

Explanation of the Model of Iranian Oil Product Export Performance

Zahra Mahdavi Sabet^{a*}, Mohammad Ali Abdolvand^b, Kambiz Heidarzadeh^c, and Mohsen Khounsiavash^d

^a Ph.D. Student, Department of Business Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: zmahdavi@ymail.com

^b Assistant Professor, Department of Business Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: abdlvand-ma@yahoo.com

^c Associate Professor, Department of Business Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. Email: kambizheidarzadeh@yahoo.com

^d Assistant Professor, Department of Mathematics, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran. Email: mfsiavash@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Organizations enter international competitive markets because of different motivations such as gaining international fame, long-term growth, increasing profitability, taking advantage of economies of scale, maturing domestic market, the intensity of competition in a domestic market, governmental rules and regulations. However, all of the companies aim to export performance improvement. According to the oil industry situation in Iran's vision, the 4th paragraph of general energy policies and, not having a comprehensive model of Iran's oil products' export performance, this research could improve and develop this industry in international markets. This research method is phenomenology, and statistical society includes export and marketing managers and experts in the oil industry. Non-probability sampling and snowball sampling methods were used in this research. A semi-structured depth interview was used to gather information for this qualitative research, and seven in-depth interviews were done regarding the saturated rule. Structure, internal, interpretive, and descriptive validity were used for the validation. For surveying reliability, revision while coding and surveying by another informed person was employed to ensure correct coding. After open, axial, selective coding, and using ATLAS.ti qualitative software, suggested antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance include market orientation, company resources, marketing mix, and macro environment. The items of Iranian oil products' export performance include financial performance, customer satisfaction, and customer retention. Most previous studies have focused on positivism and quantitative research methodology, while we used the qualitative method.

1. Introduction

With growing international businesses, exporting plays a fundamental role in many companies. Exporting activities increase organizational abilities, which generate extra resources that enhance the companies' performance. Thus, researchers, managers, and policy-makers need a strong understanding of exporting. Over the past 50 years, helpful progress of export performance research has shown the enhancing attention of this field. In this study, export performance is defined as the outcome of a company's activities in the market (Chen, Sousa & He, 2016: 630).

Nowadays, international developments have inevitably linked foreign policy and the economy, so it is impossible to have a dynamic global economy without active, interactive, and effective foreign policy. Meanwhile, energy is a particular issue as one of the essential variables of the global economy, especially Iran's energy, which is an essential issue in oil and politics and one of the world's major oil and gas producers (Rohani, 2010: 30).

Today's developing world is improving rapidly based on an intelligent and robust economy, so interactions fundamentalism and international relations, both political or commercial, have become widely dependent on the economic power of countries. There would not be an effective foreign policy to direct foreign developments without it. On the other hand, achieving a strong economy based on production and exports requires an interactive foreign policy. Thus, a country's economy and foreign policy cannot be separated, and they will always have a convergence (Rohani).

One of the key economic factors in economic progress is energy security, one of the most fundamental issues in foreign policy. Thus, oil and gas is a particular issue to form many international interactions, and Iran, as one of the prominent actors in the oil economy and policy, will be affected by this role (Rohani).

The necessity of this research in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries is that studies in different countries about the impact of antecedents on export performance have not reached consensus results, and there is a question that how much more attention to the factors affecting export performance in developing countries, especially Iran, would achieve expected results. Regarding the oil industry in the 20-year vision and the lack of a comprehensive model of Iranian oil products' export performance, this research can be a

good solution for the international development of this industry.

2. Research objectives

Ideal Objective: helping managers and experts of Iranian oil products' exporting companies gain an appropriate concept of the factors affecting export performance and providing a model for improving export performance in the critical condition of sanction.

Practical Objective: surveying the export performance of Iranian oil products manufacturing and exporting companies, providing a valuable model for managers, and utilizing this model to improve the Iranian oil products' export performance in the face of sanctions.

Primary Objective: identifying the structure of Iranian oil products' export performance and its antecedents.

