




Designing an Effective Marketing Policy Package in Free Trade Zones

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Corporate marketing policy is an important topic among policymakers and is considered a tool for achieving desirable economic growth and sustainable development. Accordingly, the purpose of this research was to design an effective marketing policy package in free trade zones.

Methodology: The present study used a meta-synthesis approach and was applied in purpose. The sample consisted of 47 articles on marketing policies, and the same number of articles were selected as the sample size. The research tool was a researcher-made questionnaire, and the Delphi method with 15 experts from academia and members of the Free Trade Zones Organization was used for data analysis.

Findings: The findings indicated that the effective marketing policy package in free trade zones consists of 4 policies and 11 main components. The primary policies are as follows: foundational policies - main actions include (institutional framework and economic management aspects), supportive policies overcoming barriers and inhibitors include (political aspects and governmental policymaking), and facilitative-supportive policies include (social and cultural aspects and the creation of strategic marketing capabilities) and facilitative-supportive policies include (creation of practical marketing capabilities, internal capabilities, external capabilities, operational capabilities, and geographical aspects).

Conclusion: Based on the results, it can be said that designing an effective marketing policy package in free trade zones, as it encompasses various policies and components, can assist economic system planners in devising the best strategies for these markets.

Keywords: marketing policy package, effectiveness, free trade zone, Arvand, meta-synthesis method

1 Introduction

Today, one of the economic policies that is receiving attention from decision-makers and policymakers globally, aimed at increasing economic competitiveness, regional development, alleviation of deprivations, attracting domestic and foreign investments, creating new job opportunities, accessing advanced technology, and increasing exports, pertains to free trade zones. Companies in the modern era are engaged in creative marketing strategy and performance of their marketing strategies (Rabiei, 2023). Also, given the developments in digital technology and the expansion of social media, the competencies and capabilities of marketers to optimally use these tools and keep pace with these changes, the necessity of employing policies in marketing is undeniable. However, having the ability to select a marketing strategy, using economic information, and understanding ways to enhance corporate competition are today's pillars and symbolic of marketing (Barani Biranvand, 2023).

One characteristic of successful companies today is their marketing policies. To formulate effective marketing policies, it is necessary to identify the advantages and disadvantages of industries so that through this, proper economic policies can be adopted for formulating global-level marketing policies (Daniel, 2018; Ostadi Iraj, 2017). An effective marketing policy package can serve as an economic strategy aimed at economic development and overcoming existing barriers in regulatory, administrative, legal, and financial systems, reducing or even eliminating entry barriers to business, reducing operational costs of economic entities, and motivating investment for domestic and foreign investors (Ebrahimi Salari, 2013; Panahifar, 2021). The concept of packaging involves structuring a set of components, elements, factors, forms, opinions, concepts, instructions, views, theories into a cohesive and homogeneous collection. In this regard, the concept of a policy package (policy bundle) implies a system of propositions indicating a set of policies that are coherently and cohesively formulated and designed to achieve specific objectives (Pourezat et al., 2014). The concept of a policy package emphasizes the need for harmony in a set of coherent and aligned policies (Rutz & Watson, 2019). The concept of policy packaging in the academic sphere was first considered in 2010 during the activities of the Public Transport Consortium in Europe, where the consortium introduced the concept of policy packaging to reform the previous approach in formulating public policies as

individually designed and separate policies. In this consortium, the policy package was introduced as a combination of individual policies aimed at achieving multiple political goals, improving the effects of individual policies, reducing the negative impacts of individual policies, and facilitating the implementation of individual policies.

Statistical review of the performance of Iran's free zones indicates that the objectives envisaged at the establishment of these zones have not been achieved. Comparing the volume of imports and exports in these zones reveals that rather than being export platforms, these zones have become import hubs; such that the total exports from the free zones (combining exports of regional production, re-exports, exports of regional production to the mainland, and exports of domestic products through the region) from 2001 to 2020 amounted to 11,625 million dollars, whereas during the same period, total imports were valued at 45,522 million dollars, approximately four times the exports. According to statistics, the Arvand Free Zone had the highest export rates and Chabahar the least during the examined period (Zaj, 2023).

