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# Development and Evaluation of Competitive Intelligence Based on Export Market Orientation

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#### 1 Introduction

he recent decade, due to globalization and competition, has distinguished itself from previous decades. Markets for consumer products, industrial goods, and services, as well as resource markets such as capital, materials, and technology, have become highly integrated globally. Export market orientation, through the creation of new businesses and development, is essential for the

#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This research aims to develop and evaluate competitive intelligence based on export market orientation in exemplary exporting companies.

**Methodology:** The current study is qualitative and has been conducted using grounded theory. In this study, 15 managers, professors, and researchers in the field of exports were interviewed through semi-structured deep interviews. Subsequently, the data obtained were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. Utilizing the results from the theoretical foundations review and the research background and content analysis of the interviews conducted, indicators were identified to enhance export market orientation and competitive intelligence. **Findings:** The development model for enhancing export market orientation includes three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, comprising six main categories: causal conditions, central phenomenon, strategies, intervening conditions, and consequences of enhancing export market orientation based on the development of competitive intelligence in exemplary exporting companies. **Conclusion:** The final model shows that a holistic approach and attention to

various aspects of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence, considering causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, are essential.

Keywords: Competitive Intelligence, Export Market Orientation, Grounded Theory

economic growth processes of countries and contributes to economic growth through the creation and transfer of knowledge, and by increasing competition and diversity (Cadogan et al., 2012). Industrial market agents, in export markets, face increasing competitive pressure and the lack of sufficient resources and managerial commitment, with the aim of securing and increasing the company's sales volume. Therefore, since international activities are crucial for their performance, companies involved in the export business face the challenge of designing and implementing export strategies, considered as an uncertain environment in rapidly changing target markets (Ogiamien & Izuagbe, 2016; Pakparvar et al., 2020). On the other hand, globalization in recent years has compelled businesses to seek new opportunities based on competitive intelligence in international markets alongside their domestic and traditional markets. Export managers allow organizations to respond to strategic changes based on competitive intelligence, affecting their export performance (Aligholi & Fatemi, 2017; Boikanyo et al., 2016).

Furthermore, companies strive through various means to sell their goods and services worldwide and maximize their profits. By exporting, companies can offer their products in foreign markets with minimal involvement in local activities (Håkansson & Nelke, 2015; Hassani & Mosconi, 2021). However, successful export development and proper market entry, as well as maintaining conditions and sustainability in it, come only with a specific and sustainable export strategy. Therefore, given the necessity and importance of developing export activities, companies need to identify factors affecting their export performance. The success of a company in exporting can be assessed by its export performance (Cadogan et al., 2012). It should be noted that the success of exporting organizations in the international market is not accidental. Competition on one hand and continuous changes on the other confront organizations with complex conditions that also remind the need for long-term strategy and planning. In this context, one of the prerequisites for successful exports is having an appropriate long-term strategy and plan, and the prerequisite for planning and strategic development is having the right export market orientation (Julian et al., 2014). Export market orientation is defined as a competitive action in the market. In the same context, competitive intelligence has become one of the important management concepts and has been integrated with the culture of exporting businesses (Oliveira & Cadogan, 2018; Pakparvar et al., 2020). Today, organizations that have a deeper understanding and evaluation of their field of activity and provide themselves with more competitive advantages will win in the competitive environment. In today's world with the feature of rapidly growing markets, relying on old information leads to reduced insight and the loss of forthcoming opportunities (Cadogan et al., 2012; Davis & Sun, 2006; Ding et al., 2021). Tomorrow's business success belongs to organizations that have more insight and information about themselves and the competitive environment. Information is considered one of the important items of strategic assets and marketing tools. Collecting and evaluating information about competitor companies plays a vital role in formulating strategies. Capacity building for the development of export market orientation on one hand requires providing the necessary training and skills with a market-oriented approach and the growth of exporting companies and based on the needs of society at all levels, but on the other hand, the development and growth of exporting businesses require the recognition and removal of obstacles and creating suitable conditions for the development of service activities. The institutional framework impacts the development of exporting companies, especially by influencing entrepreneurial behavior, and for this reason, it must be examined and analyzed (Pham et al., 2017; Rahmani et al., 2021). Therefore, due to the abundance of information in today's world, collecting more information is no longer the focus; rather, the use of information and its conversion into export market orientation for guiding organizational decisionmaking in the direction of developing competitive intelligence of exporting companies has gained importance (Pakparvar et al., 2020).