Regarding the innovation of this work, most previous studies have focused on positivism and quantitative research methodology, while we used qualitative methods by phenomenology perception.

3. Research questions

1. What are the variables of Iranian oil products' export performance?
2. What are the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance?
3. What is the model of Iranian oil products' export performance?

4. Literature review

Growth performance and trade are positively associated. Thus, exporting could be considered a strategic activity at companies, industries, and country levels. Firms should search for new chances in the market. Companies anticipate future demands and chances in the market, participate in emerging markets, shape the environment, and introduce new products and brands before their rivals by being proactive. Thus, companies could be commercial leaders by being proactive (Erdil & Özdemir, 2016: 551).

Several articles have already reviewed exporting and showed the achievements and limitations in this area. So far, the latest comprehensive literature review of export performance by Sousa et al. (2008) concludes the works until 2005. From 2006, enhancing consideration has been paid to the antecedents of export performance, as an enhanced number of articles related to export



performance are published in journals (Chen, Sousa & He, 2016: 628).

Fundamental theories, including resource-based view (RBV) and Porter's theory of competitive advantage, provide essential insights into the multi-dimensional phenomenon of exporting. Philosophical and empirical proof demonstrates elements, including research and development, macroeconomic uncertainty, networks, and domestic institutional attributes at the industry and company level as crucial for explaining export performance. For enterprises to operationalize exporting and efficiently and effectively use firm resources, Gregory, Ngo, and Karavdic (2019) assert that they must appreciate the existing challenges in the macro-environment (Kitonyi et al., 2020: 175).

The marketing mix is defined as complementary solutions and actions for achieving consumer needs and meeting the firm's marketing targets. It is also defined as a set of relevant solutions and factors that enable customers to meet their needs and achieve their goals. According to Singh (2016), marketing is a complex range of marketing mix solution variables used in the company seeking to sell their goods and services. Effective marketing mix management causes marketers to create a combination of elements that will rationally control the company's budget to achieve the desired goals. Companies that desire to operate influentially and achieve their objectives should pay well to manage all marketing mix elements. Forming the marketing mix elements needs to consider each element's characteristics to be aligned. The non-alignment of the element's interaction might be the company's shortages (Išoraitė, 2016: 26).

Based on the qualitative research results of "Designing a model for the impact of export market orientation and product design management on the export performance of Iranian handicraft exporting companies", product design management and market orientation were identified as the main pillars of handicraft exports. The results of theme analysis also led to the extraction of seven components for export market orientation, classified into four groups or sub-themes. Identified themes include author branding, exhibition marketing, virtual marketing, and export marketing strategy. Sub-themes became the central theme of export market orientation. The results of this research can be used by export companies and export facilitators (Maddakhani et al., 2020: 171).

The research entitled "quality, export, and domestic market performance: the case of pharmaceutical firms in

Iran" shows that export involvement and performance increase local market performance in the Iranian pharmaceutical firms. The research reveals empirical evidence on the relationship between domestic market performance and export performance, adding depth and understanding why traditional attitudes did not explain the position. Correlation analyses showed a positive relationship between export and domestic performance. It means that export performance causes good domestic performance, and vice versa (Dadfar et al., 2015: 938).

The outcome of the work entitled "Impact of marketing effectiveness and capabilities, and export market orientation on export performance: evidence from Turkey" recommends that export market orientation has an essential effect on marketing effectiveness and capabilities, and marketing effectiveness has a significant effect on export performance. It shows that export market orientation is critical to improving marketing capabilities, while marketing effectiveness explains export performance (Kayabasi & Mtetwa, 2016: 532).

The paper's findings entitled "A qualitative examination of market orientation measurement scale for Vietnamese instant coffee industry: case: Trung Nguyen, Nescafé, and Vinacafé" reveal that the market orientation positively affects the business performance of the company. Furthermore, the research shows that measuring traditional scales for market orientation needs modifying to suit Vietnamese firms. The modification measurement scale is revealed as one of the results of this research, implying that measurement scale would help Vietnamese instant coffee firms to keep their business activities and develop company performance (Nhu Anh, 2015).

