

# Export Intention of Small and Medium Tunisian Enterprises

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## Abstract

Due to globalization, export is considered as an essential asset for the continuity and profitability of businesses. Nevertheless, export is a complex process. To initiate and to develop this strategy, a business must clear away the internal and external constraints and take advantage of the stimulating factors. The latter show up at each stage of the process. These stimuli are especially decisive during pre - export behavior or the intention stage. So the export intention is explained by some variables: the differential advantages, the organizational predisposition and the perception of the risk. Our conceptual model has been applied on a sample of small and medium Tunisian enterprises (SME). Inspiring by Churchill's methodology, our principal conclusion is that export is the strategy implying less capital and risk than the other modes of entry. However this decision may turn up like suicidal if the firm having the intention to export doesn't proceed by an assessment of its export.

**Keywords:** Export intention, competitive advantages, organizational predisposition and risk.

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## 1. Introduction

With this wave of globalization and liberalization of exchanges that characterizes today's world, enterprises are bound to take into account the global market. In this perspective, the Tunisian enterprises which are mostly SME needed to adopt strategies of internationalisation through the exports since such a strategy involves less capital and commercial and financial risk than other modes of entry. But, such a necessity can appear like a hazardous or suicidal decision if the enterprise having the intention to export does not start by assessing its potential of export.

In this field several researchers raised the problem of the behavior hardback pre - export to the intention to export like Wiedersheim - Paul and Welch (1978). The latter is defined by Reid (1981) as being the motivation, the behavior, beliefs and waiting opposite the contribution of the export to the growth of the business.

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Our issue resides in the explanation of the intention to export through three factors, the differential advantages, the organizational predisposition of the business and the risk discerned all while doing its empiric analysis in the case of the Tunisian SME.

The objectives of our article are the following:

- To develop a model in order to explain the intention to export for the Tunisian SME;
- To determine empirically what makes the difference empirically between those who have the intention to export and those do not.

A review of the literature followed by the description of the model, the adopted methodology and the main results will be presented:

## 2. The literature Review

### 2.1. Schools of thoughts

Studies on the behavior of export increased to generate two big schools of research. The first focuses on the explanatory factors of success in exports while the second is interested in the export process, Eugene and Pasternack (1994).

#### 2.1.1. The explanatory factors of success:

The explanatory factors of the export success are tributary to the organizational features of the business and the strategy of export marketing:

- For the organizational features of the business, researchers mentioned the size of the business, Louter (1991), Dicht and al (1986), Ogram (1982); Resources of the business that represent a determinant decision of the export behaviour, Weinrauch and Rao (1974), Cavusgil (1984) ...etc, managerial expectations where the action of top management on export decisions is an obvious success. So managers tend to base their expectations on the profitability, risk, the cost of the export from the experience of their businesses and of the other and their perceptions of the potential impact of the perceptual environment change, Cavusgil (1984).
- For the strategy of export marketing, it implies several measurements namely the expansion and the commercial competitiveness. Besides the scheduling and the manner, whose function marketing is organized, reflect this strategy, Louter (1991).

#### 2.1.2 The process of export

We can consider in this setting two groups of researchers Johnson and Czinkotas (1982):

- The first has been interested in motives that push and attract managers to opt for the internationalisation through the export. These motives are of double nature. Proactive motives indicating an aggressive export behaviour such as the differential advantages, the growth through the expansion of the market and the opportunity of the profit Eugene and Pasternack (1994), Leonidas (1995) ...etc., on the other hand, the reactive motives refer to the passive engagement in the export as answers to environmental pressures such as overproduction and the reduction of local sales Eugene and Pasternack (1994).
- The second shows that decisions to export take place in a set of stages where each represents a raised degree of engagement of the business in the export. Among these stages, it mentions the effect of the experience (the effect of training) and success in the reach of the objectives, Barker (1992) and Jouy (1993) ...etc.

## 3. The description of the explanatory model

### 3.1. The export intention

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) based themselves on the measure of the intention to operate a given action in order to foresee the future behavior. According to these authors the intention of the individual to fulfil a given act depends essentially on his attitude towards his governing norms, on his behavior and motivation to conform himself to these norms.

