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Original Article (Quantified)

# Investigating the role of marketing capabilities and market performance in achieving strategic goals of export companies in Zanjan province with emphasis on the mediation of competition intensity

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of marketing capabilities and market performance on improving strategic goals with the mediation of competitive intensity among export companies in Zanjan province. This study is applicable in terms of purpose, and is descriptive-analytical, using a survey method with a correlational approach. The statistical population of the present study includes commercial managers in export companies in Zanjan province, whose number is 300 people, and the statistical sample is 168 people selected by the Cochran formula and a simple random method. The data collection tool is a standard questionnaire, and the validity was confirmed in a face form and factor analysis method with the KMO index, as well as their reliability by reporting the total Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used in data analysis, and, SPSS version 21 software was used in descriptive analyses, and structural equations and LISREL 8.8 software were used in inferential analyses and testing of research hypotheses. The results show that marketing capabilities have a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets; market performance has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets; marketing capabilities have a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets due to competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets), and market performance has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets due to competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets). Competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets) has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets.

## Keywords:

Marketing capabilities, Market performance, Strategic goals, Competitive intensity, Export companies

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

Strategic objectives are the basis for selecting the next strategies of companies and their implementation actions; as a result, they allocate important resources, are dependent on the path, and ultimately involve performance results (Kim & Park, 2023). Manufacturing companies export their products through distributors abroad by focusing on continuous investments. Therefore, in competitive strategies, we are looking for business levels of companies in export markets that are focused on the goal of this company (Rezaei & Ahmadi, 2023). Given the importance of export companies, it should be noted that the marketing unit of organizations, especially at the international level, by choosing what types of strategies, solutions, and approaches can turn internal weaknesses into strengths and environmental threats into opportunities, and realize and materialize their goals by taking advantage of internal capabilities and environmental opportunities (Alizadeh & Mousavi, 2021). Organizations that choose a differentiation strategy (Bahrami & Ahmadpour, 2023) can identify customer groups that want benefits beyond those of undifferentiated products. These customers tend to obtain sufficient benefits to gain more value. Also, organizations focus on tight cost control and cost effectiveness in all operational areas by implementing a cost reduction strategy (Singh & Gupta, 2024). On the other hand, marketing capabilities help the company to establish and maintain its relationship with customers and members of distribution channels. International marketing capabilities create a strong brand image that allows companies to have excellent financial performance (Hosseini & Naderi, 2022). Due to increasing environmental complexity and intense competition, export companies must think about achieving their competitive advantages. The existence of a competitive advantage in an organization means better performance than competitors, which ensures profitability in the short term and organizational survival and growth in the long term (Nikpour, 2022). Competitive advantage is created in the long term for a company that has capabilities superior to competitors. The opportunities facing export companies to maintain competitive advantage are determined by their capabilities. A distinctive capability or competency can be described as an important feature that makes the organization and company superior. One of the important capabilities is the capabilities of the marketing unit (the responsibility and resources of the marketing unit). The capabilities of the marketing unit are a suitable tool for this unit to influence the organization (Jahangiri, 2022). Therefore, understanding how marketing capabilities affect marketing influence in the organization is of great importance. One of the vital elements of success in the competitive world and the survival of export companies is the ability to successfully market products and services, which is possible through the use of competitive strategies. Market orientation can also be useful in achieving the company's goals, strategies, and plans and provide the possibility of achieving superior performance and a greater market share; businesses have no choice but to improve their marketing capabilities to gain an edge over their competitors and attract and retain customers (Maleki & Sadeghi, 2021). Given the above, the main question is: how marketing capabilities and market performance can affect strategic goals through competitive intensity?

### Theoretical Framework

**Marketing Capability:** Marketing capabilities are an integrated process in which companies use tangible and intangible resources to understand the complexity of specific customer needs, achieve a relative differentiation of products for competitive advantage, and ultimately achieve an appropriate brand quality (Sang, 2007). Organizational capabilities are usually defined as the ability to leverage organizational assets and their expansion in a useful way.

