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Phenomenology explanation of effective history on economy and export performance of Iranian oil products: mixed-method research

Zahra Mahdavi Sabet[a], Mohammad Ali Abdolvand[a]*, Kambiz Heidarzadeh[a], Mohsen Khounsiavash[b]

a. Department of Business Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
b. Department of Mathematics, Qazvin Branch, Islamic Azad University, Qazvin, Iran.

Article History *Received date: 18 April 2021* *Revised date: 06 July 2021* *Accepted date: 11 September 2021* *Available online: 08 October 2021* ***JEL Classification*** O16 M31 F18 L72 L25 ***Keyword*** Market Orientation Marketing Mix Macro Environment Company Resources Export Performance.	***Abstract*** Organizations enter into the international competitive markets because of different motivates such as: gaining international reputation, taking advantages of economies of scale, domestic market maturity, governmental rules and regulations; but actually all of the companies concerns of organizations is to improve export performance. Given the sanctions on the oil industry in Iran and the lack of a comprehensive model of export performance of Iranian petroleum products, this research can help improve and develop this industry in global markets. The statistical society of this mixed research method includes Iranian Petroleum Exporters Association. According to the first qualitative research, non-probability and snowball sampling method was used in this research; for gathering information, 7 semi-structured depth interview was used. Regarding the quantitative research in the second study, probable and random sampling method was used in this research. A Likert Spectrum Questionnaire of 5-point scale was used to gather information. In the first study, after open, pivotal and selective coding and using Atlas qualitative software, recommended antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance includes: market orientation, marketing mix, company resources, and macro environment and export performance items of Iranian oil products includes: financial performance, customer retention and customer satisfaction. In the second study, 19 variables with several cases and continuity domains were proposed. 57 items were used to measure structures and all 16 hypotheses were supported.

Abstract

Organizations enter into the international competitive markets because of different motivates such as: gaining international reputation, taking advantages of economies of scale, domestic market maturity, governmental rules and regulations; but actually all of the companies concerns of organizations is to improve export performance. Given the sanctions on the oil industry in Iran and the lack of a comprehensive model of export performance of Iranian petroleum products, this research can help improve and develop this industry in global markets. The statistical society of this mixed research method includes Iranian Petroleum Exporters Association. According to the first qualitative research, non-probability and snowball sampling method was used in this research; for gathering information, 7 semi-structured depth interview was used. Regarding the quantitative research in the second study, probable and random sampling method was used in this research. A Likert Spectrum Questionnaire of 5-point scale was used to gather information. In the first study, after open, pivotal and selective coding and using Atlas qualitative software, recommended antecedents of Iranian oil products export performance includes: market orientation, marketing mix, company resources, and macro environment and export performance items of Iranian oil products includes: financial performance, customer retention and customer satisfaction. In the second study, 19 variables with several cases and continuity domains were proposed. 57 items were used to measure structures and all 16 hypotheses were supported.

Highlights

- This study provides an appropriate model of Iranian oil products export performance, its variables and backgrounds.
- Applying a qualitative method (phenomenology) to achieve categories, topics and sub-topics through in-depth interviews.

∗ abdolvand-ma@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Exporting activities enhance organizational capabilities, which, in turn, generate additional resources that boost the firms' performance. Hence, a strong understanding of exporting is much called for by managers, policy-makers and researchers over the past 50 years, significant advances in export performance research have shown great progress in this area. In this research, export performance is called as the outcome of a company's activities in export market (Chen et al., 2016).

The need for this research in the oil, gas and petrochemical industries is that studies in different countries on impact of predecessors on export performance have not reached general consensus results and there is the question that more attention to the factors affecting the performance of exports in developing countries, especially Iran, will achieve the expected results. Regarding the oil industry in the 20-year vision and due to the lack of a comprehensive export performance model of Iranian petroleum products, this study can be a good solution for the international development of this industry.

Research Objectives:

Ideal Objective: Assisting managers and experts of companies exporting Iranian petroleum products to understand the appropriate concept of factors affecting export performance and providing a model to improve export performance.

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.

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

Innovation in this research: Most of the previous researches have focused on quantitative research method and positivism while we used qualitative methodology in this study by phenomenological perception for the first time in Iran.

Research questions:

1- What are the performance variables of Iran's petroleum exports?
2- What is the history of Iran's petroleum exports performance?
3- What is the performance model of Iran's petroleum products export?

According to the research needs of companies exporting Iranian petroleum products to improve export performance, the strategic importance of the oil industry in Iran, globalization of companies and international export restrictions, we try to provide a comprehensive export performance model of Iranian petroleum products to achieve maximum utilization and minimum cost.