Let's move to the case of the firm, Reid (1981) defined the export intention as being the motivation, the behavior, beliefs and expectations towards the contribution of the export to the growth of the business.

Cavusgil (1984) affirms that there is a relation between the intention to export and the organizational features associated to the export. Louter (1991) sees that the most important factor to explain the intention to export is the managerial attitude towards the export. Yang and Alden (1992) found a relation between the intention to export, the capacity of the expansion of the market, gates to the export, the differential advantages, the organizational predisposition and the perception of the relative risk to the export. In the light of what has been advanced, we notice that most researchers mention the following variables to explain the intention to export.

- The differential advantages,
- The organizational predisposition,
- The perception of the risk.

We analyze in what follows every variable.

### *3.2. The differential advantages*

These differential advantages are considered at two levels, the country and the business.

Porter (1990) found that the competitive advantage of a country influences the competitive capacity of business on the international market through the natural resources, the development of the country, the maturity of infrastructure and telecommunications, the quality of research and the development, the bases of knowledge and the requirement of the local demand in terms of innovation.

At the level of the firm, an important number of researchers underlined the importance of certain features of the business at this level; good combination product/market, skills and resources, competitive prices, technological advancement, flexibility in relation to changes..., Yang and Alden (1992)...etc.

We can already propose the following hypothesis 1:

H1: The differential advantages are positively bound to the export intention.

### *3.3. The organizational predisposition*

This concept involves several senses; knowledge, attitudes and intentions, motivations, perceptions, knowledge, faculties and managerial expectation towards the export, the organizational culture favourable or unfavourable Eugene and Pasternack (1994), Louter (1991), Kaufmann and Schmidt (1994), the training in the export or the unsuitability of the export experience, the degree of responsibility and managerial engagement, Constantines and Morgan (1994), Yang and Alden (1994).

When, the second hypothesis is stipulated:

H2: The organizational predisposition can be bound positively or negatively to the export intention.

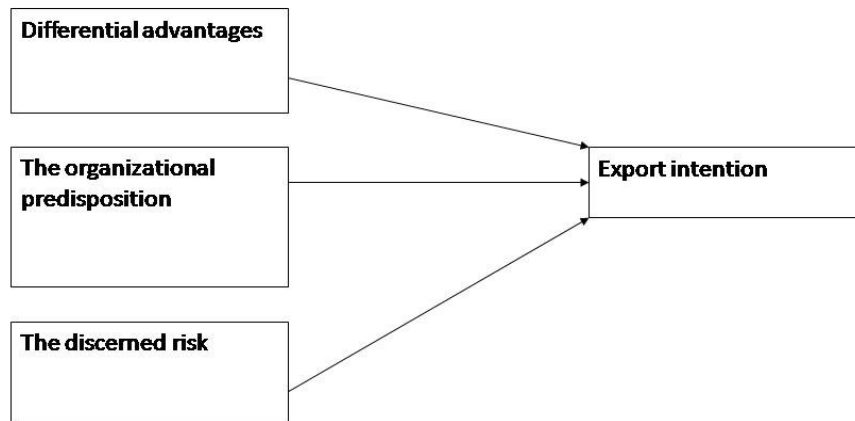
### *3.4. The discerned risk*

The perception of the export risk affects managerial strategies extensively. For this reason businesses must consider the total international risk in the conception of any internationalisation strategy. This risk includes the uncertainty of the environment (political risk, natural risk...etc.), the uncertainty of the industry (change of tastes and preferences, the apparition of substitutable products, competition, change of the technology...etc.) and, in short, appearance the operational, financial or behavioral uncertainties,...etc. Muller (1992), Johnson and Czinkota (1982) identified a set of factors of risk affecting negatively the attitude towards export among others, the lack of information, the lack of adequacy of the staff, of the financial and commercial resources, the physical distance and cross culture...etc.

We can express the third hypothesis:

H3: The discerned risk is associated negatively to the export intention.

Thus, the conceptual model is as follows:



**Fig1. The conceptual model**

Moderator Variable is the experience or the training in the export

This model will be empirically tested on the Tunisian SME while following our methodology of inspired research of Churchill's works (1979).

