Internationalization Process: Analysis of a cooperation network in the Vinho Verde sector for the US market

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ABSTRACT
Internationalization as a strategic element in the current context of globalization is increasingly a determinant of business success. Based on the literature in the area of internationalization and networks, through a case study – a cooperation network involving small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – this article intends to highlight the relationship between the various partnerships established both formally and informally. It also intends to show the importance of the various actors involved in the network, and especially the role played by the Wine-Producing Commission of the Vinho Verde Region (CVRVV). The results of the study show the importance of the network relationship for entry to the US market,
since penetration in that specific market is determined by strategic reasons and following network relationships which already exist or are subsequently created. According to the empirical evidence, use of network contacts for development and entry to the US market is also found to be fundamental, these relationships initially being intermediated by the non-profit-making sector entity of the CVRVV. Some theoretical and practical implications are also presented.

**KEYWORDS:** Cooperation, CVRVV, USA, formal, informal, internationalization, partnership.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Increased transactions on a global scale and the elimination of commercial and economic borders between countries, associated with growing regional and worldwide interaction which has become more intense in recent decades, have provided firms with new opportunities, creating new competitive challenges from both international and domestic competitors.

The elaboration of strategies to respond to these challenges depends not only on the firm but also on its sector of activity (Teruchkin, 2005). In this connection, this study is set in the wine-producing sector which plays an important role in the Portuguese economy, contributing very significantly to the final value of agricultural production and exports.

The wine sector in Portugal, and particularly that of Vinho Verde, is integrated in an increasingly competitive international scenario. The production capacity of the Portuguese wine industry has been greater than demand, and so international markets are seen as the great opportunity and solution for the sector’s competitiveness, with the simultaneous need to adapt production to the commercial requirements of the demand through new products, this being accepted as an important factor in intensification of exports (Bardaji and Mili, 2009). The Portuguese Vinho Verde sector is an important one, currently made up of 21,562 producers, essentially SMEs.
The process of globalization has meant that internationalization is no longer merely an option for SMEs, but rather a determinant of their survival and success (Pla-Barber and Alegre, 2007). In this global context, export activity has played an important role, referred to as the simplest and quickest way to access international markets (Majocchi et al., 2005).

Badrinath (2004) states that among all the theories and perspectives of internationalization the network option seems to be most relevant from the point of view of SME internationalization. The importance of network relationships for the internationalization of this type of firm has been dealt with in several studies (e.g., Coviello, 2006; Zain and Ng, 2006; Ojala, 2008), having a great impact on the choice of how to enter the various markets (Moen et al., 2004; Zain and Ng, 2006).

Markets are relationship networks in which firms are connected to one another in various and complex ways, and in contexts that are extensive and often invisible (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). Therefore, the perspective of networks within the internationalization process goes beyond its conception as an internal process of the organization. Fleury and Fleury (2003) state that one of the principal characteristics of the new economy is the transition from individual efficiency to collective efficiency, where competitiveness is related to the performance of networks between organizations rather than individual firms.

Many studies have dealt with the internationalization process, with a significant increase in research in the last decade (Singh, 2009). Nevertheless, there is still no great consensus as to the main factors leading firms to develop international markets (Pla-Barber and Puig, 2009). Indeed, with the growing interest in firms’ internationalization, Elo (2005) argues that the focus of studies on internationalization should include the network context in their scope.

In this connection, aiming for better understanding of the internationalization process, considering the network perspective, this study intends to answer the following question: What is the internationalization process of Portuguese SMEs producing vinho verde in approaching the US market through a network of organizational cooperation?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, a review of the literature in the area of internationalization and networks is carried out. Empirical analysis of the case study follows. Then the results, discussion and conclusions are presented. The study ends with the implications for research and management, mentioning limitations and some suggestions for future work.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Internationalization from a network perspective

The literature related to firms’ internationalization supported by networks is extensive, showing various approaches to researching this phenomenon. Various network theories have been used to explain companies' internationalization in the most diverse sectors.

