marketing policies. The application of the Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ ) was judged as the most suitable criterion for the elaboration of the research. The  $\chi^2$  test showed that there are statistically significant correlations between variables. The findings of the research indicate an exports manager's influence on promotions abroad and in conducting market research before exporting to a new foreign market. The employment of an export manager and the level of his/her certified knowledge appear to have a positive impact on the export marketing policies of companies that export Cretan olive oil.

**Keywords:** olive oil; exports; export manager



**Citation:** Lamprinidou, Fani, Anastasios Semos, Efthimia Tsakiridou, and Panagiota Sergaki. 2022. The Influence of an Export Manager on Export Marketing Policies: Evidence from Exporting Olive Oil Companies in Crete. *Economies* 10: 152. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies10070152>

Academic Editor: Ralf Fendel

Received: 21 May 2022

Accepted: 17 June 2022

Published: 22 June 2022

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## 1. Introduction

Olive oil is mainly produced in the Mediterranean basin. According to the International Olive Council (IOC), 3.1 million tonnes of olive oil have been produced in 2021/2022, 225 thousand tonnes of which come from Greece. For 2021/2022, 1.97 million tonnes have been produced in EU countries, including Spain, Greece, Italy, and Portugal. Just as important, 63.26% of the world's production comes from the EU. The European Commission reports that olive oil production is expected to reach 2.5 million tonnes by 2031 (EC 2021). In terms of non-EU countries, 200 thousand tonnes have been produced in Morocco, 240 thousand tonnes in Tunisia, and 227.5 thousand tonnes in Turkey. Spain, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey are responsible for 84.8% of production globally (IOC, 2022). It is expected that production will increase in traditionally non-producer countries while slower growth is likely in EU producer countries because they will focus on quality and sustainability rather than the quantity of olive oil (Mili and Bouhaddane 2019).

With consumers' changing food demands globally, especially after the pandemic, products that can have health benefits are sought after, and the spread of the Mediterranean diet and its benefits has led to rising demand for olive oil (Xiong et al. 2014). Multiple studies show that olive oil can benefit human health in various ways such as the prevention of Alzheimer disease, non-communicable diseases, and cardiovascular disease (Covas et al. 2006; Foscolou et al. 2019; Estruch et al. 2018; Román et al. 2019; Majumder et al. 2022; Gaforio et al. 2019).

Furthermore, in a scenario in which international trade recovers from the impacts of Covid-19 relatively quickly, olive oil demand could increase to the point that global

exports could increase as well (Mili and Bouhaddane 2021). According to the European Commission, this is anticipated, with olive oil holding a much larger share of available oil. As a result, there is a global expansion of olive oil markets with many countries, considering olive oil as a potential elixir to increase rural economic development (Lybbert and Elabed 2013). This increasing demand and supply of olive oil will lead to a highly competitive international environment. Agricultural policies supporting olive oil production are expected to play a great role in a country's share of exports (Pehlivanoglu et al. 2021). Although countries like Greece which specialize in the production of olive oil should have a comparative advantage in this new environment, competition will arise both in non-traditional producer countries and producer countries. As such, two directions for promoting olive oil exports are emerging; one is to encourage the production of olive oil at lower prices in accordance with the law of comparative advantage, and the other is to focus on producing differentiated olive oil that will meet improvements in quality to foster a competitive advantage (Kashiwagi et al. 2020).

Olive oil has been a successful industry in Crete since the Middle and Late Minoan period (Riley 2002). According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority, 104 thousand tonnes of olive oil were exported from Greece in 2019, 36.5 thousand tonnes of which were from Crete (ELSTAT 2020). In the increasingly competitive international environment outlined above it is imperative to ensure that the export performance of Cretan olive oil exporting companies continually improves.

To date, a widely accepted model to measure export performance has not been formed, so in order to study this field it is common to examine individual factors that affect export performance and provide fragmented results (Sousa 2004), including export sales level, export sales growth, exports profits, and export sales to total sales ratio (Styles 1998). Nevertheless, the human factor is intrinsic to export performance, influenced by "cognitive" abilities like marketing knowledge and international trade know-how and by "non-cognitive" aspects like value systems and norms. Objective characteristics of the manager such as age, level of education, and knowledge of foreign languages impact export performance as well, and in small and medium-sized companies particularly, the top-level manager wields significant influence in decision making, hence in decisions to engage in or foster exports (Holzmüller and Stöttinger 1996). The main focus of this study is to examine the influence of an exports manager on export marketing policies that could affect the company's export activity.