**4. Research methodology**

We refer to Churchill's paradigm (1979), whose stages are:

- To specify the domain of constructs (stage already established theoretically)
- To generate a sample of items,
- To purify measures (tests of unidimensionality and reliability)
- To ascertain the new measures' reliability,
- To test of the validity of constructs,
- To develop norms.

*4.1. Genesis of an item sample*

This stage is achieved in four phases:

- Proposition of measures for each construct: The dependent variable, the export intention (IE), is measured by a scale of Likert of 5 points going from "very strong intention" to "no intention", Eugene and Pasternack (1994). We suppose that those having the strong intention will be invited to answer the other questions (see Appendix 1). The first independent variable

" differential Advantages" (AD), has been measured by 36 measured items on a scale of Likert of 5 points going from " quite okay " to " Not at all okay " according to Eugene and Pasternack (1994), (see Appendix 2). The second independent variable "organizational Predisposition" (PO), has been measured by 22 items on a scale of Likert of 5 points, Eugene and Pasternack (1994), (see Appendix 3). Finally, for the third independent variable "discerned risk" (R), we propose only one question, measured on a scale of Likert of 5 points going from " the strongest " to " the weakest ", (see Appendix 4).

- The choice of the scale of Likert is justified, since methodological efficiency is satisfactory. Its operational efficiency is good for its simplicity (comprehensible). This scale is much recommended in domains of behaviour and psychology, Vernet (1991).
- An investigation test has been led by 9 SME, three belonging to the Textile sector and Clothing, three to the sector of leather and shoes and the last three to the food sector. These SME chosen by judgment are based in the region of Sfax. This investigation test was very useful to test the vocabulary employee, the length of the progress of the questions...etc.

- The choice of a final sample: the latter involves 88 chosen enterprises according to suitability

whose features are summed up in Table 1.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the sample**

Characteristics	Distributions			
Sectoriels	Textile (34.1%)	Leather and shoes (35.2%)	various (30.7%)	
Legal shape	« SA » (19.3%)		« SARL » (80.7%)	
effectif	More than 50 (30%)		Less than 50 (70%)	
Social Capital	< à 150.000DT (60%)	Enter 150.000DT and 1 Billion (20%)	More than 1 Billion (20%)	
Business Ciper in 97	Less than 1 Billion (60%)	enter 1 and 10 Billions (35%)	More than 10 Billions (5%)	
Business Ciper in 96	Less than 1Milliard (70%)	enter 1 and 10 milliards (28%)	More than 10 milliards (2%)	
Business Ciper in 95	Less than 1Mill (78%)	enter 1 and 10 milliards (20%)	More than 10 milliards (2%)	
The firm age	Less than 20 years 80%		More than 20 years 20%	
Location of the firm	Region of Sfax (80%)		Region of Tunis (20%)	
Education level of the owner	Illiterate (3%)	Primary (5%)	Secondary (52%)	Higher education (40%)
Education level of managers (average)	Illiterate (0%)	Primairy (0%)	Secondary (30%)	Higher education (70%)
The nature of the respondent	The top manager (50%)		managers (50%)	
Exportation experience	Occasionnal Experience (40%)		No experience (60%)	
Quotation in financial market	Quoted 0%		Not quoted 100%	

4.2 Purification of measures (tests of unidimensionality and reliability)

Three tests of unidimensionality have been applied on the three constructed (IE), (AD) and (PO) namely the factorial exploratory analysis, the test of interrelationship item/total score, Vernet (1991) and the test of adequacy of the sample of MSA measures or KMO that must pass a doorstep of 0.5 (given by SPSS).

A test of reliability  $\alpha$  of Crombach whose requirement is located between 0.8 and 0.9 for an applied survey, Nunally (1967) and Perien, Chérom and Zins (1984).

Details of results of (IE), (AD) and (PO) will be presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4. These tests generated some elimination item and the appearance of derived constructs for (AD) and (PO) following the factorisation so tests of reliability for derived constructs are presenting as follows:

- For (AD), the emergence of three coins constructs, "The competitiveness of suppliers and the technological and commercial advantages of the product" reflected by F1, "The state of the competition" reflected by F2 and "The state of the demand" underlined by F3. It is compliant to results of Porter (1990).
- For (PO), the emergence of three derived constructs supported by the theory, "proactive motives and the manager's knowledge" reflected by F3, "The reactive motives" reflected by F2 and "The experience in the export" underlined by F1.