Regarding the history of the topic, some studies have been conducted. Zaj and colleagues (2022) in their research titled "Designing an Effective Model Regarding the Attractiveness of Export Markets of Iran's Free Zones (Case Study: Arvand Free Trade-Industrial Zone)" stated that the results of the analysis of factors and components of attractiveness include internal factors (information factors, internal organizational characteristics, internal organizational barriers, contextual platforms, and government factors), external factors (factors promoting and creating competitive advantages, business environment factors, industry-related and marketing-related factors, investment, political factors, strategies for entering international markets, economic performance, procedural factors, customer analysis, comprehensive support, encouragement and evaluation, and analysis of international markets) are essential (Zaj, 2023). Lachinani and Esmaeili (2022) in their research titled "Examining the Role of Marketing in Tourism in Free Trade Zones with an Economic Development Approach in Qeshm Island" stated that, for the effectiveness of marketing in this field, a marketing mix technique consisting of: product, distribution, price, and promotion or product expansion (incentive policies) is used. To ensure that all efforts are aimed at achieving short-term and long-term goals, marketing (services) starts with preparing a successful marketing plan

by analyzing environmental factors and continues with analyzing economic, political, and social factors and evaluating the market and competition trends (Lechinani & Esmaili, 2022). Ahmadi and colleagues (2022) in their research titled "Identifying the Dimensions and Components of Customer Marketing in the Iranian Tourism Industry with a Qualitative Approach" stated that based on the analysis performed using the thematic analysis method to determine the dimensions and components of customer marketing in the Iranian tourism industry, 3 dimensions, 8 components, and 41 indicators have been identified and confirmed. The dimensions of marketing include the quality of services, marketing policymaking, and tourism experiences (Ahmadi et al., 2023). Panahifar and colleagues (2021) in their research titled "Designing a Policy Model for Non-Oil Export Development in Iran's Free Zones" stated that causal factors (production deterrent factors, policymaking barriers, implementation barriers of laws and policies, and export barriers at the enterprise level) affect the development of non-oil exports in free zones. Additionally, contextual factors (platforms and requirements of free zones, economic structure, cultural structure, and capabilities and advantages of free zones) and intervening factors (pressure and stakeholder factors, corruption, and self-interest) affect strategic factors and ultimately, strategic factors (improving decision-making processes, improving the structure of the Supreme Council, following national export development models, production boom policies, export development policies, improving marketing factors, and enhancing managerial productivity) will transform free zones into export platforms and engines of national development, as well as achieve the goals of free zones (Panahifar, 2021). Bu and colleagues (2022) in their research titled "Marketing Through Influencers (Influencer Marketing): Homophily, Co-Creation of Customer Value and Purchase Intent" stated that, this study encourages further research on co-creation of value in influencer marketing and can be a valuable reference for marketing professionals and influencers (Bu et al., 2022). Peterson and colleagues (2021) in their research titled "Sustainable Marketing and Consumer Support for Sustainable Businesses" stated that, three important findings of this study show that 1) consumer values based on intrinsic qualities have the greatest positive impact on consumer support for sustainable businesses, 2) followed by attitudes towards company philanthropy, and 3) then concerns about corporate ethics had the greatest impact. Evaluating social justice and recognizing the contribution of businesses to improving the quality of life of customers had no impact on

consumer support for sustainable businesses (Peterson et al., 2021). Chernonog (2020) in their research titled "Marketing Policies and Inventory in the Supply Chain of Perishable Products" concluded that investment in advertising can be carried out by the producer, retailer, or in a collaborative manner (Chernonog, 2020). Ambroziak and Hartwill (2018) stated that the most important requirements for the localization of free zones for regional development according to international standards include factors such as political and economic stability, an appropriate transport and communication system, environmental compatibility, reliable infrastructure such as transportation and water and energy, market access, financial and banking infrastructure, skilled and affordable workforce, advanced manufacturing and light industry, and high-quality staff (Ambroziak & Hartwell, 2018).

In the Arvand Free Trade Zone, considering that one of the effective policies that can have a significant impact on various economic processes in the country is having marketing policies. Given the advantages of such policies as well as the existing deficiencies and shortcomings in this area, in the free trade zones and especially the Arvand Free Trade Zone, the necessity to examine this topic as an important management and marketing method is strongly felt. Given the importance of the topic, this research aims to examine this issue in the Arvand Free Trade-Industrial Zone. Thus, the main question of this research is: What is the marketing policy package in the free trade-industrial zones with an effectiveness approach (case study of the Arvand Free Trade Zone)?