Although a company's first export order might be accidental, it may be successful as well. An export activity can start without much planning, because of a need to meet foreign demand for the company's product. From the first order, the company develops a positive attitude towards exports that leads to adjustment in its organizational structure in order to begin its export activity (Bijmoli and Zwart 1994). There are a number of companies that try to place major export orders but experience no success. It is considered common practice for a company that does not meet its entry market export goals to recruit an experienced export manager in order to pursue exports actively (Simmonds and Smith 1968). The employment of an exports manager is an indicator of the company's commitment to exporting. It is widely accepted that the presence of an exports manager positively affects export performance, while at the same time it is considered a low-risk practice because of the low cost that it incurs (Beamish et al. 2006).

Exports managers are considered highly valuable for a company thus they cannot be easily replaced. They acquire experiential knowledge through their visits and contacts in foreign markets and as such, exporting firms should offer them decision making authority and provide them with a feeling of autonomy in order to cultivate enduring commitment to the company. Additionally, they should have the opportunity to experiment with innovative selling techniques (Theodosiou and Katsikea 2007). One of the main roles of an exports manager is to locate buyers. This is a difficult task because philosophy and value system compatibility between the company and its trading partner is critical for success (Bello and Gilliland 1997). Another role of an exports manager is to form successful

exporting strategies. Export performance affects the ways that those strategies are defined, which are the degree of adaptation of pricing, product, and distribution (Filipe Lages and Montgomery 2004). In some cases, and especially in small firms, exports managers are responsible for shipment as well, although export shipping may be a part time responsibility shared with imports. In some case, there may be a shipping specialist in international transport which includes both export and import shipments (Davies and Gray 1979).

The main goal of this study is to determine the influence of an exports manager on export marketing policies that are being followed by exporting olive oil companies in Crete. To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first one to investigate Cretan olive oil exporting sector in that manner; therefore, contribution to existing literature is provided.

To investigate the influence of an exports manager, four hypotheses were formed:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects promotions in foreign markets.*

While export promotional programs alone are not sufficient for achieving sales objectives, they can provide export success by improving a company's competitive position (Gençtürk and Kotabe 2001). Promotions in foreign markets suggest a level of commitment to exports and could reflect the presence of an exports manager.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The level of certified knowledge that an exports manager has positively affects the undertaking of a market research before starting an export activity in a foreign market.*

Information deficiencies are considered the most significant export barrier for a number of reasons. First, the coordination and undertaking of research in international markets is highly complex. There may also be lack of awareness of international data sources that can provide valuable information about overseas markets as well as their advantages and disadvantages. Insufficient export information result in discouragement and fear of failure for non-exporting companies and in poor export management decisions for exporting companies (Leonidou 1997). It is expected that an export manager with a high level of certified knowledge could conduct market research or at least appreciate its value. Market research is crucial for guiding decision making especially for multinational marketers (Craig and Douglas 2001).

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects participation in international trade fairs.*

Firms that participate in international trade shows obtain more sales from exports compared to firms that do not. Participation in international trade fairs is a great opportunity to increase exports managers' experience in foreign markets (Axinn 1988).

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects adopting an expansionary export strategy.*

A company's attitude towards export growth expectations is dependent upon the manager's view of the effects of export activity. Firms tend to expand exports primarily because they seek growth and secondarily because they seek profits (Cavusgil 1984). It is possible that exports managers may want to start exporting in new distant and status-giving markets. In that case, top management support is critical because commitment is needed across the whole company (Koed Madsen 1989). Hence, there may be a correlation between the employment of an exports manager and an expansionary export strategy.

After the introduction and literature review has been presented, the followed methodology including definitions and rationale of the questionnaire, stakeholder mapping, needs survey, and data analysis will be explored in Section 2. Section 3 will illustrate results deriving from descriptive statistics and Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ). Finally, discussion and conclusions

are being presented in Section 4, along with recommendations, limitations, and further research.

## 2. Methodology

The methodology deployed will focus on providing:

- Definitions of “export manager” and “level of certified knowledge”.
- Stakeholder mapping: stakeholders will be mapped in each region.
- Needs survey: a survey has been devised for the stakeholders to reflect the difference in relation to their capacities and needs. Exports manager’s characteristics, export strategies, importing countries, and products will be investigated from their point of view. The survey was widely circulated via email.
- Data analysis: the statistical analyses and variables that were used to form conclusions will be presented.