Today, the methodology of creative marketing strategies takes place with analyses of the export market based on customer orientation and competitor activities, but less use is made of the missions and organizational values that change over time in a dynamic international environment (Kayabasi & Mtetwa, 2016). In such circumstances, the strategy is no longer about establishing a series of fixed activities to create added value and profitability for the organization; therefore, current successful export area companies need to pursue the goal of export market orientation strategy beyond the needs of market changes and focus on customer-oriented processes (Morgan et al., 2012). Thus, it must provide conditions so that organizations can create vital values and deliver them to their customers, and also so that business organizations can adapt to future value changes. Therefore, traditional emphasis on export market orientation helps managers ensure that the company is aware of the current and future needs of buyers and can act to respond to these needs (Oliveira & Cadogan, 2018).

Managers typically use objective criteria as reference points for competitive assessment. Competitive capabilities are defined as capabilities that link organizational assets together and expand them in an effective and profitable manner (Morgan et al., 2012). Competitive intelligence is a complex set of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are within all levels of a business's processes. The key role of



competitive capabilities in a business is to strive for competitive advantage and superior export performance. Creating value through competitive intelligence services often involves the company anticipating future customer needs. To offer superior value to customers, the company needs to anticipate environmental changes for developing export performance (Kayabasi & Mtetwa, 2016). However, competitive intelligence represents an additional tool that can help companies improve market performance and efficiency, which in turn may contribute to competitive advantages in today's business environment. Many export companies compete based on services rather than physical products (Pham et al., 2017; Rahmani et al., 2021).

As this study explores export market orientation from the perspective of managers, it also highlights the importance of examining export market orientation based on competitive intelligence, one of the important factors affecting export success, because the marketing strategy and communication between the exporter and other business partners result from competitive intelligence in this area. Given the nature of exporting companies, the success of these companies is the key to their survival in the competitive market. Export success is expressed in various terms such as export performance, etc., which have not yet been studied within a comprehensive model affected by this typology of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence, therefore, to address the existing theoretical gap, this research presents effective solutions for strengthening and improving competitive intelligence.

#### 2 Methods and Materials

This research is fundamental in purpose and qualitative in data collection method. Grounded theory methodology was utilized in this study. The targeted population consisted of experts in marketing and business, and due to the qualitative approach, purposive sampling based on theoretical saturation was selected for the current research. In this method, sampling is non-random, the number of samples was not predetermined, and the sampling process continued during data analysis until theoretical saturation was reached. In this approach, interviews were conducted with 15 individuals; however, theoretical saturation occurred after the 11th interview, which continued to ensure certainty up to the 15th interview. For this purpose, the data, including interview texts, documents, notes, and audio files, were imported into software and initially coded. This phase of the process is called open coding, which resulted in the

formation of main concepts. In the second phase of coding, axial coding, through the elimination and merging of existing concepts, first-level categories were formed. Repeating this process and merging first-level categories through the third stage of coding (selective coding), secondlevel categories were developed, and ultimately the final theory was derived. In this stage, to establish connections between categories, a foundational modeling approach was used. In this model, categories were placed into six groups: causal conditions, contextual conditions, the central phenomenon or main category, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes. In the qualitative phase of this research, interview tools and document collection were used for data gathering.