Internationalization through networks can provide essentially three major benefits. Firstly, through network connections, managers can recognize international opportunities that allow company expansion (Coviello and Munro, 1997; Johanson and Vahlne, 2006; Fernhaber and Li, 2013). Various studies identified that the majority of firms initially gain access to international markets through opportunities presented by their network of contacts rather than through searching on their own initiative (Chen and Chen, 1998; Johanson and Vahlne, 2006; Ellis, 2011).

Secondly, networks can lead to creating an exchange of experiences, a vital component for internationalization in new markets, allowing the firm to obtain resources and gain legitimacy (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994).

Finally, networks can provide firms with important information related to international markets (Sharma and Blomstrom, 2003). The study by Eriksson et al. (2000) concludes that the knowledge acquired can have to do with business (i.e., clients and competition), institutions (i.e., government, rules, norms, legislation) or internationalization (i.e., capacity to enter the market and the necessary resources). These benefits are important as they allow firms to compete with local firms in foreign countries, firms which do not normally lack those elements.

According to Hakansson and Snehota (1989), “no business is an island”, due to businesses overlapping in a network context with interdependence between the various network members. Johanson and Mattsson (1988) also state that businesses in an international context are based on network assumptions. These authors define a firm’s network as the long-term business relationships a firm has with its clients, distributors, suppliers, competitors and government bodies. This network also includes relationships between the parties involved, for example, between one client and another, client and supplier and client and
competitors. The dynamics of the relationship between the two parties is also influenced by the relationships of that partnership, as they provide both opportunities and restrictions.

One of the least developed aspects of an internationalization process has been cooperative agreements mainly in terms of firm networks. Network Theory has come to improve understanding of these relationships in internationalization, both in the inter and intra-organizational aspect (Lorga, 2002). This author also states that the international extent of networks depends both on the country and the product and will have strong implications for the firm’s internationalization.

International cooperative strategies allow firms to share risks and resources on entering new markets, facilitating the development of new competences (Hitt et al., 2002).

Business networks allow access to various resources necessary for the firm’s internationalization strategy, since the firm’s capacity to gain access to other organizations’ resources, mainly through horizontal networks, is an important explanatory variable of internationalization (Chetty and Holm, 2000).

Company managers who intend to internationalize should take advantage of network resources, such as the geographical proximity of companies and partners. They should be better integrated in the international community so as to form relationships with international partners, which lets them consolidate their presence in international markets (Fernhaber and Li, 2013).

Decisions related to how to enter international markets are considered strategic in the firm’s attempt to internationalize its activities (Qian and Delios, 2008; Moen et al., 2004).

According to Moen et al. (2004), the firm’s network relationships will determine the international markets to be chosen and the form of entry.

Some researchers (e.g., Loane and Bell, 2006; Coviello, 2006; Chetty and Holm, 2000) demonstrated theoretically and empirically how firms use networks for their internationalization. Loane and Bell (2006) found that a great number of firms actively used existing networks to develop knowledge about international markets and improve their international competitiveness. Coviello (2006) concluded that network theory is fundamental for international entrepreneurship. Chetty and Holm (2000) also verified the dynamics of how
firms interact with their network partners to extend, penetrate and integrate international markets.

2.2. Characterization of the internationalization process from a network perspective

i) Ways of entering international markets through networks

Initially, the Uppsala internationalization model assumed that the knowledge necessary for internationalization is mostly acquired through outside operations (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1990). This model was recently altered to recognize international exposure through network relationships. The network model was presented in the 1980s, when it became evident that most firms used various networks to facilitate their internationalization activities (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988). This confidence in using networks in the international context is widely attributed to the interdependence between companies, countries and markets (Dunning, 1995). For Johanson and Mattsson (1988), in this model, internationalization occurs when a firm begins to develop relationships with another belonging to a network in a foreign country. Relationships between firms in different countries serve as a bridge to new markets (Johanson and Vahlne, 1990). The development of these relationships with other actors in the market can be active or passive. From a perspective of an active network, the seller takes the initiative, whereas from a passive perspective the initiative is on the side of the buyer (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988). The importance of an active network in terms of learning, acquisition of knowledge, external expansion, etc, is demonstrated in various studies (Gabrielsson et al., 2008; Loane and Bell, 2006). A passive network is the result of initiative taken by another actor, such as a client, importer, intermediary or supplier (Ellis, 2000; Johanson and Vahlne, 2003), which can open up new opportunities in external markets.