2 Methods and Materials

The present study is exploratory in nature. The research design was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a meta-synthesis method was used to identify the factors influencing marketing policies in free trade-industrial zones, and in the second phase, the Delphi method was utilized with a focus group to formulate a package of marketing policies for free trade-industrial zones. The sample for the meta-synthesis was selected from qualitative studies based on their relevance to the research question. In the second phase of the study, the Delphi method was used to stabilize the variables in order to achieve the second goal of the study, "proposing a theory on the identification of marketing policies in free trade-industrial zones based on effectiveness." Subsequently, a questionnaire was developed to evaluate the model within the target population. Then, a policy package

that includes core (foundational) policies and supportive policies (in three categories: barrier-removing, enabling, and facilitating) was utilized. Finally, the focus group was used to finalize, as well as revise and confirm the proposed policies. As a result of searching and reviewing databases, journals, and various search engines using keywords, over four hundred articles were found.

The selected articles were reviewed for their compatibility with the study parameters, and subsequently, their methodological quality was assessed. The aim of this step is to eliminate articles in which the researcher does not have confidence in the presented findings, thus potentially rejecting an article that should be included in the synthesis. The tool typically used to assess the quality of primary qualitative research studies is the "Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)," consisting of 10 questions that help the researcher understand the concept of qualitative research. This tool assists the researcher in determining the accuracy, validity, and relevance of qualitative research studies.

Therefore, in this study, a scoring process for each article was conducted using the CASP criteria. Based on the CASP 50-point scale, the researcher proposes the following rating system and eliminates any article scoring below good (below 30):

Excellent: 50 – 41 (E)

Very Good: 40 – 31 (VG)

Good: 30 – 21 (G)

Fair: 20 – 11 (F)

Poor: 10 – 0 (P)

3 Findings and Results

In the current study, each article was scored based on 10 specified criteria. These scores ranged from 47 to 43, indicating that 74 selected articles were considered reliable and were used in the research. Subsequently, based on the number of codes assigned, concepts and categories were extracted, as presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Indices of Marketing Policies in Free Trade-Industrial Zones by Number of Codes

Concept	Category	Number of Codes
Marketing in Free Trade-Industrial Zones	Strategic Marketing Planning	5
	Strategic Capability	3
	Operational Capability	5
	Practical Capability	3
	Internal Capability	4
	External Capability	4
	Geographical Components	3
	Social and Cultural Components	3
	Political and Decision-Making Components	5
	Management, Government, and Policy-Making	10
	Institutional Frameworks	5
	Economic and Economic Management Components	8
Total	12 Categories	58

For the development of the marketing policy package, a focus group of experts was employed, and the methodology used in the execution of the work was considered by the researcher. From the expert community, 15 individuals were selected using a purposive method. An initial meeting with a focus group consisting of 15 experts was conducted, and comprehensive information about the marketing policy package and the identified and screened variables and categories was provided by the researcher. After identifying

the initial components of the marketing policies for free trade-industrial zones using the meta-synthesis method for the purpose of qualitative validation and stabilization of identified components, 15 managers and specialists with relevant experience in free trade zones, as well as university professors, were chosen as panel members in the Delphi method to evaluate the validity of the components. The Delphi method was implemented in three rounds, with the results presented below:

Table 2*Results of the First Delphi Round*

Round	First	Second	Third
Number	15	15	15
Kendall's Agreement Coefficient	0.213	0.494	0.890
Sig	0.0000	0.001	0.000
Consensus of Experts	No consensus	No consensus	Theoretical saturation

Table 3*Components Removed in the First Delphi Round*

Subcategory	Removed Components	Reason for Removal
Strategic Planning	Marketing Market Situation Analysis - Target Setting - Strategic Evaluations - Strategy Implementation - Monitoring and Control	Average score below 4 in the first Delphi round

Considering that under the Delphi questionnaires, a section has been provided for the experts to express additional opinions and explanations they deem important and necessary. Consequently, most experts agreed that the variable 'Management, Government, and Policy-making' itself consists of three major variables, and since policy-

making includes management and government, it was suggested to rename this variable to 'Government Policy-making'. Therefore, this change was implemented in the Delphi questionnaire. The output results are described in [Table 4](#).