Capabilities are invisible, difficult to determine their quality, and cannot be imitated, and are a source of competitive advantage (Ahmed & Brown, 2022).

**Differentiation Strategy:** In the differentiation strategy, the company's activities are focused on providing and manufacturing a unique product or service. In this strategy, the company tries to charge customers a higher price than usual by offering unique products (Thompson & Roberts, 2025).

**Cost reduction strategy:** Cost reduction strategy expresses the company's attempt to create a competitive advantage by achieving the lowest cost in the industry. By implementing a cost reduction strategy, companies focus on strict cost control and cost effectiveness in all operational areas (Oliveira & Souza, 2023).

**Market performance:** Market performance is defined as a constant performance that depends on the level of customer loyalty and honesty, profit from new customers, and access to the desired market share and growth rate (Li, Chen, 2024).

**Competitive intensity:** Competitiveness arises from a combination of assets and processes. Assets are either endowed (such as natural resources) or man-made (such as infrastructure) and the processes that convert assets into economic benefits from sales to customers and ultimately create competitiveness (Sadeghi, 2023).

### Research Methodology

This research is applicable in terms of purpose, and descriptive-analytical method, using a survey method with a causal approach. The statistical population includes commercial managers in export companies in Zanjan province, numbering 300 people, and the statistical sample is 168 people, selected by the Cochran formula and simple random method. The primary data collection tool is a standard questionnaire, and the validity was confirmed in the form of face validity, and factor analysis method with the KMO index, as well as their reliability by reporting the total Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.907.)

### Research findings

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used in data analysis, and SPSS version 21 software was used in descriptive analyses; and structural equations and LISREL 8.8 software were used in the inferential analyses and testing of research hypotheses. The results of the research using the path analysis technique show that marketing capabilities have a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets; market performance has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets; marketing capabilities have a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets due to competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets); and market performance has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets due to competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets). Competitive intensity (competition in foreign markets) has a significant effect on strategic goals in export markets.

### Conclusions

The findings of this study showed that marketing capabilities play a key and direct role in achieving the strategic goals of export companies. These capabilities, which include the ability to analyze the market, design and implement marketing strategies, product development, and customer relationship management, help companies better orient themselves towards their long-term goals. Market performance, as an influential factor, also had a positive relationship with the strategic goals of companies. Companies that are more successful in market performance indicators such as market share, customer satisfaction, and sales growth have been able to formulate and implement more effective strategies. This shows

that the current market performance not only indicates the current state of the company, but also has a guiding role in formulating future strategies. On the other hand, the role of competition intensity as a mediating variable was well confirmed. The results showed that in highly competitive conditions, the impact of marketing capabilities and market performance on strategic goals is strengthened. In other words, the more competitive the market, the more companies are forced to optimize their marketing capabilities in order to achieve their strategic goals. These findings are consistent with existing theories such as the resource-based view (RBV) and the environmental dependency theory. According to these theories, in order to compete effectively in challenging markets, companies must develop specific resources and capabilities and adapt them to market conditions. Therefore, it is recommended that companies analyze the competitive environment of export target markets in the form of market intelligence reports and use it in formulating strategies. Also, by improving the level of effective marketing skills and capabilities, managers can take the necessary measures to promote strategic thinking in the firm, especially at management levels, as well as establish efficient strategic management in the firm (developing, implementing, and continuously evaluating strategic plans at different levels). On the other hand, company managers can increase profitability and promote strategic goals by employing specialized working groups in the field of identifying target markets in order to increase capacity and flexibility in accepting new product development conditions. In order to improve overall performance, export companies should strive for comprehensive understanding of the organization's environment and understanding customers and their needs. For example, they can use marketing research to identify customer needs and desires, competitors' strengths and weaknesses, and optimize marketing and sales activities. By increasing the capabilities of new services and products, they can be in a better position compared to their competitors and thus be able to meet customer needs in a desirable way.