4.1. Oil products and export limitations

Oil products are used materials from crude oil processed in an oil refinery. Oil products include gas oil (gasoline), kerosene, plane fuel (ATK), liquid gas, fuel oil, sulfur, hydrogen, and carbon (petroleum coke).

By doing field research and exploratory interviews, international limitations of oil products' export due to sanctions have reached, and some are mentioned below.

The more tensions, the more expenses we have; nowadays, some ships do not enter Iran, and those allowed are not permitted to go to the other countries because of high age and poor facilities, so we have double handling. These inappropriate ships have high expenses. In addition to delayed time, these factors cause more expenses, involving Iran in security/political

factors. Involving in environmental tensions, such as ship piercing in Fujairah and rocket hitting the Iranian tanker in the Red sea, cause high risks for insurance companies, receiving more premium and at last more freight.

Another issue is transaction prohibition with the other countries due to the American government. Thus, any country which deals with Iran should accept the other countries' rejection. Nowadays, Iran does not negotiate with importers directly because of sanctions and tries to do it differently.

One of the most critical issues in Iran's trading is payment. The export product is sold in foreign currency, and this currency has to be paid to the Nima system, but we have to use paper companies due to sanctions. Iran obtains guarantees from exchange companies, but it is not a clear bank statement. Unfortunately, money laundry would happen via this system. Iran cannot trade by LC anymore, and customers have to pay in cash by exchange companies; all of these factors cause lower prices than Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Another issue is shipping problems; the best container lines such as Ever Green do not transfer containers to Iran, and just shipping of Islamic republic of Iran is available. However, it cannot act well because of sanctions; for instance, there is no central hub in Iranian factories, so there is a lag time to transfer products to destinations.

Economic war is the following problem. For instance, America has recently reached a large capacity of oil resources and has exported oil products at low prices to Turkey and China, disrupting the balance of the market and causing low prices in Iran.

One of the most significant problems of Iran's export performance is exchange rate instability. Sanctions are a practical issue on the exports of Iran because they affect marketing, sale, shipping, and logistics.

Regarding research needs of Iranian oil products' exporting companies to export performance improvement, the strategic importance of the oil industry in Iran, globalization of companies, and international export limitations, we try to provide a comprehensive model of Iranian oil products' export performance to achieve maximum exploitation and minimum expenses.

In this research, after determining objectives and statements, gathering literature review, designing protocol by qualitative method, doing in-depth interviews, qualitative data analysis has been done by

coding, and achieving results by providing a comprehensive model. The steps of research are given in Figure 1.

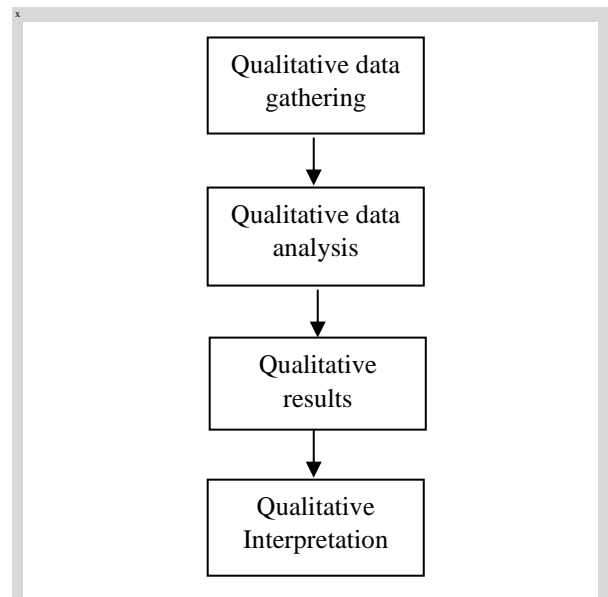


Figure 1. Steps of the research.