ii) Different types of network relationship to enter the international market

According to the network internationalization model (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988), the firm can have relationships with various actors including clients, distributors, suppliers, competitors, non profit-making organizations, public bodies, etc. The different types of network relationships to enter external markets can be divided into formal, informal (Coviello and Martin, 1999; Westphal et al., 2006; Fernhaber and Li, 2013), and intermediary (Havila et al., 2004; Oviatt and McDougall, 2005). Various contradictory opinions have existed about
the definition of these terms, but the current literature accepts that formal relationships are related to business activities between two or more actors in a network, while informal ones are related to personal relationships between friends or family (Coviello, 2006; Westphal et al., 2006; McCann and Foita, 2011). Then again, other authors (e.g., Ellis and Pecotoich, 2001; Oviatt and McDougall, 2005) have indicated the importance of intermediary relationships, where there is no direct contact between buyer and seller, but rather an intermediary, i.e., a third actor who facilitates the formation of a relationship between them.

ili) Influence on network relationships on the way of entering international markets

Various studies related to companies’ internationalization (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988; Moen et al., 2004; Zain and Ng, 2006; Fernhaber and Li, 2013) indicate that networks have a strong impact on the choice of market and/or the form of entry. These studies seem to agree that these firms enter markets that are geographically and/or psychologically (language, cultural matters, historical relationship, etc) closer, based on their network relationships. Studies by Coviello and Munro (1995, 1997) concluded that informal and formal networks facilitate in the first place entry to markets that are psychologically closer as well as the respective choice of how to enter, results also found in other studies by Coviello and Martin (1999) and Moen et al. (2004).

iv) Importance of social networks for SME internationalization

Some researchers (Chetty and Wilson, 2003; Lenchner and Dowling, 2003) have highlighted the importance of social relationships in SME networks. These social relationships give SMEs access to information, financial resources and other networks, besides improving their reputation.

Networks are important for identifying opportunities during the internationalization process (Johanson and Vahlne, 2006). Several studies have pointed out that SMEs depend on network relationships and contacts to learn more about internationalization, whether in choosing the form of entry, acquiring information about new markets or acquiring resources for that process (Chetty and Wilson, 2003).

Pittaway et al. (2004) identified six benefits companies can obtain from their networks: (1) risk-sharing; (2) access to new markets and technologies; (3) rapid commercialization; (4) access to complementary assets; (5) protection of ownership rights; and (6) access via the network to external knowledge.
Different forms of network cooperation can be strengthened for internationalization, when they count on support from sector or government entities. According to Chen and Chen (1998), the integration of organizations and government policies has a key role in supporting and stimulating the internationalization process.

Government initiatives and support to promote and facilitate SME access to internationalization through programmes often carried out in partnership with the regulatory bodies of the sector the firm belongs to, such as what happens with firms in the Vinho Verde sector through the Commission of Wine-Producers in the Vinho Verde Region (CVRVV), allows the formation of networks to exploit opportunities in international markets (Johanson and Vahlne, 2006).

The internationalization process of SMEs is an important aspect, as it helps to lessen financial difficulties and give access to another type of resources, besides allowing the sharing of experiences and consolidating trust (Lu and Beamish, 2001). Network relationships have various effects on the internationalization process, and frequently allow initiation stimulating firms’ intentions to internationalize (Chetty and Patterson, 2002; Ellis, 2000), encourage the company decision in selecting markets (Coviello and Munro, 1995), help firms decide how to enter (Johansson and Vahlne, 2003; Chen, 2003), give access to additional relationships and more suitable channels (Chetty and Patterson, 2002; Welch, 1992), increase knowledge of the local market (Coviello and Munro, 1995), allow acquisition of the initial trust of the other actors (Chetty and Patterson, 2002; Coviello and Munro, 1995), reduce the costs and risk of internationalization (Chetty and Patterson, 2002; Ellis and Pecotich, 2001), make internationalization faster (Coviello and Munro, 1995) and let the firm expand to take greater advantage of market opportunities (Coviello and Munro, 1995).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Type of study and case selection

