

# Explanation the Model of Iranian Oil Products Export Performance

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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 advantages of economies of scale, maturing domestic market, the intensity of competition in a domestic market, governmental rules and regulations; but actually, 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 Iranian 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-probable sampling and snowball sampling method was used in this research. Regarding this qualitative research, semi-structured depth interview was used to gather information and 7 deep interviews were done regarding saturated rule. Structure, internal, interpretive and descriptive validity were used in order to Validation; for surveying reliability, revision while coding and surveying by another informed person were used to insure correct coding. After open, axial and selective coding and using Atlas.ti qualitative software, suggested antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance includes: market orientation, company resources, marketing mix, macro environment and items of Iranian oil products export performance includes: financial performance, customer satisfaction and customer retention. Most of the previous studies have focused on positivism and quantitative research methodology while we used the qualitative method in this research.

## 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, useful progress of export performance research has showed 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 made an inevitable link between foreign policy and the economy. So that it is impossible to have a dynamic and global economy without active, interactive and effective foreign policy. Meanwhile, energy is a special issue as one of the most important variables of the global economy, especially Iran, which is not only an important issue in oil and politics, but also one of the world's major oil and gas producers (Rohani, 2010: 30).

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

One of the key economic factors in economic progress is energy security, which is one of the most fundamental issues in foreign policy. So, oil and gas is a special issue to form many international interactions and Iran, as one of the major 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 oil industry in the 20-year vision and due to 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 to 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 useful model for managers, and applying this model to improve the Iranian oil products export performance in the face of sanctions.

**Main Objective:** identifying the structure of Iranian oil products export performance and its antecedents.

**Innovation in this research:** In most of the previous studies have focused on positivism and quantitative research methodology while we used qualitative method in this research by phenomenology perception.

## 3. Research questions

- 1- What are variables of Iranian oil products export performance?
- 2- What are 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 as a strategic activity at companies, industries and country levels. Firms should search 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 a commercial leader by being proactive (Erdil & Özdemir, 2016: 551).

Several articles have already got the literature review of 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 articles until 2005. From 2006, enhancing consideration has been paid to antecedents of



export performance, as enhancing 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 important insights into the multi-dimensional phenomenon on exporting. Philosophical and empirical proof demonstrates elements including research and development, macroeconomic uncertainty, networks, as well as domestic institutional attributes in both industry and company level as crucial for explaining export performance. In order for enterprises to operationalize exporting and be able to 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).

Marketing mix is defined as interrelated 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 company's 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". Influencing marketing mix management causes marketers to create a combination of elements that will enable rationally control the company's budget in order for achieving the desired goals. Companies that desire to operate influentially and achieve their objectives should pay well to manage all elements of the marketing mix. The marketing mix elements formation needs taking into account each element's characteristics so that they could be aligned. The non-alignment of the element's interaction might be the company's shortages (Işoraité, 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 main pillars of handicraft exports. The results of theme analysis also led to the extraction of 7 components for export market orientation, which were classified into 4 groups or sub-themes. Identified themes include author branding, exhibition marketing, Virtual marketing and export marketing strategy. Sub-themes became a main theme as export market orientation. The results of this research can be used by export companies as well as export facilitators (Maddakhani et al., 2020: 171).

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

The outcome of this research "Impact of marketing effectiveness and capabilities, and export market orientation on export performance: evidence from Turkey" recommends that export market orientation has an important effect on marketing effectiveness and marketing capabilities, and marketing effectiveness has a significant effect on export performance. It shows that export market orientation is critical to the improvement of marketing capabilities, while marketing effectiveness results to explain export performance (Kayabasi & Mtetwa, 2016: 532).

The findings of the research "A qualitative examination of market orientation measurement scale for Vietnamese instant coffee industry: case: Trung Nguyen, Nescafé, and Vinacafé" reveal that the market orientation has a positive effect on business performance of the company. Furthermore, the research shows that measuring traditional scales for market orientation need modifying to suit Vietnamese firms. The modification measurement scale is revealed as one of the results of this research. This suggested measurement scale would help Vietnamese instant coffee firms to keep their business activities and develop company performance (Nhu Anh, 2015).