5. Research methodology

Qualitative research is any type of research that produces findings that have not been obtained through statistical operations or other counting methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1997: 32). In other words, the qualitative approach in research is a set of inductive and non-quantitative methods for the in-depth study of social and cultural concepts (Mansoorian, 2014: 166). This study's research method is phenomenology. It proposes a research method with descriptive, reflective, and interpretive coordinates to extract the essence of human experience. Based on this approach, the researcher tries to identify variables and factors affecting Iranian oil products' export performance with the help of informants and their lived experience (Mansoorian). This research has a fundamental purpose because we search antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance and do not have definitive hypotheses.

5.1. Data gathering method

Studying scientific documents and doing in-depth interviews of informants have been used to determine the variables and antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance. The statistical population of the study are managers and experts of marketing and exporting of the Iranian oil products and Exporters Association selected via non-probability and purposive sampling methods. After selecting the first person and conducting the next



person's interview by his suggestion, the interviews continued until reaching repeated answers and theoretical saturation after seven interviews. Informants' information is given in Table 1.

5.2. Validity and reliability

Trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research, definitions, and equivalents in quantitative research are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Informants' information.

Column	Company	Name	Sex	Education	Work experience (years)	Interview time (min)
1	National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company	H.A.	Female	MA	17	75
2	Banagstar Karaneh	KH.M.	Male	MA	5	45
3	Mehr Petrochemical	N.P.	Male	MA	6	60
4	Hesarmehran Refinement	M.SH	Male	Bachelor	7	55
5	Siahfam	N.R.	Female	MA	6	50
6	Jey Oil	B.T.	Male	MA	13	45
7	Persian Gulf Apadana Petrochemical Plant	K.F.	Male	Ph.D.	10	60

Table 2. Trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research, their definitions, and equivalents in quantitative research (Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009: 296; Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 290).

Criterion and definition	Quantitative equivalent
Credibility: Are research constructs credible to the creators of the multiple primary reality (actors or subjects)	Internal reliability
Transferability: Transferring inferences from a specific transmitter to a specific receiver	External reliability
Dependability: The extent to which the review process is reliable; the ability of human components to achieve consistent and logical results	Validity
Conformability: The extent to which the product verifies whether the results are precisely from the data or reasonable? Is there a researcher bias?	Objectivity

Structural validity (triangulation and flexibility method), internal validity (theoretical saturation), interpretive validity (informants' feedback), and descriptive validity (applying two interviewees) were used to evaluate this research validity.

The post-coding review method and applying the second interviewee in parallel in some interviews evaluated this research's reliability.

6. Findings

Searching for patterns in data is qualitative data analysis. Hermeneutics phenomenology of Heidegger is used to analyze data (Van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology analysis is the most challenging research method due to the extended philosophical dimension (Mohammad pour, 2016), and coding is the primary step to analyze qualitative data. Open coding,

axial coding, and selective coding were used for the qualitative analysis of this research (Heidarzadeh & Norouzi, 2015).

After each in-depth interview, the interview transcript was entered into ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software for open coding and analysis. Then, the researcher proceeded to subsequent interviews. Open coding is an analysis process to recognize subthemes, features, and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1397). The interview transcript was read several times in this step, and main sentences were recognized and recorded as text codes. Then, similar conceptual codes were put in some groups, and 838 open codes were recognized in this research.

Axial coding was the next step related to categories; actually, categories were related in their features and dimensions (Strauss and Corbin). In this step, primary codes of open coding related to each other were put in a common axis, and the continuous comparison of codes was made to ensure having different categories. Selective coding was done by repeating this method, and the core variable was recognized.

According to this research results given in Table 3, the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance are market orientation, firm's resources, marketing mix, and the macro environment with the critical item of political issues. Customer satisfaction, customer retention, and financial performance are also the items of Iranian oil products' export performance.

Table 3.