Data analysis was conducted based on the grounded theory approach, utilizing coding and categorization. Initially, through open interviews with managers of exemplary exporting companies, the subject matter was understood. Observations of the behaviors of experts and active participants in these companies also helped deepen the researcher's understanding. Subsequently, based on this, and after coding and categorization, the conceptual model of the research was drawn. Additionally, the researcher extracted and coded texts from each interview after they were conducted. Three stages of coding—open, axial, and selective—were performed on the data. Initially, the data were read line by line, and open codes (the actual words of the participants) were extracted.

The resulting codes were compared with previous codes, and similar conceptual codes were placed in one category, gradually forming categories. Categories were compared with each other, and if necessary, merged, or in some cases, one category was split into two or more categories, or the placement of a code changed from one category to another until an axial category was obtained. The essence of the relational process in axial coding is the expansion and development of one of the categories, as selected in the current research, namely the model of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence in exemplary exporting companies, which originated from causal conditions and had an impact on the process and strategy, leading to the final outcome. Selective coding also clarified the relationship between the categories. However, after conducting scientific interviews with academic and executive experts in the organization, the model of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence in exemplary exporting companies emerged based on the grounded theory method.



#### **3** Findings and Results

Table 1 summarizes the different aspects of the research findings, categorizing the various elements based on their role in the study's conceptual framework.

#### Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Category Type	Secondary Category	Sample Concepts Extracted from Interviews
Causal	Learning Capabilities	Cohesive learning network, Favorable environmental ads, Use of social networks, Development of favorable learning
	Export Knowledge	Long-term activities in knowledge and technology, Finding potential applications for achievements, Increasing competitive capability in exports, Establishing research and development units
	Recognition of Export Market Needs	Competitor analysis, Increasing competition in the export market, Identifying product standards in target markets, Responding to needs
Contextual	Competitive Thinking	Development of innovative ideas, Technological infrastructure, Active stakeholder participation
	Competitive Export Processes	Development of competitive standards, Attention to external constraints, Sharing desired information with competitors, Group participation with competitors in the export market, Evaluations of internal strengths and weaknesses
	Competitive Governance	Utilization of existing potential in the market, Market share, Competitive patterns
Intervening	Technical Market Structure	Human resource capabilities, Change in required skills and expertise, Trust-based relationships, Strategic outlook, Technology type aligned with the need for new product development
	Environmental Uncertainty	Economic factors, Political factors, Social factors
	Export Risks	Significant changes in laws, Regulatory instability, Currency fluctuations, Sanctions, Lack of managerial support, Reduction in inter-sectoral cooperation
Central	Value Chain	Adaptability, Innovation, Leading in a competitive environment, Diversity in competitive space, Flexibility with competitive advantage
	Human Resource Capabilities	Development of knowledge capital in the export market, Transfer of export knowledge, Employee creativity, Empowerment of human resources, Sufficient technical knowledge
	Export Intelligence	Positioning strategy, Export entrepreneurship training, Educational evaluation, Promotion of training in entrepreneurial activities, Strategic thinking in exports
Strategy	Competitive Value Creation	Introduction of new products and services, New production methods, Supplying products to new export markets, Access to new raw material suppliers
	Development of Export Competitiveness	Selection of efficient advertising channels, Creation of customer clubs, New organizational structures in the export market
	Competitive Agility	Acquiring knowledge, Evaluating market changes through intra-company cooperation, Flexibility, Responding to changes in markets, New capabilities and services
Outcome	Export Effectiveness	Risk-taking, Integrated export marketing, Creating differentiation, Identifying entrepreneurial opportunities
	Enhancement of Dynamic Export Capabilities	Coherent competitive actions, Enhancing desired responsiveness, International experience
	Export Intensity	Focus on value-added activities, Participation in the global market, Management orientation and commitment, Market orientation

Causal Conditions: In this model, causal conditions are events that create and explain situations and issues related to a phenomenon, elucidating why and how individuals and groups respond in particular ways. Causal conditions include categories that directly affect the export market orientation based on competitive intelligence or factors that generate and develop the phenomenon. In this research, three categories—learning capabilities, export knowledge, and recognition of export market needs—are empirical factors that can create causal conditions for export market orientation based on competitive intelligence.