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#### 4.1. Oil products and export limitations

Oil products are highly used materials from crude oil that are 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 of them are mentioned as below.

Environmental factors like war affect a lot, the more tensions, the more expenses we have; nowadays some ships do not enter Iran and those which come are not allowed to go to the other countries because of high age and poor facilities, so we have double handling; these inappropriate ships have more expenses. All of these factors besides delayed time cause to more expenses. In fact, we get involved in security/political factors; getting involved in environmental tensions such as ship piercing in Fujairah, rocket hitting the Iranian tanker in Red sea, etc., cause high risks for insurance companies, getting more premium and at last more freight.

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

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

Another issue is shipping problems, the best container lines such as Ever Green do not transfer containers to Iran, just shipping of Islamic republic of

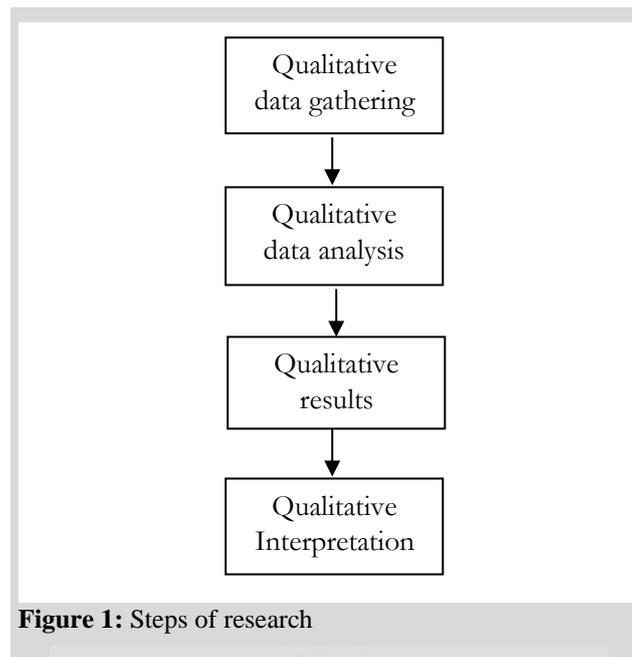
Iran is available but it is not able to act well because of sanction; for instance, there is no central hub in Iranian factories, so there is a lag time to transfer products to destinations.

Economic war is the next problem. For instance, America has reached to a large capacity of oil resources recently and has exported oil products at low prices to turkey, china, etc. so, it has disrupted the balance of the market and also it causes low prices in Iran too.

One of the most significant problems of Iran's export performance is exchange rate instability. Totally sanction is an effective issue on exporting of Iran because it affects marketing, sale, shipping and logistics, etc.

Regarding, research needs of Iranian oil products exporting companies to export performance improvement, strategic importance of 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 deep interviews, qualitative data analysis has been done by coding, and also achieving results by providing a comprehensive model. Steps of research (chart 1):



**Figure 1:** Steps of 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, qualitative approach in research is a set of inductive and non-quantitative methods for in-depth study of social and cultural concepts (Mansoorian, 2014: 166). This study 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 are searching

antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance and do not have definitive hypotheses.

### 5.1. Data gathering method

Studying scientific documents and doing deep 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 Exporters Association who were selected via non-probable and purposive sampling method. 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 7 interviews. Informants' information are as below (table 1):

**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	PhD	10	60

## 5.2. Validity and reliability

Trustworthiness Criteria in qualitative research, their definitions and equivalents in quantitative research are mentioned as below. (Table 2)

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

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

Structural validity (triangulation & flexibility method), internal validity (theoretical saturation), interpretive validity (informants' feedback) and descriptive validity (applying 2 interviewees) were used to evaluate this research validity.

Post-coding review method and applying the second interviewee in parallel in some interviews were used to evaluate this research 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 difficult method of research methods due to extended philosophical dimension (Mohammad pour, 2016). coding is the basic step to analyze qualitative data; open coding, axial

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

After each deep interview, the transcript of the interview was entered into Atlas 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, their features and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) in this step, the interview transcript was read several times, main sentences were recognized and they were recorded as text codes, then similar conceptual codes were put in some groups, 838 open codes were recognized in this research.