Category	Theme	Subtheme
Market orientation	Cultural market orientation (customer orientation and competitor orientation) and behavioral market orientation (information generation and responsiveness)	Internal completion, competitive advantage (price, product, and service), porter competitive strategies (price, differentiation, and concentration), competition structure (enter and exit barriers), services (communication with customers and responsiveness), external competition, competitive environment (competition intensity and environmental uncertainty), commercial communication and destination identification
Marketing mix	Product, price, distribution, and marketing research	International marketing research, export marketing strategy, pricing strategy, shipping strategy, distribution channels, product quality and quantity, relationship marketing, products standardization, and product improvement and variety
Firm's resources	Human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources, and financial resources.	Management (target, experience, foreign language, international knowledge, motivation, taking risks, understanding the export market, commitment, and public relation), company competence, staff experience and commitment, technology, production capacity, and resources availability
Macro-environment	Economic, legal, political, and technology factors	Tariffs, standard, customs, export limitations and barriers, technology and religious variables, security decisions, sanction, payment mechanisms, foreign currency exchange, war, and tension
Export performance	Financial performance, customer satisfaction, and customer retention	Strategic performance, export volume, staff and customer satisfaction, target market, export rate and sale, export sale development, export market countries, entering new markets, customer retention, effectiveness and productivity, and success rate



After interviews and qualitative analysis, we reached 5 categories and 20 themes listed in the above table, and the details are mentioned below.

Export performance is the main category and the core concept of this research, and its examples in interviews are referred to as given below.

Firstly, we consider financial issues with measuring export performance efficiency, and earnings are measured from product exporting to target markets (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

Measuring the customer order time to the transfer time to ship (lead time), production to sales ratio (sales efficiency), customer satisfaction which is done every four months, following claims and complaints via a committee to solve problems and back payments (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

Regarding interviews and qualitative research export performance, themes are customer satisfaction, customer retention, financial performance; this proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

Proposition 1: Iranian oil products' export performance includes customer satisfaction, customer retention, and financial performance.

Market orientation is the first antecedent of export performance, including cultural and behavioral market orientations. It has four subthemes: customer orientation, competitor orientation, information generation, and responsiveness; half of the interviewed informants have mentioned this variable.

The most important exporting product is ship fuel, and quality, delivery, and delay time have not been paramount. However, nowadays, these issues are becoming more significant because we do not have a source of fuel oil now. Thus, Iran must be active in the other issues to attract the market (Banagstar Karaneh company).

One of the most critical factors in achieving success in the export market is employee interaction with customers to gain a competitive advantage (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

Regarding this research prediction, the below proposition is suggested.

Proposition 2: Market orientation is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance which includes cultural market orientation (customer orientation and competitor orientation) and behavioral

market orientation (information generation and responsiveness).

The marketing mix is the third antecedent and has been mentioned in more than half of interviews by informants; some examples of interviews are mentioned below.

Various export facilities (product storage distribution and proximity to the borders, road and rail transportation) and transportation facilities have presented cost leadership (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

We are the largest private refinery company in the Middle East in product diversity. Customer chooses our company with all these products instead of buying them from different companies and paying more for shipping (Hesarmehran Refinement Company).

After interviews with experts and managers, four themes have been achieved: product, price, distribution, and marketing research. This proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

Proposition 3: marketing mix is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance which includes the product, price, distribution, and marketing research.

The next antecedent of export performance is the firm's resources. A couple of examples are described in the interviews.

Employees' skills and experiences in exporting, negotiation and bargaining abilities, oil products recognition and its market, familiarity with pricing strategies, training in operational issues are significant issues (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

This company has continuous resources, which is a sustainable competitive advantage and meets countries' material needs (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

Firms' resources have five themes: human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources, and financial resources; regarding this research prediction, the below proposition is suggested.

Proposition 4: The firm's resources is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance which includes human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources, and financial resources.

The last antecedent of export performance is the macro environment in this research, and it has been recognized as the most influential factor in all interviews. Some examples of the interviews are as follows.