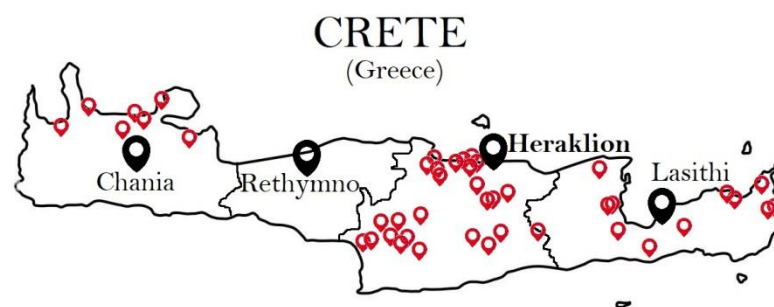
### 2.1. Definitions and Rationale of the Questionnaire

The term “exports manager” describes the employee who is responsible for finding buyers internationally in order to sell the company’s products abroad. An exports manager’s duties include negotiating with buyers and shippers, drafting export contracts, planning the shipment of goods, keeping track of invoices, and supervising the international department staff. In this study, the term “employment of an exports manager” implies that the company employs a specific person whose main role is to manage all export activities, as described above.

The term “level of certified knowledge” describes the criteria for assessing the level of knowledge of that employee. Since there are no specific knowledge requirements when employing someone as an export manager, the criteria used to measure the level of certified knowledge are a university degree, a master’s degree, extensive knowledge of languages, and seminar certificates.

### 2.2. Stakeholder Mapping

The database used to measure the influence of an exports manager on the company’s exports activity was derived from a survey sent to all 44 companies listed in the Exporters Association of Crete that export Cretan olive oil. To generate a representative sample, the inclusion criteria was that companies: (a) were based in Heraklion, Chania, Rethymno, or Lasithi (regional units of Crete); (b) exported Cretan olive oil; (c) were both large and small organizations; (d) were either corporations or cooperatives; and (e) employed an exports manager or not. According to the Exporters Association of Crete there are: 26 companies that export Cretan olive oil in Heraklion (59.09%): 11 in Lasithi (25.00%), 7 in Chania (15.91%), and none in Rethymno (0.00%). A map of Crete, where red pins indicate the stakeholders is presented bellow (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Map of Crete, where red pins indicate the stakeholders.

### 2.3. Needs Survey

The data collection instrument sought responses from the exports manager or the employee that was responsible for export activities. A pilot survey was first sent to five

companies to determine if the study met its needs. After that, all 44 companies were contacted by phone and were informed about the study. Then the survey was sent via e-mail followed-up by a phone call to ensure that the aims of the study as well as the information requested were clear. The topics of the survey covered various exports manager characteristics such as: age, gender, level of certified knowledge, and work experience in exports. Other topics covered included a variety of export strategies such as: conducting market research, promotions abroad, participation in international trade fairs, and export expansion prospects. Additionally other information about the company including exports history, its products, and markets was collected. The topics discussed as well as their measurements are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Topics discussed and their measurements.

Topic	Measurement
Employment of an exports manager	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company employs an exports manager and zero otherwise.
Export manager's gender	A dummy variable is equal to one if the export manager is male and zero otherwise.
Export manager's age	Classified into five categories: 1 = younger/or than 25 years old; 2 = 26–35 years old; 3 = 36–45 years old; 4 = 46–55 years old; and 5 = older than 56 years old.
Exports manager's level of certified knowledge	Quantified on a scale from 0 (very low) to 5 (very high).
Exports manager's work experience	Quantified on a scale from 0 (very low) to 5 (very high).
Market research	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company conducts a market research before starting an export activity in a foreign country and zero otherwise.
Promotions abroad	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company carries out promotions abroad and zero otherwise.
Participation in international trade fairs	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company participates in international trade fairs and zero otherwise.
Expansionary export strategy	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company follows an expansionary export strategy and zero otherwise.
Export history	Measured according to how many years the company exports its products and classified into five categories: 1 = less than/or 5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 11–15 years; 4 = 16–20 years; and 5 = more than 20 years.
PDO olive oil	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company exports PDO olive oil and zero otherwise.
PGI olive oil	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company exports PGI olive oil and zero otherwise.
Organic olive oil	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company exports organic olive oil and zero otherwise.
Countries	A dummy variable is equal to one if the company exports to EU countries and zero otherwise.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

To evaluate the influence of an exports manager two statistical analyses were used: (1) descriptive statistics to depict research parameters such as the exports manager's profile, and (2) Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) to determine if there were statistically significant correlations between variables. The variables that were used are as follows:

1. The employment of an exports manager ( $x_1$ )
2. The level of certified knowledge that the exports manager has ( $x_2$ )
3. Promotions in foreign markets ( $x_3$ )
4. The undertaking of market research before starting an export activity in a foreign market ( $x_4$ )
5. Participation in international trade fairs ( $x_5$ )
6. Expansionary export strategy ( $x_6$ )

A test of normality was first carried out and showed that the data was regular and all the required assumptions were observed in order to apply the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ). The  $\chi^2$  test showed that there were correlations between the variables, which were statistically significant. The statistical analysis was performed using S.P.S.S. Version 26.0 for the examination of possible correlations.

