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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT): NEW DEAL FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SMEs SERVICES

VAHID RANGRIZ
RESEARCH SCHOLAR
ECONOMICS AND CO-OPERATION DEPARTMENT
MYSORE UNIVERSITY
MYSORE

ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of research on the development international small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in business services. The main issue for the strategic analysis of international SMEs and the new opportunities offered by the recent development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Strategic models of international development that reference is based on cases of very large companies with difficulty and applies to small businesses: my research therefore seeks to identify strategic priorities of SMEs and to identify the differences and similarities between large firms and SME services. It is based on a survey that allowed us to build a database of 183 service SMEs located in the south of France and with international activities.

KEYWORDS

Business services, information and communication technologies (ICTs), international development, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the achievements of the 1990s has been the recognition of the importance of service activities in international economic relations. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), Agreement on Financial Services, NAFTA, the creation of the single market in Europe and the deregulation of public and private, have shown the existence of international trade in services and rules for trade are being set up and are sometimes very controversial. The position of SMEs in this movement has long been marginal due to the large investment requirements and most studies have been devoted to large multinationals in the areas of finance, transportation and even the board. Yet SMEs in the services sector are increasingly interested in the many development opportunities abroad and a number of them are actually engaged in internationalisation strategies. Foreign markets offer growth opportunities effect that may be preferable to continued expansion in the domestic market. The service sector is unique in the market share leaders are much lower than in manufacturing (Leo and Philippe, 1991); the increase in the market is facing rapidly rising costs and competition everywhere. From a relatively low penetration rates, market shares become more expensive to win. Companies are quickly confronted with the need to diversify if they want to continue to grow in their country of origin. Foreign markets offer an alternative because you can find room for growth while providing the same service, sometimes at the cost of some adjustments at the margin. The company can keep his job specific and speciality based its competitive strength in the domestic market. When engaging in foreign markets, service SMEs face many difficulties are mainly due to costs of development abroad and the difficulty of the emergence of economies of scale. The new information technology and communication have greatly reduced the cost of access to information and customers. In some cases I can speak of a collapse of barriers to entry and small business services are probably the first to step into the breach. These recent developments in information technology and communications that facilitate access and monitoring of international markets can be a new deal for SME service providers. These technologies greatly increase trade opportunities for service firms. The smaller they are now with access to distant markets that they can theoretically prospect and, in some cases used without costly travel or investment. They also establish control structures and information exchange in line with the strategies pursued and makes easier the control of any network and its operation. SMEs in business services are likely to peak in this area as having a small number of customers with whom they often share a lot of information; they are directly affected by modern technological advances.

The big question that remains unresolved is the importance of the consequences of new technologies on international development opportunities of service SMEs: do they constitute a new mode of access and development to do without the lengthy and costly implementation of the network or are they an improvement of existing methods with the consequences and therefore a much more limited? The purpose of this communication is to provide some answers to these questions by relying on surveys that were conducted by us with the support of Chambers of Commerce of Marseille and Toulouse as part of a Search more vaste1 initiated to better awareness and understanding of the extent of international openness of firms in the sector business services. In this paper, after asking what terms arise for us the issue of international development services for SMEs, I will identify how the survey was conducted and the results: first on their debut at the International then how they organise their relations with customers abroad and the role of networks and ICT in them, and finally I propose an evaluation the role played by information technology and communication in their international development.

2. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES OF SERVICES SMEs

By bringing to the international service firms are, in principle, subject to a tension between two broad options: adapting their services to make them comparable and acceptable in a context different from the usual national context, or standardise their services, This often requires a redefinition of the concept of service including in their home market, which in turn greatly facilitates the development outside the boundaries and remote control of the homogeneity and quality of services. This issue of adaptation or standardisation is obviously present for SMEs who opt for International Development (Leo and Philippe, 2004). From another point of view, I can consider that the need for adaptation of a service is very sensitive to the activity and the concept of service: the more technology services are often less dependent on culture country of origin and can often be accepted as awarded (or with little adaptation) by foreign clients. The presumption of excellence (Munos, 1999) can play the same role for services with the highest cultural content as soon as the company is seen as a reference or because of his clean image (which is rare for SMEs) is because of the territorial image that is associated by prospective foreign (country, region or city). The fundamental strategic choice as analysed by Bartlett & Goshal (2002) is therefore often to SMEs as they do not seek to challenge their distinctive competence in developing internationally. Lovelock and Yip (1996) consider that it is rather the overall strategy is the horizon of development of international service firms but it must be noted that this overall strategy, as the transnational strategy, concerns only a handful of very large companies: most service SMEs with access to international markets may embrace strategies multi domestic but most often opt for international strategies. The latter form, which seems the least accomplished, brings together the votes of the majority of companies. For cons, the problem of how to implement for International Development is extremely present for SMEs in the services sector because the costs of international development can quickly become unbearable. The great difficulty in the service sector comes from the scarcity of sources of economies of scale. International Development increases the distances involved as much mileage in terms in terms cultural and regulatory. The information is initially more difficult (and therefore more expensive) to obtain. Enter the market is widely regarded as the best way to overcome these difficulties and costs. But this requires an investment that can be cumbersome and that few SMEs can consider. In contrast, the image of free and immediacy offered by ICT focus certainly many hopes of leaders.