This study aims to analyze the relationship between management models and internationalization using the network perspective. Therefore, following the suggestions of Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1994), the case study, as a strategy of qualitative research, was used here due to its exploratory nature. Eisenhardt (1989) argues that the case study
method allows the study of patterns that may be common, also allowing explanation of the meaning of the cause/effect relationship in the phenomenon examined (Yin, 1994).

A case was chosen for this study, a network made up of several actors/partners:
- CVRVV – promoter of the internationalization programme in the USA.
- Local importers and distributors in the USA.
- Local Agency in the USA.
- Three Portuguese SMEs, producers and distributors of vinho verde.

The three producer SMEs chosen (Firms A, B and C) satisfied the following criteria: (1) firms situated in Portugal in the Vinho Verde Region, (2) part of their strategy is to sell their products in the US market and (3) they are producers and distributors of Vinho Verde. This study also analyzed the role of the CVRVV in the internationalization process.

The three producer firms were selected by the CVRVV, since initially one firm refused to participate in the study and was substituted by another. The criteria for choosing the three firms were established together with the CVRVV, to be as wide-ranging as possible.

As for the three SMEs selected, one is successful in the market and has been present in the USA for quite some time (Firm A), one has tried to enter the market, but unsuccessfully (Firm B), and another successful firm, but only recently present in the US market (Firm C).

### 3.2. Context of analysis of the study

In this study, Portugal was chosen as the country of origin, due to its small economy with a very limited domestic market allied to motives of logistics in accessing the firms. The destination country chosen was the USA as it is one of the main wine-consuming markets in the world, and forecast to become the biggest if the current growth in consumption per capita and the number of North American consumers (on average 5 million new consumers each year) is maintained. In terms of consumption per capita, it occupies the 38th position\(^1\), still far from the figures found in Europe, particularly in countries like Italy, Spain, France and Portugal (Table 1).

\(^1\) Table 1- Wine consumption per capita
As the main data-gathering source, this study adopted the interview and documentary analysis. Accordingly, each of the three SMEs studied and the CVRVV were contacted by e-mail to arrange a semi-structured interview to be held on the premises of each organization. The interviews were with the managers responsible for the US market, each of them occupying a top management position within the firm.

With the open semi-structured interview, it was possible to ask the main questions, leaving space for other more detailed ones (Yin, 1994). Initially, the interviewees were asked to give a general description of the business and then, in particular, in the US market. Based on the general information, they were also asked for more detailed information on entry to the US market.

The questions were divided into topics: (1) the firm’s activity and the network process for entry to the US market, (2) important events, people, firms and organizations that influenced entry and deciding how to enter the USA, (3) the importance of the US market for the firm’s products, and (4) the impact of other actors on entry to the market and deciding how to enter the USA. All these topics were developed according to the guidelines of Yin (1994), trying to ask objective questions, in this way allowing the interviewees to give the most authentic answers possible.

### Table 1: Wine consumption per capita

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Wine consumption per capita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>54.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>47.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Wine Market 2005

Note: the positions do not correspond to the ranking
The interviews, lasting around 90 to 120 minutes, were digitally recorded and listened to with great attention, transcribing the main ideas. In the case of any doubt, e-mail and the telephone were used for clarification. Other sources were also used for comparison (triangulation), such as websites, social networks and diverse information about the firms studied.

In data analysis, the orientations of Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1994) were followed. All the firms/partners/actors were analyzed as individual cases, with individual patterns being identified and then categorized as a whole by topics.