### 3. Results

Regarding the completed surveys received, 31 companies provided usable responses, forming a net usable response of 70.45%. Most of the non-respondents claimed in a follow-up communication that their company was understaffed and facing difficulties

due to the Covid-19 and were not able to contribute to the study. The pandemic may be considered one of the main limitations of the study. Nevertheless, the net response (70.45%) is deemed sufficient to form a representative sample of the Cretan olive oil exporting sector, considering that the non-responding companies did not differ majorly from the responding companies. The surveys were completed by either the export manager or the CEO of the company.

### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Of the 31 companies examined, 74.19% employ an export manager and 25.81% do not. The export manager's gender, age, certified knowledge, and work experience were used to create their profile. Most of the exports managers are male (73.91%) and the rest are female (26.09%). The largest proportion are 36–45 years old (39.13%) and the remainder are; 46–55 years old (21.74%); 26–35 years old (21.74%); and older than 55 years old (17.39%). Just over half of the exports managers' have a high level of certified knowledge (52.17%), 26.09% of them have a very high level of certified knowledge and 21.74% have a medium level of certified knowledge. Lastly, regarding the export manager's level of work experience, 47.83% indicated very high, 26.09% high, 21.74% medium, and 4.35% low. The results concerning the exports managers' profiles are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics (Manager's profile).

Variables	N (23)	%
Gender		
Male	17	73.91
Female	6	26.09
Age		
26–35 years old	5	21.74
36–45 years old	9	39.13
46–55 years old	5	21.74
>55 years old	4	17.39
Level of certified knowledge		
Medium	5	21.74
High	12	52.17
Very high	6	26.09
Level of work experience		
Low	1	4.35
Medium	5	21.74
High	6	26.09
Very high	11	47.83

In terms of the product that is exported, 77.42% of the companies export organic olive oil and 22.58% do not. From the companies that export organic olive oil 83.33% employ an exports manager and 16.67% do not. From the companies that do not export organic olive oil 42.86% employ an export manager and 57.14% do not. Additionally, 77.42% of the companies export PDO olive oil while 22.58% do not. From the companies that export PDO olive oil 75.00% employ an exports manager and 25.00% do not. From the companies that do not export PDO olive oil, 71.43% employ an exports manager, and 28.57% do not. In addition, 29.03% of the companies export PGI olive oil and 70.97% do not. From the companies that export PGI olive oil 100.00% employ an exports manager. From the companies that do not export PGI olive oil, 63.64% employ an exports manager and 36.36% do not. The results regarding the exported product are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics (Exported product).

Variables	Total		Exports Manager		No Exports Manager	
	N (31)	%	N (23)	%	N (8)	%
Organic olive oil	24	77.42	20	83.33	4	16.67
Non organic olive oil	7	22.58	3	42.85	4	57.14
PDO olive oil	24	77.42	18	75.00	6	25.00
Non PDO olive oil	7	22.58	5	71.43	2	28.57
PGI olive oil	9	29.03	9	100	0	0
Non PGI olive oil	22	70.97	14	63.64	8	36.36

Considering the countries that Cretan olive oil is being exported to, 19.35% of companies export only to EU countries, and 80.64% of companies export both to EU and non-EU countries. Of the companies that export only to EU countries, 50% employ an exports manager. On the other hand, of those that export to both EU and non-EU countries, 80.00% employ an export manager. The results referring to the countries that companies export olive oil to, are being presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics (importing countries).