2.1 The organisation of the customer relationship, central variable for services

O'Farrell and Wood (1994) identified the characteristics of international trade in services activities. Direct investment abroad complements trade for many business services. The international trade can be observed by the border crossing and the change of ownership taking place. In the case of services there is no clear border activity to determine if there was an exchange, unlike goods: "production" may take place in the importing country where the customer is

located. Services can be delivered through the usual channels of communication, usually not dedicated to international trade (telephone, postal services, fax, and internet). Trade in services can be conducted in many ways that have been identified very early (Richardson, 1987) by analysts as by the practitioners: the movement of providers, client flow, movement of the two protagonists, and no movement at all (designated sometimes *'cross-border exchange pure'*). This complexity is that the barriers to entry are more diffuse and may relate to regulatory requirements or preferences that are essential to know. Service activities operate in an environment significantly different from that exporting manufacturers have accustomed us: first, the distinction between investment and trade is not as obvious, and secondly, most services require more of As the goods and finally, the simultaneity of consumption and production characteristic of many services means that the establishment of an office on site (for direct investment abroad or by contractual agreement) is often a requirement but regulatory restrictions on direct investment in services are generally more restrictive than for the creation of a factory producing manufactured goods. SME service that address a new market abroad must overcome two major obstacles in succession: first, the difficulty of obtaining relevant information in this market, they share with disabilities manufacturing SMEs that want to develop abroad. The cost of travel, missions, visits to prospects and potential partners, the time spent searching for regulatory information (essential for most service activities), those on business practices and competition can reach significant amounts, comparable to a real investment without ensuring that they never lead to a new stream of business. Second, and differs from the manufacturing sector, if the new market seems to be realised, I must quickly hire new financial means to access a form of more permanent presence than the movement of personnel service provider or the client. These considerations provide insight into the enthusiasm shown for simple strategies of internationalisation remain modest and pragmatic. Information and networking are important elements of the internationalisation strategy because they define the organisation set up to remotely manage the client relationship. Research on international marketing services have favoured some elements of the problem and customer contact management "front office" taking into account the consequences of specific services (Nicoulaud, 1989), the network and local presence (Campbell and Verbeke, 1994) and already the impact of information technology (Vandermerwe and Chadwick, 1989). The emphasis was placed on the development of networks abroad and how to implement to enable an organisation to type *'servuction'* run in different environments. The *'back office'* is yet also an essential element of internationalisation strategies because it allows for information systems managing large volumes of transactions, responding to requests in a very short time and can offer services additional. Paul Collin (2002) stresses that the emergence of reservation services and transaction banking services in fact based on a standardised back office and creates economies of scale. Moreover, research on intercultural management (Warner and Joynt, 2002) provides interesting insights on the impact of the heterogeneity of cultures and contexts on the management of human resources and the design of the multinational organisation. Until now, research work devoted to international development services firms have mainly focused on the development of networks abroad and the various practical ways to implement, since export *'pure'* to the local establishment. These modes are not all present, far from it, the same level of financial involvement. The financial aspect is covered by a basic difficulty in services: the reproducibility constant quality of the service in an establishment other than the parent. This difficulty exists at the national level, but is greatly amplified at the international level because of differences in culture, legislation and communication difficulties. Technological developments in the fields of information and communication can affect the primary service SMEs who can see at once opened a range of international opportunities.