In the process of analyzing each firm, the activity of the network relationship was classified as active or passive according to the network internationalization model (Johanson and Mattson, 1988). If the firm took the network initiative for the process of market entry, this was classified as active. If the initiative was taken outside the firm, this was classified as having a passive attitude. The network relationships used for market entry were categorized as formal, informal and intermediary, and were based on the principal relationship, i.e., on the most important contact (key element) which opened the path to entering the US market.

4. CASE STUDY: RESULTS

4.1 Characterization of Actors/Organizations

A brief characterization of the three SMEs forming the network studied can be seen in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>First year of activity</th>
<th>First year of internationalization</th>
<th>Year of entry to the USA</th>
<th>Form of entry</th>
<th>Key element in the USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Exporting</td>
<td>Importer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Exporting</td>
<td>Importer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVRVV</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1980(^3)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Via associates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) The CVRVV does not export directly. It intermediates and facilitates the internationalization process of its associates.

\(^3\) Exports already existed. Vinho Verde was the first Portuguese wine to be exported. Active, planned and organized initial year of promotion.
4.2 Network approach adopted by the firms analyzed

The approach adopted can be described as passive or active. None of the three producer firms analyzed have a direct presence in the US market, with firms A and C being represented through importers. Of the three firms studied, two (A and C) were actively developing their networks so as to improve their opportunities in the US market. This is essentially to do with the size of the US market and the legalities of distribution and commercialization logistics, known as “Three Tier”, with three intermediaries: Importer, Distributor and Retailer, this being the legal circuit followed until the product reaches the final consumer. Firms A and C, are present in the US market through active development of a relationship network already formed but still developing in the search for new business opportunities. It has already given very positive results, managing to achieve sustained growth since the beginning of internationalization in the USA. As the US market is vast with its own characteristics differing from one state to another4, these two firms established both formal and informal partnerships on entering, in this way helping the consolidation of those networks for future development of new business. The firms established and built partnership networks benefitting from programmes carried out by the CVRVV to spread awareness of Vinho Verde, with the contacts obtained and developed being vital for their successful presence in this market, and also for consolidation to be able to take advantage of new business opportunities. It is of note that firms A and C also occasionally used other programmes outside the scope of the CVRVV, namely those of ViniPortugal5. The interviewee from firm A stated that “… we are present in all the initiatives and programmes developed by the CVRVV. We also use other programmes from other bodies….the contacts obtained in these actions are fundamental for a successful presence in the US market.”

As for firm B, even using programmes promoted by the CVRVV, it has not yet been able to establish formally or informally a network of contacts that would allow it to enter the US market. This SME has shown a more passive attitude in waiting for possible contacts from interested parties. Recently, a more definite new opportunity has arisen, benefiting from a partnership programme developed by the CVRVV, in the form of various US importers travelling to visit the Vinho Verde region. The manager says that “ … this time, internationalization will definitely progress…an opportunity emerged to re-establish relations

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4 One of the interviewees indicated “that each state is a country, the USA being a country made up of another 50 small countries ”
5 ViniPortugal is the inter-professional association of the Wine-producing sector and the managing body of the Wines of Portugal brand.
with a former contact….it’s an importer who was in Portugal recently as part of a programme of visits to the Vinho Verde region by US importers, promoted by the CVRVV”. In this case, initiation of entry to the US market also emerges from a previous contact the manager had (informal relationship), and confirms the more passive attitude of this firm.

Concerning the existence of informal networks between the competing firms themselves in terms of exchanging contacts, information about possible partners, division of transport costs and stays in the USA, the manager of firm B says that “…we had a first experience between three producers of vinho verde sharing a stand in the Expo Vinhos in Brazil, which went extremely well…”. The manager of firm A says that “…increasingly, there is a greater share of information and resources among the competitors themselves, even of the cost of hotels when travelling…”

4.3 Key element of the network relationship

The results of the network (case) study, involving the three producer firms and the CVRVV, revealed that entry to the US market was facilitated by formal, informal and intermediary relationships.

Firm A has used its formal relationships such as its importer, which has allowed it to expand and take advantage of new business opportunities. The manager of this firm states “ …a lot of work is organized together with our importer in awareness actions for our product, which has helped us to achieve better results…”.