Contextual Conditions: Contextual conditions represent a specific set of characteristics related to the phenomenon that

generally refers to the place of events and related occurrences. Contextual characteristics include factors that are essential for realizing export market orientation based on competitive intelligence in organizations and provide a context in which strategies for managing, controlling, and responding to the phenomenon occur. These conditions are formed by a set of concepts, categories, and contextual variables. In this research, competitive thinking, competitive export processes, and competitive governance are the main contextual factors for export market orientation based on competitive intelligence.

Intervening Conditions: In this research, three categories—technical market structure, environmental

competitive intelligence.

competitive agility-are considered as strategies based on

central categories of export market orientation focused on

outcomes of the model were extracted, then named and

classified according to a back-and-forth movement among

themes and main category concepts. Consequently,

outcomes are divided into three sections related to export

effectiveness, enhancement of dynamic export capabilities,

and export intensity, as outcomes of export market

orientation based on competitive intelligence.

Outcomes: Based on open coding, concepts related to the

uncertainty, and export risks-are considered as intervening conditions based on export market orientation focused on competitive intelligence.

Central Phenomenon: The central phenomenon must be pivotal, meaning all other main categories should relate to it and appear repeatedly in the data. This refers to the idea or phenomenon that forms the basis and core of the process to which all other main categories are related. In this research, three categories-value chain, human resource capabilities, and export intelligence-are considered as central phenomena for export market orientation based on competitive intelligence.

Strategies: In this research, three categories-competitive value creation, development of export competitiveness, and

#### Figure 1

#### Final Model

 Competitive Thinking Competitive Governance Enhancement of Dynamic Competitive Value Creation Learning Capabilities **Export** Capabilities • Value Chain • Export Knowledge • Human Resource Capabilities Recognition of Export Market Needs Intervening Conditions

The paradigm model of this research was designed based

on the paradigm model by Strauss and Corbin. Despite these factors and conditions, the model and process of export

market orientation based on competitive intelligence were

designed for exemplary exporting companies in Tehran.

Explaining the factors that created this issue was also a

primary concern of this research. The paradigm model of the

 Technical Market Structure Environmental Uncertainty • Export Risks

#### **Discussion and Conclusion** 4

The present study aimed to propose a model of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence using grounded theory. The research results include the presentation of causal, contextual, intervening factors, central categories, outcomes, and the formulation of strategies for developing marketing education presented



research is shown in Figure 1.

within a paradigm model aligned with grounded theory. The final model obtained demonstrates that a holistic view and attention to various aspects of the export market orientation based on competitive intelligence, considering causal, contextual, and intervening conditions, are essential.

Most studies conducted in the field of export market orientation are theoretical rather than empirical and fieldbased. However, this research not only encompasses a relatively extensive review of both domestic and international studies on the phenomenon under study but also conducts a study based on practical evidence from the perspective of experts and various views on the studied phenomenon. Among previous studies, no research was found that primarily aimed to identify a comprehensive set of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence, its outcomes, and present it as a theory, model, or a derived pattern. In other words, previous research has only theoretically or empirically discussed (not explained) a limited number of factors. However, this research extensively and deeply identifies, describes, and explains the phenomenon of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence and presents a comprehensive model for its successful implementation, including some articles and concepts not considered in previous studies; thus, the current research has introduced more details that could help develop competitive intelligence in the model of export market orientation. Unlike identified models limited to export market orientation, this model also includes perspectives accompanied by strategies in the export sector. Moreover, the research model does not create specific limitations for including types of export market orientation that may be identified in future research. In line with this, prior research concluded that entrepreneurial orientation in the export market entails three main individual, organizational, and social outcomes (Rahmani et al., 2021; Wellalage et al., 2023).