2.2 ICT and open international business services

The evolution of telecommunications technology affects this analysis in depth: a lot of information on foreign direct from foreign databases become easily accessible, so that some services may be exported without ever being physically present in the foreign country. Prospecting and customer relationship may in some cases take place entirely online, ignoring the boundaries and regulations. Opportunities for strategic, technological, legal and are actually very competitive amplified by relatively simple software to use and monitor the *'web'* like so many semi intelligent sensors potentially interesting information for each company (Gadille and Amabile, 2002). In a completely different note, the same technologies introduce novel organisational possibilities by allowing the decoupling of the different stages of benefits and geographical separation of the *'back'* and *'front offices'*. ICTs facilitate the control of today's geographically dispersed facilities and permit coordination procedures far more cumbersome to implement (Roche and Blaine 2000). Some studies (Zimny and Mallampally, 2002) even propose to conclude that the main contribution of ICT would enable a better complementarity and a better integration of different relational modes more than they would actually promote a mode at the expense of another and it is important to realise that the data they use are very comprehensive and leave no room to open perspectives for SMEs. In summary, the changes introduced have several impacts: first, the transportability many services is enhanced, especially when it comes to business services processing information, developing the use of cross-border mode of service delivery without moving the staff and clients on the other hand, the access to foreign markets and customers is greatly improved, some firms may also rely on the development of ICT to create innovative processes, the basis of international or territorial expansion by offering new services, additional devices to the basic service (Lovelock, 2001) or by separating the core business (*'back office'*) activities in contact with the customer (*'front office'*) and finally, management and coordination of the institutions are geographically dispersed facilities and the cost of this management is reduced. These technological developments thus relate directly the issue of international development services. Many publications have focused on the new opportunities offered by ICT for businesses or SMEs. Few have focused specifically on the service sector and there is still very difficult to identify what practices and what practices are favoured of these SMEs, especially internationally. Yet the question of international development of service activities can arise in a new way: to what extent the use of ICT allows it to overcome the constraints of location identified in the past? In theory, the forms of presence to find clients no longer pass by the location must trade through the use of information technology. These not only affect the relationship service but also help to increase sales, reduce organisational costs and gain knowledge in some cases with an efficiency level comparable to that of a local institution.

Internationally, SMEs in some respects similar to services to SMEs Manufacturing: modest financial capacity, decreased organisation is sometimes at odds with the diversity of situations to deal with, highly flexible and adaptive structure. But these similarities should not mask the sectorial context are placed in strategic perspectives very different: even fewer gains of scale, greater sensitivity of the intangible cultural differences and regulatory balance of non-tariff barriers tariff, a frequent need for production (*'servuction'*) total or partial on-site stress that for most manufacturers that during the post-sale. It is clear that different types of antennas that SMEs can use to build their networks do not identically available to them: subsidiaries and joint ventures require financial investment, up a franchise network requires an upstream work on the concept and control means for remote control of quality and it is not a strong point for SMEs and it is easier to develop a network of agents and it is a formula that has the support of SMEs, but often these networks limited to a role in the exploration and representation, benefits assigned to the remaining parent. If agents must provide the services, the problem of their training and their control arises again.

Finally, there are all kinds of partnership agreements more or less formal that have the potential to have support in foreign countries without having to invest too. These forms of *'soft'* are the advantages and disadvantages of their often informal, but it seems they have the support of many SMEs. The use of ICT to enable SMEs to develop cross-border exchange by the *'pure'* when used to make the service available to the foreign customer. They also facilitate access to information about prospects, customers and partners and brought in to support the intermediate stages of development. Finally, they allow richer communications with subsidiaries where they exist and can renew the role of the parent as *'back office'* generates external economies and contributing in part to the benefits provided by the network.

3. THE SURVEY

The first problem faced by researchers interested in service businesses open to the international is to identify these companies. There is no reliable database and recognised in this field. If I add that you want to look at SMEs, independent businesses and small size and the scope of investigation for the use of modern communication technologies and the network developed for the international business, I easily understand that the use of a survey is difficult to avoid.

My surveys were conducted in 2000, as part of larger projects and in the dual aim of providing information to professionals and to answer research questions, including those that are the basis of this communication. I thus have a database of 274 firms in the market services sector companies and I can quickly brush characteristics. Respondents are institutions for 84% of firms with local headquarters, 82% of them having only one institution. 74% of responses come from independent companies. A quarter of the responses emanating from subsidiaries of larger or smaller are set apart. The vast majority of independent firms are small or very small (57% have less than 10 active), but there are also seven responses from large firms with over 500 employees, too, are treated separately.

Once all these criteria intersected, my analysis focuses on the 183 companies that are unquestionably of SMEs (independent for their capital, with fewer than 200 employees and less than 25 million euros of turnover). The other 91 (subsidiaries or large) will serve to highlight what is really specific to SMEs.

The answers come from four main areas of activity. First the engineering and information technology provides 41% of responses. Two areas followed with weights comparable activities of logistics and transport (21%) and consulting activities for business and management (25%). Firms in this sector are more international than could have been thinking a priori and, in my sample, it is mainly SMEs that responded. Finally, a number of operational services (cleaning, security, investigations, translation, secretarial services, factoring) are also present (12%). The information requested relates to the identity of the company in order to clearly identify those that rely on larger organisations (legal form, ownership of capital, decision-making autonomy, the parent company if any), the international debut (when, how, why, the first choice of country), the current international business (exports, services provided abroad, adaptation or not they, way of relating with customers, network set up, countries served, use ICT), a number of opinions requested from the manager (challenges, strengths and potential weaknesses of the company, strong sales) finally, the usual quantitative data are collected (numbers, frame rate, number of business). Questions are asked in the form of closed questions with, in general, a free response at the end of enumeration. The assessments were requested on rating scales of importance to 5 or 7 levels. The preliminary discussions in developing the questionnaire helped clarify the answers that could be offered to each question, they also showed that it would be difficult to obtain precise figures on the economic performance and financial companies; data is often considered too sensitive to be disclosed.