**Table 2: Purification tests of (INT)**

Items	MSAI	Correlation item/ total score	$\alpha$ of the construct if item deleted	Contribution in F1 (67%)
INT1	0.887	0.887	0.797	0.872
INT2	0.855	0.855	0.671	0.780
INT3	0.887	0.885	0.684	0.783
INT4	0.887	0.829	0.840	0.897
INT5	0.887	0.834	0.571	0.687
INT6	0.887	0.883	0.775	0.853

$\alpha$  of crombach =0.896 ; MSA= 0.857 ; N=88

**Table3: Purification tests of (AD)**

Items	MSAi	Correlation I/total score	Contribution in factors : F1 (28.7%)	F2 (19.6%)	F3 (4.8%)	Test of reliability ( $\alpha$ if item deleted (after factorisation))
AD1	0.380	0.141		0.543		0.728
AD2	0.686	0.07		0.480		0.6752
AD3	0.673	0.187		0.448		0.676
AD4	0.723	0.143		0.637		0.652
AD5	0.607	0.034		0.301		0.721
AD6	0.709	0.235		0.502		0.708
AD7	0.519	0.051		0.316		0.798
AD8	0.781	0.267		0.655		0.680
AD9	0.759	0.126		0.498		0.686
AD10	0.783	0.547	0.510			0.883
AD11	0.818	0.581	0.619			0.880
AD12	0.685	0.336	0.516			0.887
AD13	0.793	0.538	0.660			0.880
AD14	0.769	0.545	0.662			0.879
AD15	0.805	0.482	0.623			0.882
AD16	0.707	0.531	0.559			0.884
AD17	0.688	0.446	0.635			0.882
AD18	0.666	0.282	0.466			0.889
AD19	0.818	0.287	0.637			0.884
AD20	0.782	0.379	0.628			0.883
AD21	0.647	0.207	0.407			0.892
AD22	0.626	0.299	0.417			0.888
AD23	0.760	0.375	0.567			0.886
AD24	0.754	0.415	0.618			0.882
AD25	0.854	0.455	0.584			0.883
AD26	0.823	0.271	0.588			0.885
AD27	0.712	0.196	0.592			0.886
AD28	0.715	0.129	0.414			0.892
AD29	0.622	0.04			0.566	0.738
AD30	0.738	0.138			0.499	0.611
AD31	0.650	0.199			0.499	0.575
AD32	0.677	0.127			0.582	0.564
AD33	0.673	0.150			0.575	0.584
AD34	0.782	0.08			0.741	0.605
AD35	0.510	0.329			0.468	0.667
AD36	0.553	0.258			0.478	0.734

$\alpha$  of crombach for the construct=0.765 ; MSA= 0.719 ; N=88

**Table 4: Purification tests of (PO)**

Items	MSAi	Correlation I/Total score	Contribution in factors : F1 (34.4%)	F2 (11%)	F3 (7.2%)	Test of reliability ( $\alpha$ if item deleted (after factorisation))
PO1	0.460	0.266			0.289	0.586
PO2	0.720	0.501			0.272	0.488
PO3	0.592	0.427			0.674	0.446
PO4	0.833	0.728			0.284	0.483
PO5	0.479	0.165			0.436	0.565
PO6	0.333	0.07			0.261	0.631
PO7	0.656	0.5			0.469	0.516
PO8	0.661	0.350			0.301	0.687
PO9	0.614	0.401	0.423			0.889
PO10	0.853	0.568	0.616			0.880
PO11	0.848	0.756	0.846			0.872
PO12	0.798	0.388	0.487			0.884
PO13	0.831	0.744	0.815			0.875
PO14	0.862	0.695	0.786			0.875
PO15	0.884	0.763	0.833			0.871
PO16	0.858	0.641	0.745			0.876
PO17	0.882	0.7	0.795			0.871
PO18	0.766	0.552	0.604			0.880
PO19	0.764	0.410	0.6			0.881
PO20	0.806	0.447		0.430		0.552
PO21	0.902	0.577	0.715			0.880
PO22	0.717	0.329		0.537		0.550
PO23	0.791	0.507	0.617			0.8806
PO24	0.440	0.025	739			0.905

$\alpha$  of crombach for the construct=0.839 ; MSA= 0.773 ; N=88

4.3. Validity of constructs

"Only the reliable instruments can be validated", Churchill, (1979).