Determining internal rules by the government and their constant change is too confusing for brokers; it causes an unsustainable and unpredictable situation (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

Lack of the same rate for foreign currency to export means exporting with foreign currency rate and receiving Nima currency from us by the government; these exchange rate differences are too damageable for our financial issues (Hesarmehran Refinement Company).

Political issues are the most influential factors such as sanctions, foreign currency exchange, exporting ban to some countries, and lack of movement of foreign ships to the Persian Gulf (Siahpham Oil and Gas Company).

This category has four economic, legal, political, and technology factors. This proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

Proposition 5: the macro environment is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance which includes economic, legal, political, and technology factors.

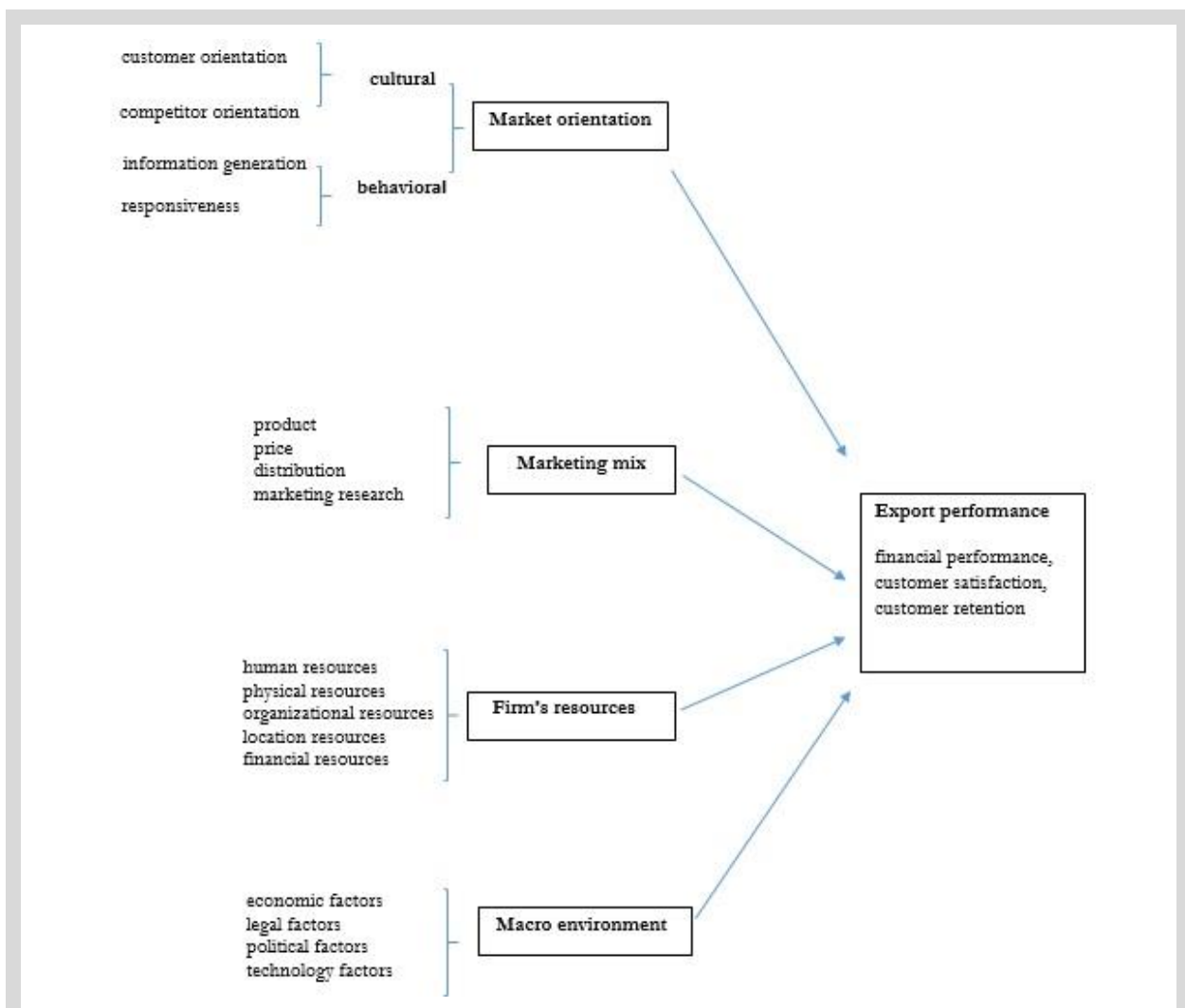


Figure 2. The conceptual model (research findings).