4. RESULTS

Here I present some highlights from these investigations first beginnings of the international opening of SME business services and forms of relationship they establish with their customers and, finally, the role of ICT in international development of SMEs.

4.1 The initial strategies

Service companies operating internationally are becoming more numerous and among them, SMEs are becoming increasingly common: they benefit from new demands from their customers who are becoming too. In addition, new information technologies are opening unprecedented opportunities for organisation by allowing a separation in space activities of the 'back' and 'front offices'. But the very services interactive, such as advice, are probably more sensitive to lower costs of transport including air transport. My investigations confirm a number of these trends.

4.1.1 A phenomenon that is accelerating and growing importance of SMEs

Openness to international SME service seems to undergo acceleration. It is very sensitive since 1989 and my surveys indicate an accentuation of this trend after 1995 (GATS Agreement), even clearer after 1992 (European single market), then combining the two measures their effects. If the phenomenon of internationalisation in the service sector is quite old, it concerned mainly the beginning of large firms. It can be observed in my investigation that the recent increase is mainly due to small opening to international markets and foreign. In my total sample, there are 12 firms that were brought to the International prior to 1965, 26 to 70 years, and 43 during the 80. They are 91 to 97 from 1990 to 1995 and from 1996 to 2000. These waves of internationalisation are driven more by SMEs: they account for only 40% until the late 70's, 63% in the decade 80, 70% in the first half of the 90 and 78% in the most recent period. There is a clear specificity of the activities of advice on the most recent period, the oldest openings under most logistics activities. Operational services, relatively less numerous in this field also seem to know an internationalisation later.

For 83% of SMEs internationalisation was more than two years, the start was made with a number of schools the same as they do today. This seems to confirm that access to foreign markets is when some of their French market saturation occurs. The general law which would not be interested in the markets foreigners once exhausted the possibilities of the internal market does not seem to be necessary for large companies, 54% continued to expand their network of business in France after their international openness.

4.1.2 Forms starting

Often requires a service to set up a delivery system for the physical meeting with the client. This is a real difficulty for SMEs tertiary means necessarily very limited. This constraint is much less present in the manufacturing sector where exports can grow for years without need for a physical location on the market. 79% of SMEs in my sample discussed their first foreign market by a simple export. The majority of services are counselling and education, with benefits and valuable point that accommodate the movement of the provider or client. In addition, the cost of travel has declined and new forms of distance communications were established. Openings based on an early settlement, whatever its nature, are extremely rare (7%) which is quite specific for SMEs (25% of large companies surveyed starting their international business this way). The most recent period (1996-2000) sees SMEs use more (15% of starts) to other forms of openness, more indirect (outsourcing or international networking working 'back office') concerning certain consulting activities as well as operational services such as secretarial and translation.

4.2 Networks and Client Relations

Providing services to the international forces companies to control the distance to make their services available to their customers and to develop or maintain relationships with them. 69% of SMEs in my sample move their staff to meet the foreign customer to ensure their benefits. 34% are foreign customers to come get the service in France and 13% have set up procedures for cross-border exchange a 'pure', similar to material goods. SMEs in significant numbers (38%), however, developed branches abroad in order to ensure their benefits even after starting with simple exports. Using the network, if it is not required at start up (RESER, 1995), seems to be an effective form when international trade will be sustainable: 12% of beginners (less than two years) 18% of recent (2 to 5 years) but 28% of confirmed (5 to 10 years) and 38% of senior (10 years or more) developed at least one local branch to ensure the services. The degree of international involvement in this development also includes: SMEs who make less than 10% of their foreign sales are 31% to be set up antennas; those who are between 10 and 35% 33% this case, while 46% of the most committed (over 35% of sales) have developed a network. With the exception of the cross-border exchange 'pure', these modes of relationship are not mutually exclusive and the other two modes (sometimes three) coexist within the same company in 49% of cases. In most cases, when only one type of relationship is used, it is the movement of personnel to service foreign customers (63% of cases). Very few firms (7) are limited to making their services in France to foreign customers who go there. By cons, 28% of SMEs with foreign partners entrust all of their services abroad.