Although various classifications are available, we identify three types of

validity, validity of the content, discriminative validity and convergent validity and nomologic validity:

- The validity of the content: is to note that there is not an indication to assure the validity of the content. It is



about more of a gait: to insure that in terms of content, instruments developed in research are representative of what one tries to measure...Perien and Zins (1984).

- The convergent validity and discriminative validity: The convergent validity is demonstrated for measures of the two constructed (AD) and (PO), knowing that the  $\rho_{vc}$  indications are superior to 0.5, Fornells and Larker's (1981). The discriminative validity is also demonstrated since constructs are so distinct from one another that the extracted average variance of every construct is superior to the covariance between that construct and another one, Fornell and Larker's (1981).
- Nomologic validity: permits to test the theoretical validity of constructs as well as its conformity with what is conceived by the theory, Vernet (1994).

## 5. Results and discussions

The method chosen according to the objective of research and the nature of variables is the multiple linear regression permitting to identify the degree of explanation of the variation of a dependent variable by the independent variable variation. This method is only applied after a verification of the four conditions of application of a regression, Wheelwright and Makridakis (1983).

Two linear regressions have been applied on two groups of the sample, enterprises having an experience in the export and those that never exported. The model for the first group is statistically meaningful to  $p=0.02$ , with a  $R^2=0.418$  and a test of Fisher of  $2.772>2$ . For the second group the model is as meaningful to  $p=0.0001$  with a  $R^2=0.645$  and a Fisher of  $11.683>2$ .

### 5.1. The differential advantages

For the experienced businesses the state of suppliers and advantages of products seem to be a necessity to enliven the intention of

reexport, the state of the demand is bound negatively to the intention to export. It is generally owing to a stage of mind influenced by logic of production and not of need. In short the state of competitors and especially through their innovations stimulates these businesses to improve their competitiveness to attempt the export. This result is nearly compliant to the one of Eugene and Pasternack (1994). As for businesses that never exported, the differential advantages represent brakes for the intention to export. Thus there is a partial acceptance of the H1 hypothesis since the differential advantages can be bound positively or negatively to the intention to export. We can find explanations while examining the reality of the Tunisian SME. Indeed, if for the SME already exporters, only the competitiveness of suppliers, the product and the competition and not the pressure of the demand stimulate the intention to export. It is because, in the case of SME, the position of power is occupied mostly by firms rather than by consumers (Only the big firms have a marketing service)

### 5.2. The organizational predisposition

Results of (PO), show that for the first group, reactive motives, proactive motives and knowledge are bound negatively to the export intention. This indicates that for this group, the export is only occasional and non inherent to the offensive or defensive strategies. And managerial knowledge on the foreign markets is very limited. Whereas the past experience, represents a motive to renew the export and indicating a certain satisfaction. As for the second group, proactive motives and knowledge are bound positively to the export intention. It implies that the managers of this group can achieve the expansion of their enterprises only through export, therefore, an organizational change and knowledge on the other markets has proved to be necessary. In the light of these results, the H2 hypothesis is confirmed.

### 5.3 The discerned risk

The perception of the risk of the foreign business, compared to the one on the local

market, influences the intention to export, depending on the degree of the exporters satisfaction with their past experience, since those who have never experienced this activity fear this risk of internationalisation. Thus, H3 hypothesis is confirmed. These results coincide with those of Eugene and Pasternack (1994).

### Conclusion

In a globalized world, the Tunisian SME are invited to build true strategies of internationalisation. Even though export is the fashion generating the least financial and commercial risk, it must be studied in a strategic way and should not result from luck and opportunities. Our SME must find the good remedies to detain the differential advantages and a good organizational predisposition to pull a place in an intensive competitive universe. In this article, we tried to reflect the reality of the Tunisian SME in an international context, It cannot delete the theoretical and empiric limits of this study that we will try to complete in an ulterior research work.