Axial coding was the next step which is related categories to themes; actually, categories were related to each other in their features and dimensions (Strauss and Corbin). In this step, primary codes of open coding which were related to each other were put in a common



axis; Continuous comparison of codes was done to make sure of having different categories; Selective Coding was done by repeating this method and core variable was recognized.

According to this research result as shown in the bellowed table (table 3), antecedents of Iranian oil

products export performance were: Market orientation, Firm's resources, Marketing mix and Macro environment with the most important item of political issues; also, customer satisfaction, customer retention and financial performance were items of Iranian oil products export performance.

**Table 3:**

Category	Theme	Subtheme
Market orientation	Cultural market orientation (customer orientation & competitor orientation) and behavioral market orientation (information generation & responsiveness)	Internal completion, competitive advantage (price, product, service), Porter competitive strategies (price, differentiation, concentration), competition structure (enter & exit barriers), services (communication with customers, responsiveness), external competition, competitive environment (competition intensity, environmental uncertainty), commercial communication, destination identification
Marketing mix	Product, price, distribution, marketing research	International marketing research, export marketing strategy, pricing strategy, shipping strategy, distribution channels, product quality & quantity, relationship marketing, products standardization, product improvement & 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, public relation), company competence, staff experience & commitment, technology, production capacity, resources availability
Macro environment	Economic, legal, political and technology factors	Tariffs, standard, customs & ..., export limitations & barriers, technology & religious variables, security decisions, sanction, payment mechanisms, foreign currency exchange, war & tension
Export performance		Strategic performance, export volume, staff & customer satisfaction, target market, export

	Financial performance, customer satisfaction, customer retention	rate & sale, export sale development, export market countries, entering new markets, customer retention, effectiveness and productivity, success rate
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After interviews and qualitative analysis, we reached 5 categories and 20 themes as you see in the above table and details are mentioned as below.

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

Firstly, we consider financial issues to measure export performance Efficiency, 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 4 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, financial performance.

Market orientation is the first antecedent of export performance which includes cultural market orientation and behavioral market orientation; also, it has 4 subthemes such as, customer orientation, Competitor orientation, information generation and responsiveness); half of informants in the interviews have mentioned this variable such as below.

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

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

Regarding this research prediction, bellowed 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 & competitor orientation) and behavioral market orientation (information generation & responsiveness).

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

Variety of export facilities (product storage distribution and their proximity to the borders, road and rail transportation), also 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 terms of 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 doing interviews with experts and managers 4 themes in this research have been achieved such as 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 product, price, distribution and marketing research.

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

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



This company has continuous resources which is a sustainable competitive advantage and can meet countries' needs of materials regularly (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

Firms' resources have 5 themes such as: human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources and financial resources.; regarding this research prediction, bellowed proposition is suggested.

**Proposition 4:** 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 macro environment in this research and it has been recognized as the most effective factor in all interviews; Here are some examples of interviews.

Determining internal rules by the government and their constant change is too confusing for brokers, it causes to 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 and 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 4 themes such as economic, legal, political and technology factors. This proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

**Proposition 5:** macro environment is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance

which includes economic, legal, political and technology factors.

By applying the new research method in marketing field and existing literature review about export performance; also, surveying qualitative researches, 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 as providing a conceptual model of Iranian oil products export performance in sanction was answered as below (chart 2); regarding categories, themes and subthemes which we found via interviews and they were 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 then we could achieve this conceptual mode which is the last result and aim of this study.

To clarify this model, the following information are mentioned.