TABLE 1: TYPES OF RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN CUSTOMERS BY INDUSTRY

Forms of relationship	Tech Tips number		Business Management Tips & number		Logistic number		Operational services number	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
Border pure	11	15.0	3	6.7	8	20.5	2	9.5
Movement of people	51	69.9	36	80.0	23	59.0	13	61.9
Moving the customer	26	35.6	17	37.8	10	25.6	7	33.3
Delivery by air	23	31.5	18	40.0	21	53.8	7	33.3
All firms	73	100.0	45	100.0	39	100	21	100.0

NB: Column totals exceed 100% because multiple responses, field 178 replies (5 missing)

In terms of industry, the modes of relationship with foreign clients oppose the logistics activities in two areas of consulting and operational services: cross-border provision 'pure' and that provided by the local branches are more frequent. The network forms the most frequently cited by SMEs are partner networks more or less informal (58% of firms with an overseas network) and networks of sales agents under contract (30%). There are also 19% of branch networks, as opposed to 58% of large firms in my sample who have them. These proportions change significantly if I exclude purely commercial antennas and I consider only the antennas that are responsible for providing services abroad (Table 2): SMEs in this case are much more likely (31%) to adopt the form subsidiary, as expensive but better control. However, they remain far from the largest firms of which 75% use this method in providing services abroad.

TABLE 2: FORMS OF THE DELIVERY NETWORK BY TYPE OF BUSINESS

Business Type Network forms	SME		Large companies		Set	
	no of firms	%	no of firms	%	no of firms	%
No network	70	38.2	11	12.1	81	29.6
Purely commercial network	44	24.0	21	23.1	65	23.7
Delivery Network	69	37.7	59	64.8	128	46.7
Which: *						
Subsidiaries	20	31.3	43	75.4	63	52.1
Joint ventures	9	14.1	8	14.0	17	14.0
Franchises	2	3.1	1	1.8	3	2.5
Contract staff	20	31.3	31	54.4	51	42.1
Other Partners	40	62.5	23	40.0	63	52.1
Set	183	100.0	91	100.0	274	100.0

* Totals exceed 100% in a column due to multiple responses from the delivery systems, but there are seven missing responses (5 small and 2 large firms) in this regard.

In general, firms do not multiply types of networks they develop. Most (71%) are confined to a single type of antenna, others manage two types, exceptionally three (5 cases). 84% of networks composites combine a relatively flexible to a more controlled. This simple network is even more pronounced for networks that do not purely commercial benefits: 79% are consistent and none has more than two types of antenna. Features are observed depending on the country where the services are performed: the Western Europe, local market, is subject to fewer settlements or settlements purely commercial. Other developed countries have a profile close but yet more firms operating in these markets from a delivery network. The use of network seems even more necessary in developing countries and it seems affiliate form preferred by SMEs in the service of the joint venture may be more difficult to control. This survey seems to reveal the pragmatism that guide most of the leaders who choose to intervene by multiple means. The attractive idea of an internationalisation process would take place in stages must be seriously reconsidered. While it is clear that a firm cannot do everything at once in this area, and a learning process can lead to more complex forms of temporary networks during their experiment. But it is also likely that the terms most convenient and most appropriate will vary from one country or context to another.

4.3 Use of ICT in international

Classical relational modes are doubled in 85% of cases by the use of media, traditional or not. Telephone or fax is mobilised by 73%, the mail by 54%. The new means of telecommunication (Internet, EDI, databases), 60% are employed by SMEs, which shows the rapid penetration of these technologies and their adaptation to the needs of such firms. However, the IDE seems a way reserved for large organisations because, in my survey, only one SME is used to make its services available to its customers abroad (15% of large company's surveyed do). SMEs, few in my survey, which use the cross-border exchange "pure" maximum use of these new ways of relating, 71%, operate new telecommunications facilities, 67% of the traditional means of telecommunication. The use of ICT is far from homogeneous in my sample. Having specifically identified these practices, I propose to assess their impact on performance variables available in my data (the dynamic international) by putting them in competition with other variables such as firm size or characteristics its network.

4.3.1 Practices for SMEs

The use of new materials applications of information technology and communication has long favoured larger companies who were only able to engage in the necessary investments in both hardware and human resources. Structured and hierarchical networks could take full advantage of data transfer by EDI procedures that proved of little use to SMEs whose networks are often more flexible and not hierarchical. The revolution in information technology had put the micro computing power within the reach of smaller companies; it seems that the Internet now plays a similar role in the communications field. SMEs in my sample do not contradict this view because they appear almost as many users of ICT than larger firms I surveyed 77% have an email address, 48% have created their site on the 'web', these figures are very close to those given to us by big companies or subsidiaries of my sample (75% and 46%, respectively). I have distinguished several levels of use of ICT. Just use the Internet to communicate (having an email address) is now very widespread and is thus not very discriminating. The first significant step towards the integration of ICT in the process of internationalisation probably just wants to be on the "canvas" for a specific website. A second stage is reached where the SME began to search for information or to engage in prospecting through ICT. A company that manages to deliver its service 'online' is probably to a greater degree of control and use of ICT. Finally, companies that perform all these operations are clearly those most integrated all the possibilities offered by ICT. This interpretation reveals a split among SMEs, greater than for large companies, between those who engage fully in the use of ICT and those who remain behind, not exceeding the stage of the site or even a simple email address.