By applying the new research method in the marketing field and existing literature review about export performance, surveying qualitative research, managers' and experts' opinions, objectives,

antecedents, and variables of Iranian oil products' export performance and their relations in a critical situation like sanction were recognized. Thus, the main research question providing a conceptual model of Iranian oil



products' export performance in sanction was answered below (see Figure 2), regarding categories, themes, and subthemes we found via interviews and mentioned in the previous table. Actually, they are antecedents of the core concept (export performance), which were found by the qualitative research and phenomenology method. Furthermore, all data analysis was done by ATLAS.ti software, and then we could achieve this conceptual mode which is the last result and aim of this study.

The following information is mentioned to clarify this model.

The core concept is export performance, and the variables are financial performance, customer satisfaction, and customer retention.

The first antecedent is market orientation in two categories: cultural and behavioral; the variables are customer orientation, competitor orientation, information generation, and responsiveness.

The second antecedent is the marketing mix; the variables are product, price, distribution, and marketing research.

The third antecedent is the firm's resources; the variables are human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources, financial resources.

The fourth antecedent is the macro-environment; the variables are economic, legal, political, and technological factors.

7. Conclusions and discussion

This study is the first qualitative research in determining influential factors of Iranian oil products' export performance. This research has been interviewed with experienced managers and experts in marketing and exporting fields; then, the model of Iranian oil products' export performance, its variables, and practical factors have been determined as a result. These results are beneficial for managers, marketers, and decision-makers of oil companies, and they would be able to do appropriate reactions in critical situations. Further, considering influential factors and customer feedback, they cause customer satisfaction. These are important due to the competitive environment and extended virtual world. Hence, importers can quickly extend their complaints. Thus, companies must consider these effective factors in their marketing plan to achieve their goals.

At this stage, this study's results are compared with the other similar research. Regarding the first proposition

(question 1), the export performance items of Iranian oil products are customer satisfaction, customer retention, and financial performance. These results are the same as Njeru's work (2013), reporting "market orientation, marketing practices, firm characteristics, external environment, and performance of four firms in Kenya". He considered export performance items such as customer satisfaction, staff satisfaction, customer retention, efficiency, productivity, relationship, and financial performance. This study aligns with Njeru's research via the confirmation of the hypotheses, export performance and market orientation, export performance and macro environment, export performance, and marketing mix relationship. It is divergent with the disapproval of the hypothesis export performance and the company features relationship.

Regarding the second proposition (question 2), market orientation consists of cultural market orientation (customer orientation and competitor orientation) and behavioral market orientation (information generation and responsiveness), which is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance. This result overlaps with the research by Jaworski & Kohli (1993), Narver and Slater (1990), Cadogan, Cui, and Li (2003), and Gotteland and Boulé (2006). This study is aligned with Cadogan's research via the confirmation of the hypothesis, export performance, and export market orientation relationship; this study showed that export market orientation directly influences export improvement. Environmental tensions like technology factors and competition intensity are influential on exporting.

According to the third proposition (question 2), the marketing mix consists of product, price, distribution, marketing research, one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance. Moreover, they were recognized in Njeru's (2013) research entitled "Market orientation, marketing practices, firm characteristics, external environment and performance of four firms in Kenya". He considered marketing mix items such as product, price, place, promotion, marketing research. Kayabasi's research, titled "Impact of marketing effectiveness and capabilities, and export market orientation on export performance: evidence from Turkey", diverges from this study in the disapproval of the hypothesis export market orientation affecting export performance and marketing mix affecting export performance.