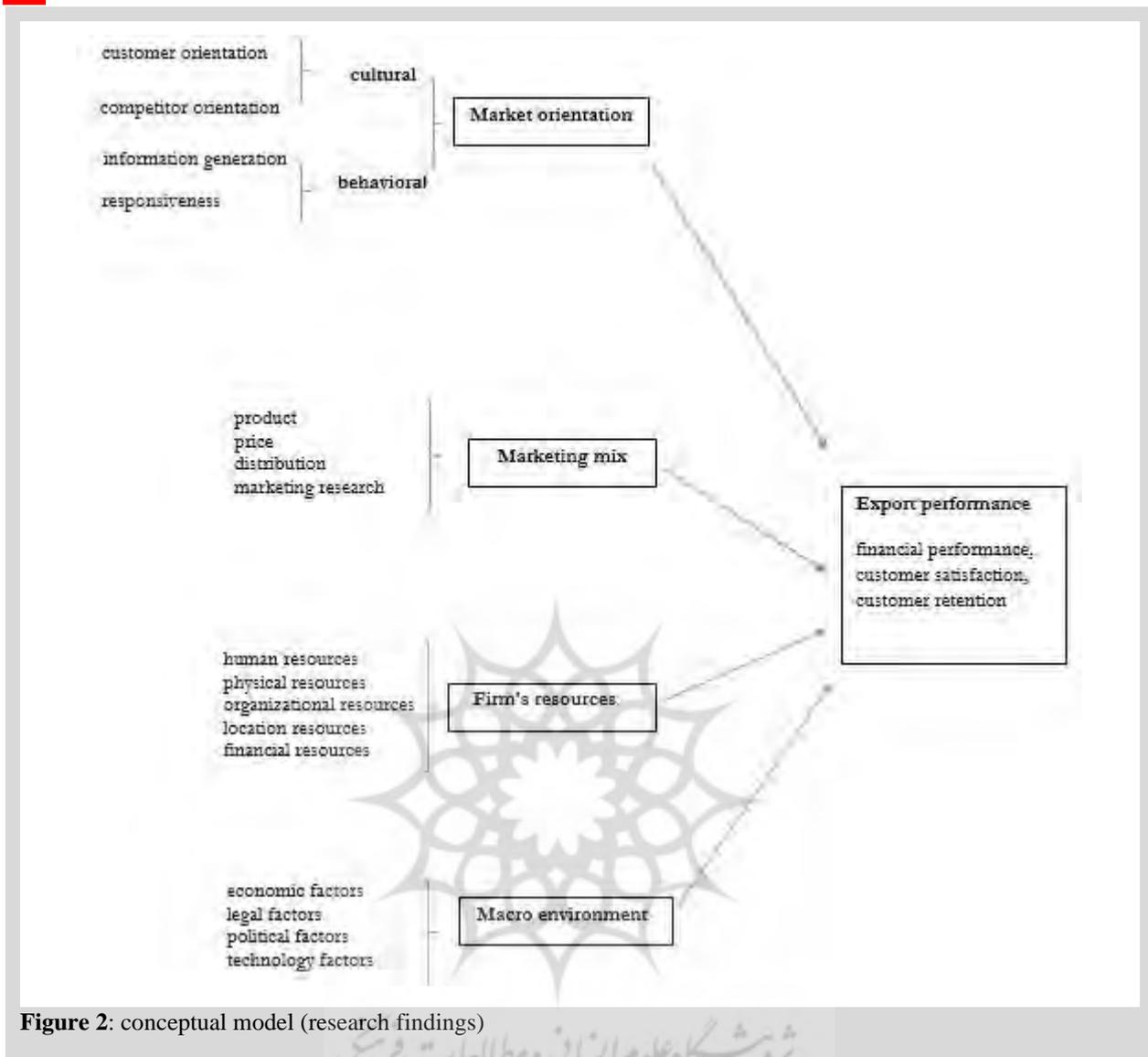
Core concept: export performance; variables: financial performance, customer satisfaction, customer retention.

First antecedent: Market orientation in 2 categories (cultural and behavioral); variables: customer orientation, competitor orientation, information generation, responsiveness.

Second antecedent: Marketing mix; variables: product, price, distribution, marketing research.

Third antecedent: Firm's resources; variables: human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources, financial resources.

Forth antecedent: Macro environment; variables: economic factors, legal factors, political factors, technology factors.



## 7. Conclusion and discussion

This study is the first qualitative research in determining effective 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 effective factors have been determined as a result. These results are so useful for managers, marketers, decision makers of oil companies and they would be able to do appropriate reactions in critical situations; Also, considering effective factors and customer feedbacks are caused to customer satisfaction. These are so important due to competitive environment and extended virtual world; So, importers are able to extend their complains very soon. Thus, it is necessary for companies to consider these

effective factors in their marketing plan to achieve their goals.