Table 4*Final Delphi Results*

Strategic Capability	Proposed Components
Strategic Capabilities	Planning Position Market Assessment Marketing Position
Operational Capabilities	Access to Customer Sales Management Product Management Unique Capability Advertising
Practical Capabilities	Specialized Skills Management Skills Perceptual Skills
Internal Capabilities	General Company Characteristics Marketing Characteristics Business Characteristics Organizational Characteristics of the Company
Geographical Aspects	Strategic Location Finding Transit Position Access to Local, Regional, and Global Markets
External Capabilities	Industry Characteristics Market Characteristics Environmental Turbulence Environmental Uncertainty
Social and Cultural Aspects	Institutionalizing Social and Cultural Development Public Participation to Improve the Development Environment Integration of Cultural and Social Activities
Political and Decision-Making Aspects	Effective Communication with International Markets Constructive and Peaceful Foreign Policies Comprehensive Political Stability Intelligent Cooperation with Successful Countries in the Field Compliance with International Commitments

Government Policy-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy-making and Strategic Design Competence-based Approaches Employment of Expert Managers Empowerment of Management and Human Resources Feasibility Studies and Regulatory Work Proper Organization and Strategic Orientation Support from Senior Managers and the Role of Free Zones in National Development Documents Agile Organizational Structure and Efficient, Non-bureaucratic Administrative Processes Government Supports and Policies Evaluation and Performance Management in Free Zones
Institutional Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed Industrial Infrastructures Technology-based Approaches and Structure Suitable Infrastructures Reliance on Information Technology Functional Ports and Multimodal Transport Infrastructures
Economic and Economic Management Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leading Private Sector, Industrial, Insurance, and Banking in Free Trade Zones Economic Stability Alignment of National Economy with Global Economy Integration and Economic Management Formation of a Knowledge-based Economy Domestic and Foreign Capital and Investment Security

To verify the findings, the kappa coefficient was used. The kappa value obtained was 0.8042, which indicates the desired reliability and is referable.

Finally, based on the results obtained from the experts, the marketing policy package for free trade-industrial zones was produced as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Marketing Policy Package in Free Trade-Industrial Zones with an Effectiveness Approach

Policy Type	Main Axes	Policy Actions
Foundational Policy (Main Actions)	Institutional Framework	1. Development of industrial infrastructures in free trade zones; 2. Technology and structure-based approaches; 3. Development of suitable infrastructures; 4. Expansion of information and communication technology; 5. Creation of the necessary capability for functional free zones and multimodal transport infrastructures
	Economic and Management Aspects	1. Utilization of the leading private sector, industry, insurance, and banking in free zones; 2. Development of economic stability policies and outcomes of lifting economic sanctions; 3. Alignment of the national economy with the global economy; 4. Development of integration strategies and economic management; 5. Planning for the formation of a knowledge-based economy; 6. Legislation on the use of domestic and foreign capital and investment security
Supportive Policies Overcoming Barriers and Inhibitors	Political and Decision-Making Aspects	1. Establishing effective communication with international markets in free zones; 2. Adoption of constructive and peaceful foreign policies; 3. Development of comprehensive political stability strategies; 4. Smart cooperation with countries successful in the field of marketing exports and imports; 5. Development of coherence, compatibility, and integration in complying with international commitments
	Government Policy-making	1. Creation of policy-making and strategic design in free zones; 2. Development of competence-based approaches for human and other resources; 3. Employment of expert managers and policymakers in marketing; 4. Empowerment of management and human resources at the headquarters of commercial zones; 5. Conducting feasibility studies and regulatory effective work tailored to marketing in free zones; 6. Proper organization and strategic orientation in marketing; 7. Support from senior managers and the role of free zones in national development documents; 8. Creation of an agile organizational structure and efficient, non-bureaucratic administrative processes; 9. Government supports and policies from free zones; 10. Implementation of evaluation and performance management of personnel and organizational in free zones
Facilitative-Supportive Policies	Social and Cultural Aspects	1. Institutionalizing social and cultural development in free zones tailored to marketing; 2. Public participation to improve the marketing development environment; 3. Integration of cultural and social activities in line with marketing
	Creation of Strategic Marketing Capabilities	1. Development of planning positions in marketing of commercial-industrial zones; 2. Evaluation and assessment of the market in line with marketing; 3. Position assessment and creation of evaluations in marketing position
Facilitative-Supportive Policies	Creation of Practical Marketing Capabilities	1. Use of specialized skills of marketing managers in free zones; 2. Enhancement and strengthening of managerial skills among employees and managers of free zones; 3. Enhancement and improvement of perceptual skills of managers and employees