According to the fourth proposition (question 2), a firm's resources consist of human resources, physical

resources, organizational resources, location resources, and financial resources, the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance. The work of Freeman (2009) entitled "Factors contributing to the successful export performance of regional and metropolitan SME exporters" is aligned with this study via the confirmation of the hypothesis, the positive influence of firm's resources on export performance, the disapproval of the hypothesis, and the negative influence of macro environment on export performance.

Regarding the fifth proposition (question 2), the macro environment consists of economic, legal, political, and technology factors and is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products' export performance; these results overlapped with the findings of Njeru (2013) and Freeman (2009), confirming this study's findings.

8. Recommendations and limitations

There are two kinds of suggestions in this research: Intra-organizational and extra-organizational. One of the internal factors is managers and employees' attitude toward exporting, which is recommended to improve it through deciding to export, familiarity with exporting rules and markets, taking a risk in trading, standard importance, the importance of entering particular markets and its revenue, and skills from training and experience.

Another internal factor is improving quality and quantity of products through the following: quality improvement (improving operating conditions of refineries and changing products into more widely used products), the high quantity of products for exporting and products variation, different warehouses in several parts of the country, having diverse materials in warehouses, and the standardization of products to be more acceptable and usable for surrounding countries.

One of the external factors is the comprehensive knowledge of the export market as follows. How much of the product is produced in the destination country, and how much depends on its import, product vitality for the consumer, competitors in the market, customer experience of financial issues and their capabilities, and competition intensity.

Another external factor is extended resources and the firm's export development programs: access to new markets, changing financial mechanisms, having an internal hub beside the factory for on-time delivery, and customer satisfaction. Due to running out of raw

materials and avoiding selling them, exporting service instead of materials is suggested.

Regarding this study, the most important confrontation solution with export barriers is to have a strategic and comprehensive program for exporting and implementing that in any situation. Another solution is bypassing sanctions, as mentioned in an interview as follows: Iranian fuel oil is sold in Fujairah of UAE, we are in contact with a company in Fujairah which, on our behalf, is in contact with the final consumer in the UAE because nowadays Iranian companies are not allowed to work with international companies.

Energy intensity is crucial for developing countries, and one of the methods to balance energy intensity is pricing modification and gaining improvement technology. Thus, foreign policy has a fundamental role in preserving the country's reservoirs and security of oil production, distribution, and export. Even a country with rich internal resources cannot provide all the needed resources for the development process. Therefore, it has to provide some of them with international resources; international resources play a fundamental role for developing countries. Hence, governmental foreign policy and their relationship with the other countries fundamentally impact attracting these resources.

It is recommended that future researchers should do the other categories of the system general policies in the field of energy. This study was done in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industry and included their products, so the research generalization was reduced. Thus, it is suggested that this research be conducted in other industries.

In qualitative studies, product analysis is a process of conceptualization and has an interpretive nature. The choice of each analysis method should be appropriate to the research methodology, be done in a specified range, and have some limitations. Since qualitative research on export performance has not been conducted in Iran, less scientific analysis has been performed in this field. Therefore, the most significant limitation of this research is the localization of the literature review. The other limitation is different interpretations of this phenomenon, and this interpretation is only one of the acceptable interpretations. Another research limitation is the political behavior of the interviewees.

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Appendix

Protocol

1. What intra-organizational factors affect Iranian oil products' export performance?
2. What extra-organizational factors (internal and external) affect Iranian oil products' export performance?
3. What are the company's resources and plans for export development?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of export performance in the company?
5. What competitive structure is used for export performance, and what strategies are suggested to improve export performance?
6. Which environmental factors (uncontrollable internal and external environment) affect commercial relationships?
7. What is the relationship with Iranian oil products importing countries? What are the communication methods?
8. What method is used for exporting?
9. How is the company's export performance efficiency measured?
10. What are the problems and barriers to improving export performance?
11. What are the solutions to overcome these obstacles?