Furthermore, it is suggested that managers allocate effective financial and management resources as the commitment of organizational resources necessary for the export market encourages and facilitates the development of new and innovative ideas regarding product, service, or process innovations that increase the value delivered to the customer and lead to situational competitive advantages for the companies. Additionally, emphasizing alignment and commitment with export markets, the adoption of a customer-centric approach in these markets is strongly recommended. Exemplary exporting companies through innovative solutions can respond to the needs and preferences of foreign customers.

Managers should create an environment where risktaking becomes common. Instilling a spirit of risk-taking among the human resources of all departments encourages them to be creative and innovative, always striving for and pursuing new opportunities in the market.

In line with the development of export market orientation, aligning export marketing strategies such as aligning export products with the preferences of foreign customers allows an exporter not only to meet the needs of foreign customers but also to create a competitive position in the market. Therefore, managers should lean towards a strategy of adaptation instead of focusing on a low-cost strategy because a large number of producers worldwide have started to reduce their prices. Nuts companies in response to these competitors should use adaptive marketing strategies to solidify their position in the global market and increase their market share.

It is suggested that managers of exemplary exporting companies, considering the target market, produce new products compared to competitors and through extensive marketing advertisements, try to make their new brand names of their products more recognizable in the export market.

It is recommended that with the expansion and development of innovation strategies based on the understanding of customer value creation to new products and services, financing should be sought from domestic and foreign sources, and in this direction, by helping company units cooperate with each other and taking the initiative in important decisions, export effectiveness should be increased.

Considering the use of scientific methods of export marketing in exports, by creating and activating a market research and marketing department in the production-export unit in order to offer competitive prices, recognizing the cultural, economic, political, and legal environment of target markets to reduce risk, identifying distribution channels and local distribution channels, identifying competitors, and identifying the most effective sales promotion activities, examining consumer tastes in the target market, and examining the possibility of changing or modifying the product according to target markets, as well as by creating long-term investment opportunities for marketing and advertising in the form of short-term export programs, increasing government assistance for sending marketing delegations to different markets, increasing specialized marketing seminars and inviting delegations from potential export markets by relevant organizations, holding international exhibitions and assisting in holding a permanent exhibition of Iranian products abroad by the relevant organization/organizations, creating necessary postal facilities by the government for quick sending of samples to foreign markets, exports should be increased.

Managers are advised to strengthen innovative processes and encourage employee participation in teamwork for the exchange of creative and enlightening work in companies and consequently stimulate the innovative process in companies, leading to the creation of new knowledge and ideas, sharing innovative ideas, and ultimately applying them in the process of value creation in the export market, thereby enabling employees. Managers of exemplary export companies in transferring and creating ideas should pay more attention to designing cooperation mechanisms through encouraging a culture of teamwork, fostering and promoting participatory thinking, and creating a friendly atmosphere among employees and strive to strengthen it. The more organizational infrastructures are strengthened, the more effective role they will play in enhancing the innovative process in the company and will lead to the creation, sharing, and more application of ideas in the direction of value creation of companies in the export market.

Attention to the development and strengthening of innovation infrastructure necessary such as network communications, document management, database and information retrieval engines, integrating and updating organizational information systems, facilitating employee access to knowledge and information related to exports using modern information and communication technologies, and other items are among other suggestions that can effectively provide the process of implementing innovative capabilities in the export market and consequently create value.

Company managers should consider employees' opinions and suggestions in developing informational capabilities in the market regarding export innovations, take advantage of their greater experience in creating, developing, and maintaining regular export effectiveness, and also for achieving higher levels of innovation performance in domestic markets should consider them.

In line with suggestions to future researchers, it is recommended to use the fuzzy Delphi technique to identify and prioritize the components of export market orientation based on competitive intelligence. It is also suggested that the effects of export market orientation on concepts with appropriate semantic approximation be measured.

#### **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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