Variables	Total		Exports Manager		No Exports Manager	
	N (31)	%	N (23)	%	N (8)	%
EU & Non EU countries	25	80.64	20	80.00	5	20.00
Only EU countries	6	19.35	3	50.00	3	50.00

Lastly, concerning how many years the companies have had an export activity, results show that: 29.03% have exported for less than/or 5 years; 29.03% of them have exported for 16–20 years; 22.58% have exported for more than 20 years; 12.90% for 6–10 years, and 6.45% of them have exported for 11–15 years. Taking into account the employment of an exports manager, results show that: 100.00% of the companies that have been exporting for 11–15 years employ an export manager; 85.71% of the companies that have exported for more than 20 years employ an export manager; 77.78% of the companies that have exported for 16–20 years employ an export manager; 50% of the companies that have been exporting for 6–10 years employ an export manager; and 66.67% of the companies that export for less/or 5 years employ an export manager. These results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics (Export history).

Variables	Total		Exports Manager		No Exports Manager	
	N (31)	%	N (23)	%	N (8)	%
<5 years	9	29.03	6	66.67	3	33.33
5–10 years	4	12.90	2	50.00	2	50.00
11–15 years	2	6.45	2	100.00	0	0.00
16–20 years	9	29.03	7	77.78	2	22.22
>20 years	7	22.58	6	85.71	1	14.29

### 3.2. Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ ) and Hypotheses

The Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to investigate if there are statistically significant correlations between the variables mentioned above. Those correlations determine whether a hypothesis is verified.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects promotions in foreign markets.*

The variables used to verify or reject Hypothesis 1 (H1) are:

1. The employment of an exports manager ( $x_1$ )
2. Promotions in foreign markets ( $x_3$ )

The Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) shows a significant correlation between  $x_1$  and  $x_3$ , therefore Hypothesis 1 (H1) is verified [ $\chi^2 (1) = 9.014, p = 0.003$ ]. Results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Chi-square tests (H1).

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	dF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.014	1	0.003		
Continuity Correction	6.571	1	0.010		
Likelihood Ratio	8.735	1	0.003		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.006	0.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.724	1	0.003		
N of Valid Cases	31				

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *The level of certified knowledge that an exports manager has positively affects the undertaking of market research before starting an export activity in a foreign market.*

The variables used to verify or reject Hypothesis 2 (H2) are:

1. The level of certified knowledge that the exports manager has ( $x_2$ )
2. The undertaking of market research before starting an export activity in a foreign market ( $x_4$ )

The Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) shows a significant correlation between  $x_2$  and  $x_4$ , therefore Hypothesis 2 (H2) is verified [ $\chi^2 (2) = 9.333, p = 0.025$ ]. Results are presented in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Chi-square tests (H2).

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	dF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.333	3	0.025		
Continuity Correction					
Likelihood Ratio	12.379	3	0.006		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.796	1	0.003		
N of Valid Cases	31				

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects participation in international trade fairs.*

The variables used to verify or reject Hypothesis 3 (H3) are:

1. The employment of an exports manager ( $x_1$ )
2. Participation in international trade fairs ( $x_5$ )

The Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) does not show a significant correlation between  $x_1$  and  $x_5$ , therefore Hypothesis 3 (H3) is rejected [ $\chi^2 (3) = 3.438, p = 0.064$ ]. Results are presented in Table 8.



**Table 8.** Chi-square tests (H3).

	Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	dF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.438	1	0.064		
Continuity Correction	2.031	1	0.154		
Likelihood Ratio	3.337	1	0.068		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.095	0.079
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.327	1	0.068		
N of Valid Cases	31				

**Hypothesis 4 (H4).** *The employment of an exports manager positively affects adopting an expansionary export strategy.*

The variables used to verify or reject the Hypothesis 4 (H4) are:

1. The employment of an exports manager ( $x_1$ )
2. Expansionary export strategy ( $x_6$ )

The Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) does not show a significant correlation between  $x_1$  and  $x_6$ , and therefore Hypothesis 4 (H4) is rejected [ $\chi^2$  (3) = 3.296,  $p = 0.069$ ]. Results are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9.** Chi-square tests (H4).

	Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	dF	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.296	1	0.069		
Continuity Correction	1.813	1	0.178		
Likelihood Ratio	3.059	1	0.080		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.154	0.092
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.190	1	0.074		
N of Valid Cases	31				

The conclusions that can be excluded from the results will be presented in Discussion and Conclusions.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

Most of the companies that export Cretan olive oil employ an exports manager with a high or very high level of certified knowledge (78.26%) and a high or very high level of work experience (74.73%). The descriptive statistics indicate that to some level at least, companies chose to export differentiated olive oil to achieve a higher value-added olive oil; 77.42% of the companies export organic and PDO olive oil and only 29.09% export PGI olive oil. Various studies have underlined the advantages of exporting organic, PDO, and PGI olive oil, but in this study the main goal is to observe whether those categories are linked with the presence of an exports manager in the company. It is safe to conclude that companies which export organic, PDO, or PGI olive oil are more likely to employ an exports manager. The percentage of the companies that employ an exports manager is higher if they export organic (83.33%), PDO (75%), or PGI (100%) olive oil.