TABLE 3: USES OF ICTS INTERNATIONALLY BY SMES BY SECTOR OF ACTIVITY

Forms of relationship	Tech Tips		Tips for Business & Management		Logistics		Operational services	
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
No of use	12	16.4	8	17.8	20	52.6	3	13.6
Simple web site *	7	9.6	1	2.2	2	5.3	1	4.5
Prospecting or information *	5	6.8	3	6.7	2	5.3	7	31.8
Provision of service*	21	28.8	23	51.1	8	21.1	3	13.6
All these uses	28	38.4	10	22.2	6	15.8	8	36.4
Have an email address	66	89.2	39	84.8	19	46.3	20	90.0
Have a website	45	60.8	17	37.0	9	22.0	15	68.2
All firms	73	100.0	45	100.0	38	100.0	22	100.0

* Excluding other types of use

Analysis by sector in Table 3 highlights the peculiarities enough trenches. SMEs in the logistics sector differ significantly from the others: a majority isn't use of ICT, while in other areas of work I do is never more than 20% in this case. This delay is confirmed when one considers the rate of endowments email addresses or websites. SMEs in this sector have often started their internationalisation very early, well before the advent of ICT and have established networks and procedures for internal communication on previous generation technology (telex, fax ...). They will have to evolve on this point to stay competitive with larger firms in the sector which is constantly growing range of services through ICT (tracking, order tracking, delivery etc.). The second lesson of the analysis by sector is to show that the activities of engineering and technical advice, which include consultancy services in IT, are the main area where the use of ICT has grown toward the international. This sector benefits from the technical mastery of these tools and can sell its services abroad without any adaptation because of their high-tech. Both areas were heavily consultancy engaged in strategies to sell their services through ICT. Operational activities are quite limited and their area of operation is a priori not well prepared for international development. Those who have answered almost all rely on ICT but more for information to ensure that their benefits. These results support the hypothesis that ICT allows a larger opening of SMEs to international service.

TABLE 4: USE OF ICT AND THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR SMEs

Network forms Use of ICT	No of network		Sales network		Delivery Network	
	no of firms	%	no of firms	%	no of firms	%
No of use	12	21.8	11	28.2	17	32.7
Simple web site *	1	1.8	3	7.7	2	3.8
Prospecting or information *	5	9.1	5	12.8	3	5.8
Provision of service*	18	32.7	9	23.1	12	23.1
All these uses	19	34.5	11	28.2	18	34.6
All firms	55	100.0	39	100.0	52	100.0