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**Appendix 1: Measures of the export intention**

a/ Do you have the intention to export in the next 5 years ?

<b>Very strong intention Strong</b>	<b>Strong intention</b>	<b>middle intention</b>	<b>Weak intention</b>	<b>No intention</b>

b / Did the manager foresee the necessary resources for the expansion of the business?

<b>Not at all okay</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>quite okay</b>

c / Is the manager of your enterprise able to exploit all the new opportunities that the market can propose ?

<b>Not at all okay</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>quite okay</b>

d /Can you specify the frequency of the following activities outside the firm?

	<b>Very frequently</b>	<b>Frequently</b>	<b>middle Frequency</b>	<b>A few times</b>	<b>No time</b>
<b>You participate in the national or international conferences having for theme the export</b>					
<b>You subscribe in the national or international magazines dealing with the theme of export</b>					
<b>You participate in national or international events encouraging exports</b>					

## Appendix 2: Measures of the differential advantages of the business

	Not at all okay	okay	Undecided	okay	quite okay
<b><u>The main competitors</u></b>					
<b>Influence the development of the product</b>					
<b>Have a large enough setting up</b>					
<b>Have a large investment in research and development</b>					
<b>Influence the technological development</b>					
<b>Have very good pictures of mark</b>					
<b>Are present in the international exhibitions</b>					
<b>Have access to the capital through actions that they detain in stock market</b>					
<b>Their sales increase quickly</b>					
<b>Have a large range of products</b>					
<b><u>Your suppliers</u></b>					
<b>Are innovators</b>					
<b>Are active in the foreign markets</b>					
<b>Are the leaders</b>					
<b>Use some advanced technologies</b>					
<b>Their technologies change quickly</b>					
<b>Have a large setting up</b>					
<b>Are competitive</b>					
<b>Have developed knowledge</b>					

<b><u>Your business has:</u></b>					
<b>A technological advantage</b>					
<b>A good quality of products</b>					
<b>A differential advantage of products</b>					
<b>An advantage of manufacture process</b>					
<b>A good service</b>					
<b>A variety of products</b>					
<b>A capacity to compete</b>					
<b>Consumers faithful to your mark</b>					
<b>A good relation with suppliers</b>					
<b>Competitive prices</b>					
<b>Motivated staff</b>					
<b>Your customers:</b>					
<b>Can become competitors</b>					
<b>Exert a pressure on your business to lower prices</b>					
<b>Exert a pressure on your business to be competitive</b>					
<b>Exercise a pressure on your business to widen the variety of products</b>					
<b>Exert a pressure on your business to be innovative</b>					
<b>Exert a pressure on your business to improve the quality of your products</b>					
<b>You have a large clientele</b>					
<b>You are knowledgeable about the market</b>					

**Appendix 3: Measures of the organizational predisposition**

	<b>Not at all okay</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>okay</b>	<b>quite okay</b>
<b>You export to follow the example of competitors</b>					
<b>You export to pull a tariff reduction advantage</b>					
<b>You export following an intense national competition</b>					
<b>You export to exploit opportunities of growth</b>					
<b>You export to compensate for some negligible markets by more important others</b>					
<b>You export to liquidate an excess of stock</b>					
<b>You export to achieve some supplementary sales following the occasional exports</b>					
<b>You don't export because the elevated tariffs are gates to the export</b>					
<b>You export to consolidate the seasonal fluctuations</b>					
<b>You export to lengthen the product life cycle</b>					
<b>You export to increase savings of scales</b>					
<b>You export in order to contribute to the expansion in the future</b>					
<b>You export to reduce the risk by the diversification</b>					

of markets					
You export so that your products can be adapted in foreign markets					
You export to improve the profitability of the investment					
You export by what your products are competitive abroad					
You export by what you have a good knowledge on the other cultures					
You master the foreign languages					
You don't export for lack of information on the foreign markets					
You export by what you have a knowledge on the foreign consumers					
You export to answer to a domestic tradition					
You export to sustain a political program					
You export for the prestige					

**Appendix 4: The measurement of the risk discerned**

The risk of the foreign business compared to the one of the national market is:

<b>Bigger</b>	<b>big</b>	<b>The same</b>	<b>weak</b>	<b>weaker</b>