At this stage, the comparison of this studies results with the other similar researches is done. Regarding the first proposition (question 1), items of Iranian oil products export performance are customer satisfaction, customer retention and financial performance; these results are the same as (Njeru, 2013) research which named "Market orientation, marketing practices, firm characteristics, external environment and performance of tour firms in Kenya"; he considered export performance items such as customer satisfaction, staff satisfaction, customer retention, efficiency, productivity, relationship and financial performance. This study is aligned with Njeru research via confirmation of the hypothesizes,



export performance and market orientation, export performance and macro environment, export performance and marketing mix relationship; and is divergent with disapproval of the hypothesis export performance and company features relationship.

Regarding the second proposition (question 2), market orientation consists of cultural market orientation (customer orientation & competitor orientation) and behavioral market orientation (information generation & responsiveness), is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance. This result is overlapped with researches by (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Narver & Slater, 1990; Cadogan, Cui, & Li, 2003; Gotteland & Boulé, 2006). In fact, this study is aligned with Cadogan research via confirmation of the hypothesis, export performance and export market orientation relationship; this study showed export market orientation has a direct influence on export improvement; also, environmental tensions like technology factors and competition intensity are influential on exporting.

According to the third proposition (question 2), marketing mix consists product, price, distribution, marketing research, is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance. Also, they were recognized in the research of (Njeru, 2013) which named "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 research which is named "Impact of marketing effectiveness and capabilities, and export market orientation on export performance: evidence from Turkey", is divergent from this study in disapproval of the hypothesis, export market orientation affects export performance and marketing mix affects export performance.

According to the fourth proposition (question 2) firm's resources consists of human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources and financial resources, is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance. In (Freeman, 2009) research with this title "Factors contributing to successful export performance of regional and metropolitan SME exporters", is aligned with this study via confirmation of the hypothesis, the positive influence of firm's resources on export performance and disapproval of the hypothesis, the negative influence of macro environment on export performance.

Regarding the fifth proposition (question 2), macro environment consists economic, legal, political and

technology factors, is one of the antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance; these results overlapped with (Njeru, 2013; Freeman, 2009) researches results which shows this study confirmation.

## 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 these ways: deciding to export, familiarity with exporting, rules and markets, taking risk in trading, standards importance, the importance of entering special markets and its revenue, skills from training and experience.

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

One of the external factors is extended 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, competition intensity.

Another external factor is extended resources and firm's programs to export development as follows: access to new markets, changing financial mechanisms, having internal hub beside factory in order to on time delivery and customer satisfaction. Due to running out of raw materials and avoiding selling raw materials, it is suggested to export service instead of materials.

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; for instance, it has 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 so important for developing countries and one of the methods to balance energy intensity is pricing modification and gaining improvement technology. Thus, foreign policy has a basic role to preserve of the country's reservoirs and security of oil production, distribution and export. Even, a country with rich internal resources, cannot provide all of the needed resources for development process. Therefore, it has to provide some of them from international resources; international resources have a fundamental role for developing countries. So, governmental foreign policy and their relationship with the other countries has a basic role to attract these resources.

It is recommended for future researches to 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 also included their products. So, the research generalization was reduced; thus, it is suggested to do this research in other industries for future researchers.

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, to be done in a specified range and has some limitations too. Since qualitative research on export performance has not been conducted in Iran, less scientific analysis has been done in this field; therefore, the most significant limitation of this research is localization of literature review. The other limitation is different interpretations of this phenomenon. In fact, this interpretation is only one of the acceptable interpretations. Another research limitation was the political behavior of the interviewees.

## Appendix

### Protocol

1. What intra-organizational factors affect Iranian oil products export performance?
2. What extra-organizational factors (internal & 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 your company?
5. What competitive structure do you use for export performance and what strategies do you suggest to improve export performance?

6. Which environmental factors (uncontrollable internal and external environment) affect commercial relationships?

7. How is your relationship with importing countries of Iranian oil products? and what are your communication methods?

8. What method do you use for exporting?

9. How do you measure the company's export performance efficiency?

10. What are the problems and barriers in improving export performance?

11. What are the solutions to overcome these obstacles?

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