Additionally, data shows that 80.64% of the companies choose to export both to EU and non-EU countries and 19.35% only to EU countries. Export performance is not influenced

negatively by the lack of similarities between the home and export market. That being said, the degree of market similarity alone does not guarantee success in export activities (Calantone et al. 2006). Nevertheless, it seems that companies which export to both EU and non-EU countries are more likely to employ an exports manager (80%) than those who export only to EU countries (50%). To correctly evaluate this finding, it must be taken into consideration that olive oil is being exported both in bulk and bottled. Olive oil is being exported in bulk mainly to Italian and Spanish markets.

Regarding the number of years that companies have had an export activity, results indicate that the exporting sector is on the one hand experienced (22.58% have been exporting for more than 20 years) but yet unfolding (29.03% have been exporting for less than 5 years).

Results from the Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ) are summarized in the following four points. First, a significant correlation between the establishment of an exports manager and promotions in foreign markets was confirmed. Promotions refer to marketing and communication actions that change the perceived price-value ratio of a product and thus produce direct results at the level of sales while also affecting the long-term brand value (Goodrich 1983). Promotional activities abroad are more difficult to standardize because they are typically local in nature (Kashani and Quelch 1990). In developing countries, the most popular promotion techniques are promotional gifts and product displays, while in developed countries they are discount coupons, which are distributed mainly through newspapers and magazines or inside the product packaging (Albaum et al. 2002). Arguably, promotions abroad should be one of the responsibilities of an exports manager. Exports managers can visit international markets to create connections with each local region. This helps to identify the promotional needs of the market and to investigate the competitive promotional actions as well. Through those visits, they gain valuable experience that leads to successful decision-making regarding promotions abroad. Just as important, exports managers are responsible for drafting export contracts, in which promotions are usually stated. That gives them the margin to negotiate more favourable terms regarding promotions.

Second, a significant correlation was confirmed between the level of certified knowledge that an exports manager has and the undertaking of market research before starting to export in a foreign market. International market research provides the feedback needed to perfect various business activities while also providing management with the ability to take appropriate actions and prepare appropriately for global changes (Panigyrakis 2013). Due to the high level of certified knowledge that exports managers have, they are in a position to acknowledge that market research is a powerful tool that can be used to make the appropriate entry-level decisions. Besides, they are capable of locating reliable data sources that provide useful indicators about whether to engage in a new market. In order to undertake market research, the person compiling it must be able to distinguish between useful and useless information as well as sources of reliable data (Kotabe and Helsen 2011). Even if the exports managers are not capable of conducting market research themselves, they will reach out to external collaborators to gain access to desirable insights.

Third, a significant correlation between the establishment of an exports manager and the participation in international trade fairs was not confirmed. International trade fairs help companies to communicate with wholesalers and retailers, with intended objectives to create permanent and proper cooperation, to inform them about new products and future plans of the company and to identify common interests (Panigyrakis 2013). Although international trade fairs seem to be beneficial for both companies and exports managers, a correlation between those two variables was not indicated for a number of reasons. Due to the relatively high cost of participation in international trade fairs, many companies choose to participate through associations that take part collectively. Along those lines, companies that wish to be represented in such trades can easily participate irrespective of whether they employ an exports manager.

Fourth, a significant correlation between the establishment of an exports manager and an expansionary export strategy was not confirmed. This may reflect that even though

companies may have an expansionary export strategy, they are not able to employ an exports manager at the current time. Perhaps this addition to their organizational structure is planned ahead and was not able to be identified in this study.

Despite the limitations resulting from the Covid-19, pandemic, this study highlights the importance of an exports manager in the Cretan olive oil exports sector. The increasing global demand for olive oil and the expected increase in exports could provide an opportunity to re-evaluate factors that can influence successful marketing policies to achieve a rewarding export performance. Further research could include semi-structured interviews, interviews with relevant stake holders i.e., export experts, export managers, and olive oil producers. Further research could investigate the correlations between exports managers and various marketing policies, not only in the Greek olive oil sector but globally, in order to verify similar results and to identify optimal strategies to be followed.

**Author Contributions:** Supervision, A.S., E.T. and P.S.; Writing—review & editing, F.L. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data available on request.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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