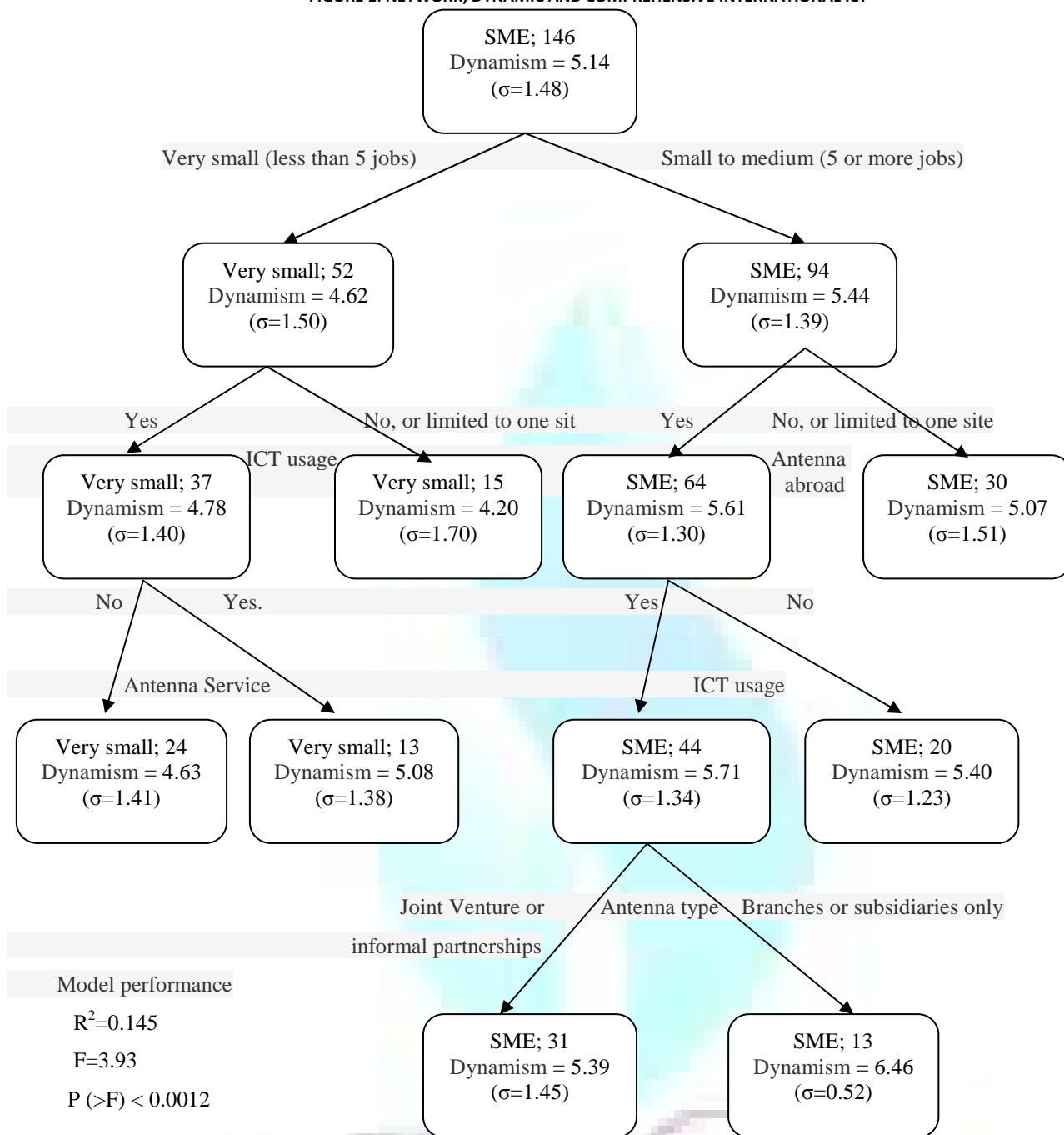
* Excluding other types of use

From Table 4 reinforces this impression: when no antenna is available abroad, the proportion of firms that use ICT to make the service is the highest (67.2%) and those who have not using ICT are less numerous. But this table also shows that ICT also strengthen the network and when there are therefore not only a palliative for the absence. The possibility of selling 'online' service accelerates its international development. Thus, of the 17 SMEs in my sample who sell 20 or more countries, 12 international has started within the last 10 years and 83% of them use ICT to make their service available to customers abroad.

4.3.2 Networks, ICT and dynamic international

The results presented so far remain largely descriptive. My data allow us to go a bit beyond if one connects a variable performance of the company with the choice of network type and type of use of ICT. Authors who have analysed the performance of international firms (Madsen, 1987; and Ramangalahy Julien, 2003) generally hold the view that the concept is multi-dimensional and discuss the value of an objective accounting measure and only deal with strategic objectives quite varied. These reflections show the interest there is to consider how these results are received and evaluated by the leader when it may be questioned. The indicator used here is admittedly one-dimensional since it concerns only one aspect of performance, the strength of international sales, but he decides to move away from strict accounting ratios for preference assessment that in fact the leader. This preference is also justified by the inadequacy of accounting measures in the context of services exports. Revenues from international operations that can be considered as the amount of exports after consolidation of results of subsidiaries, is often used to compare the large companies but it is difficult to use when a portion of benefits abroad is the fact of unauthorised subsidiaries, which is often the case when it comes to utilities medium or low. Speaking of internationalisation services and not for export, is precisely this uniqueness of the development of service activities that can be done by creating a network more or less controlled with each antenna providing the services in its area of competence. Ideally, I should consider affiliate sales and sales by partners (joint ventures, agents, franchisees and others). However these cannot be integrated because all these companies have their own activity, independent of the activity due to the network. Each firm establishes its own rules for evaluation and control within the network so that it does little good to apply directly for encryption of international activity due to the heterogeneity of responses that would be provided. In reality, the degree of internationalisation of a firm relative to another is actually very difficult to measure (Huault, 1998). Taking into account the network and the strategic objectives that differ from one firm to another, moves the measurement capabilities to more qualitative indicators. The leader is normally the person who best knows the reality of the international activity of the company and its network. The momentum indicator used here directly expresses how he evaluates the evolution of the overall figure on a scale of 7 points. To improve the quality of responses, this question has been grouped with other requests for assessments on sales figures more accurately known by the leader (CA general, sales in France, and exported CA subsidiaries). An observation must be made here: this indicator shows no significant difference in the four major sectors covered by this research (logistics, engineering, management consulting and operational services) unless it is considered that these four sectors experiencing increases parallel to the internationally, it is likely that leaders have more or less stalled on the evaluation of their activities. The tree shown in Figure 1 was prepared by method C & RT (Classification and Regression Trees) to explain the differences in the indicator of dynamic depending on network features, the intensity of use of ICT and the size of the enterprise (workforce). The analysis of binary cascade used to identify groups of firms experiencing international tertiary dynamics significantly different. The quality of the 'diagnosis' loses reliability gradually as one move down the tree that can be more or less developed depending on the size thresholds for identified groups a priori. Given the size of my sample (Reduced by 146 SMEs because of incomplete responses), I asked the program not to divide groups of less than thirty companies and not to accept groups of under ten. The explanatory variables were: size class (jobs in the company into seven classes), the fact of having an office abroad whether commercial or delivery (3 classes), the composition network (subsidiaries, joint ventures, agents and other partners), and finally an indicator of the use of ICT the company: no use, a simple website, use selective (limited to the exploration or the provision of services), Prospecting involving extensive use and availability. The program operates at every stage, comparisons between different groups as possible and, in the case of ordinal variables with more than two terms; the dichotomy holds the most effective. C & RT method was developed by Breiman et al (1984). She chooses at each stage the division of the sample which produces the two sub-samples as homogeneous in terms of the dependent variable. It is implemented in the software marketed by SPSS Answer Tree.