It should be noted that for firm C, the interviewee stressed the importance of the network that has been created, giving examples of clients who recommend them to potential new clients, through their informal network of contacts “…we have had sustained growth largely thanks to our relationships, our clients recommend us a lot, which has allowed us to get new clients based on these recommendations…”, which agrees with the conclusions of Johanson and Mattsson (1988) who state that business in an international context is based on network assumptions.

All the firms analyzed also opted, at the various stages, to take advantage of the intermediary relationship to enter the market, largely due to the US legal system, using the importer, which has not prevented active work in promoting their products in the various existing commercialization networks, in conjunction with importers and distributors.
The existing partnership with the CVRVV, through adhering to the programmes of internationalization and promotion of Vinho Verde in the US market, has revealed itself to be extremely important, in this way allowing a kind of consultancy for identifying potential importers and distributors for their products, for which the CVRVV has used a partnership with a local agency in the USA.

4.4 Influence of network relationships for entry to the US market.

The firms analyzed indicate that the different types of network relationships had only a limited influence in choosing the USA and the respective form of entry. Irrespective of the choice of country, the SMEs studied mentioned they had previously decided for strategic reasons to enter the US market, even before deciding to look for a network of contacts and relationships that would allow them to fulfil this objective. The choice of country was partly influenced by the actions carried out in partnership with the CVRVV, although firm A had already made this decision autonomously.

For firms B and C, the size of the US market was one of the principal indicators for choosing it. The form of entry for firms A and C was through importers found in the programmes developed in partnership with the CVRVV.

Finally, the importance of internationalization for the firms in this sector is confirmed. The manager of firm A stated that “…no, I don't believe that the firm would be viable without the international market, we have been making major investment to improve our response capacity…”, while the manager of firm B underlined that “…no, without internationalization, the firm would not be viable…".

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study contributes to the network internationalization model (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988) through recognizing the importance of network activity in the internationalization of SMEs in the area of Vinho Verde.

As is confirmed through carrying out this study, two of the three firms actively developed relationships or used existing contacts to identify opportunities and achieve entry to the US market. These conclusions contradict some studies that find firms follow their informal and
formal networks reactively to enter foreign markets (Bell, 1995; Coviello and Martin, 1999, Moen et al, 2004; Zain and Ng, 2006).

The results obtained are consistent with other studies (Coviello, 2006; Westphal et al., 2006; Ojala, 2008), which suggest that formal and informal relationships facilitate the internationalization of SMEs.

The empirical evidence also agrees with the work of Havila et al. (2004), who find firms use triadic relationships, where there are no commercial transactions between the buyer and the intermediary or between the seller and the intermediary, an aspect found in this study in the relationship between the three actors: firm, CVRVV and importer. The part played by the CVRVV, as a partner and intermediary, is therefore highlighted in this process, underlining the importance of non profit-making organizations in supporting and facilitating SME entry to international markets, giving empirical support to the conceptual study of the importance of the role of non-commercial organizations by Christensen and Lindmark (1993).

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications

From the point of view of management and strategy, relationships through intermediaries are a valuable resource for SMEs that do not have an informal or formal relationship network able to facilitate entry to international markets, especially when significant physical and psychological differences are involved. These firms can use non profit-making or sector organizations to enter those markets, using their contact networks and partnerships in the intended country.

It is demonstrated that managers should actively develop their relationship and partnership network, to allow entry to the intended markets. On the other hand, if the firm adopts a passive attitude in following its network regarding international markets, it may lose market opportunities and eventually be unsuccessful in its strategy of internationalization in these same markets.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for the future

The limitations of this study have to do with focusing on a single industry and a single country, and so the results of the qualitative study may not be completely open to generalization. It must be remembered that the US market has its own characteristics and that the markets differ from one to another considerably (Ronen and Shenkar, 1985). The
Vinho Verde market has its own characteristics due to its very nature, and so the results of this study require future validation in other industries and markets. The existing relationships were neither validated nor confirmed with the other actors involved (importer and agency in the USA), this being an aspect to explore in future research.

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