Creation of Internal Capabilities	of	1. Creation of general characteristics of companies existing in free zones; 2. Development and strengthening of marketing characteristics of free zones; 3. Strengthening of business characteristics in line with marketing; 4. Creation of organizational characteristics of companies existing in free zones tailored to marketing
Creation of External Capabilities (External)	of	1. Creation of industry characteristics tailored to marketing in free zones; 2. Development of strategies for market characteristics; 3. Development of strategies to reduce environmental turbulence in free zones; 4. Reduction of environmental uncertainty
Creation of Operational Capabilities	of	1. Development of policies and strategies for customer access in free zones; 2. Creation of sales management work groups in free zones; 3. Planning for product management; 4. Creation of a unique ability both in exports and imports of goods and materials in free zones; 5. Planning for marketing and use of advertising in the marketing area
Geographical Aspects		1. Development of strategic location finding in marketing of free zones; 2. Creation of transit position strategies; 3. Access to local, regional, and global markets

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to design a marketing policy package for free trade zones with an effectiveness approach. The Delphi method and the use of a focus group were employed for the development of the marketing policy package. Initially, a meeting with a focus group consisting of 15 experts was held, where comprehensive information on the marketing policy package and the identified and screened variables and categories was provided by the researcher. The results indicated that the most central elements for the phenomenon of marketing in free trade-industrial zones using the meta-synthesis method include: (1) Geographical aspects, (2) Social and cultural aspects, (3) Political and decision-making aspects, (4) Government policy-making, (5) Institutional frameworks, (6) Economic and management aspects, (7) Strategic marketing capabilities, (8) Operational marketing capabilities, (9) Practical marketing capabilities, (10) Internal marketing capabilities, and (11) External marketing capabilities. These findings are consistent with some studies (Bu et al., 2022; Lechinani & Esmaili, 2022; Panahifar, 2021; Rutz & Watson, 2019). Analyzing the results, it can be said that a marketing policy package based on effectiveness can serve as an economic strategy aimed at economic development and overcoming existing barriers in regulatory, administrative, legal, and financial systems, reducing or even eliminating barriers to business entry, reducing operational costs of economic entities, and creating investment incentives for domestic and foreign investors (Ebrahimi Salari, 2013). Structuring a set of components, elements, factors, concepts, instructions, viewpoints, and theories into a cohesive and homogeneous collection makes the policy package specific to free zones operate more cohesively and efficiently.

One limitation of this research was that due to time and financial constraints, the researcher could not evaluate the

research results using quantitative methods. Also, as free zones in Iran are diverse, the results might vary in different areas, thus caution should be exercised regarding the results. Based on the research findings, it is recommended that:

Supportive policies to reduce marketing costs based on the 11 identified items in this research should be considered to reduce the related costs of importing capital goods for production and investment.

Examining the experience of East Asian countries, especially Japan and South Korea, shows that one of the most important factors for the success of export development programs in these countries is the government's role in combining collaboration and marketing and the correct approach of blending management, government, and policy-making within a government action plan considering innovations, initiatives, and private sector capabilities. Additionally, strengthening the economic and management aspects of the private sector in a constructive and interactive environment should play a strategic and coordinating role.

In the policy package, managing costs in activities and, on the other hand, coordinating and integrating activities and policies by determining main and supportive actions (facilitators and barrier-overcomers) can lead to improvement in marketing in specific areas and opportunity creation, branding, and modeling, and providing a framework for development and progress. Facilitating rules and the dominant governance perspective, along with national will and political resolve, lead to improved performance and productivity of free trade-industrial zones, implementing effectiveness and efficiency.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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