FIGURE 1: NETWORK, DYNAMIC AND COMPREHENSIVE INTERNATIONAL ICT



The lessons can be drawn from this analysis are manifold. First a caution: the model explains only 14.5% of the variance in the dependent variable. The international dynamism depends on other factors but the dichotomies obtained have still significant differences it is interesting to observe. The first distinction occurs between the very small firms (less than 5 assets) of others. The very small services show an average energy International (4.62) significantly lower than other SMEs in the sample (5.44). For these very small, it appears that the use of ICT opens up new opportunities for dynamic, provided they are not limited to simply create their website. The intensive use of selective media does differs, however, the dynamic performance of very small if not associated with a network, even embryonic, providing direct benefits to the country market. In this case, it does not seem the type of antenna (commercial or service) significantly influences the dynamic. The lack of air seems significantly burdening the development potential of becoming comparable to the most dynamic very small. The analysis does not show whether firms can overcome this lack in part through the use of ICT: those that use them are too few (they are 6 in my sample). If one overcomes the limits imposed on the dichotomous analysis can be observed that these six companies appear less dynamic than the other 24 (average 4.67 against 5.17 for those who use ICT). Companies that have established a network abroad experience different dynamics depending on their use of ICT: those that are absolutely no use of ICT are less dynamic. Finally, the type of network developed outside influence on the dynamic potential of SMEs is using ICT: those subsidiaries or agents (relatively homogeneous categories on the test modelled and combined to avoid too small numbers) show increases much faster than others. It is interesting to note that the use of joint ventures (joint ventures), often advocated for small businesses as an inexpensive way to have a quasifiliale does not seem to be as effective in the service sector; it does not seem to allow such rapid development that the simple network of agencies and would be closer to the informal network that is not characterised by rapid turnover. This seems to confirm that this type of partnership should be difficult to service activities, probably posing more problems than it does to solve.

These results deserve to be verified in larger samples, because here I reach the limit of the significance of the statistical analysis, some of the numbers involved are small and I had to make combinations. SMEs involved in joint ventures are in fact only nine in my sample. I also find that there are eight SMEs were able to acquire a foreign subsidiary, are also those which are most dynamic (6.63 on average, with a standard deviation of 0.74) but their small numbers requires caution. From the perspective of an SME may consider establishing a subsidiary, the way the dynamic is still possible. It passes through the branch network is a development often enjoyed by such companies, including industry, for its flexibility and low initial cost: the 11 SMEs in my sample who are also very well

structured dynamics (6.18 on average, with a standard deviation of 0.60), significantly more so than, yet twice as many who have resorted to informal partnership arrangements (5.41 on average, with a standard deviation of 1.59).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The service sector has entered the last ten years a new phase of internationalisation. International agreements and economic integration of Europe and North America have liberalised trade in services. The new communication technologies create favourable conditions in some sectors for the international deployment of medium-sized moderate who can start by avoiding the high cost of installation or removal. New areas and new companies are likely to expand beyond their national borders and, in the same way, I can expect increased penetration of Foreign Service companies in France. Companies try to differentiate their services to gain competitive advantage perceived by their customers. There are many ways to distinguish itself from its competitors, but the choices on the methods and the nature of relational benefits are two vectors of differentiation very powerful, even essential, services for SMEs. The state of competition and skills each firm affect the choices made but it remains essential that the various components of the strategies are kept consistent. The question at the end of this analysis is the specifics of service SMEs compared to larger firms in this sector. Do they have really different internationalisation strategies; they are especially on some strategic vectors for successful internationalisation? To the first question can be answered that the internationalisation strategies followed by the SMEs they are not really specific. Regarding the second question, thereby against that SMEs are more willing to use local partners to serve their customers and forming networks and inexpensive but often informal, however, less easy to control, especially in terms of the quality of services that networks of foreign subsidiaries. Although my investigation starts to date, the use of ICT appears widespread among the companies studied. No doubt they are carrying must now support the international development strategies of service SMEs. This support is particularly clear for all matters concerning the operation of networks set up abroad. However, the data in my sample do not show whether they are really a sustainable alternative development of the network remains the main differentiating factor between firms.

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