In this research, after setting goals and collecting materials, reviewing the literature, designing a protocol in a qualitative manner and conducting in-depth interviews, qualitative data analysis is performed by coding as well as achieving results by providing a comprehensive model. Then, data analysis was performed

using SPSS and AMOS software and also data collection was done through a questionnaire. Chart 1 illustrates research stages.
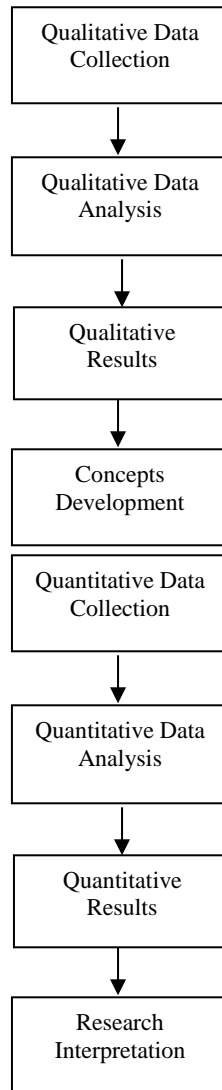
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Figure 1. Research stages
Source: *Research findings*

2. Literature Review

Issues such as growth performance and trade are positively related. Therefore, export can be considered as a strategic activity at the level of companies, industries and countries. Companies need to look for new

opportunities in the market. Companies predict 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. Therefore, companies can be a business leader by being a pioneer (Erdil & Özdemir, 2016).

Several articles have already conducted a thematic review of the export literature and have shown the achievements and limitations in this field. 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 history of export performance, as enhancing number of articles related to export performance are published in journals (Chen et al., 2016).

Basic theories such as the resource-based perspective (RBV) and competitive advantage, which is Porter's theory, offer important perspectives on the multidimensional context of the export phenomenon. Empirical and philosophical proof shows elements concluding research and development, macroeconomic uncertainty, networks, as well as domestic institutional attributes in both industry and firm level as vital to explain export implementation. Gregory, Ngo and Karavdic (2019) claim that companies should appreciate macro environment challenges in order to apply firm resources effectively and efficiently and exporting operationalization (Kitonyi et al., 2020).

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 (2012), "marketing is a complex range of marketing mix solution variables used in the company seeking to sell their goods and services". Influencive 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 elements interaction might be the company's shortages (Išoraitė, 2016).

Based on the qualitative research results of Maddakhani et al. (2020), 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 the main theme as export market orientation. The results of this research can be used by export companies as well as export facilitators.

The research Dadfar et al. (2015) shows that in the Iranian pharmaceutical firms, export involvement and performance increase local market performance. This research reveals empirical evidence on the relationship between domestic market performance and export performance, and adds the necessary reasons why

traditional attitudes do not explain the situation. Correlation analysis showed that there is a positive relationship between exports and domestic performance. This means that export performance leads to better domestic performance and vice versa.

The outcome of the research Kayabasi and Mtetwa (2016) 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. This shows that the export market orientation is very important to improve marketing capabilities while marketing explains export performance.

The findings of the research Nhu Anh (2015) reveal that market orientation has a positive effect on business performance of the company. In addition, research shows that measuring traditional scales for market orientation requires change for Vietnamese companies. The modified context of 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.

3. Research Methodology

This study uses a mixed method to answer the statement of problem. Mixed method research with philosophical and intellectual reliance on the pragmatism paradigm emphasizes the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in all stages; In general, the basis of pragmatism methodology is to use whatever is efficient and useful in a research (Mohammad pour, 2016).

Qualitative research is any type of research that produces findings that have not been obtained through statistical operations or other counting methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1397). In other words, a qualitative approach in research is a set of inductive and non-quantitative methods for in-depth study of social and cultural concepts (Mansoorian, 2014). This study method is sequential-exploratory. The first research method is the phenomenological method with Mustachas approach; it proposes a research method with descriptive, reflective and interpretive coordinates to extract the essence of human experience (Iman, 1394).

Based on this approach, the researcher tries to identify the variables and factors affecting the performance of Iran's petroleum products with the help of interviewees and their lived experiences (Mansoorian, 2014). This research has a basic purpose because we are looking for records of the export performance in this study, the study of scientific documents and in-depth interviews with experienced people has been used to determine the variables and the history of Iranian petroleum products export. The statistical population of the study is Iranian Petroleum Exporters Association who has been selected by non-probability and purposeful sampling method. After selecting the first person and conducting the next person interview, the interviews continued at her suggestion

until after 7 interviews, there were repeated answers and theoretical saturation. The information obtained is as follows table 1.

Table 1. Interviewees 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

Source*: Interviews*

The second research approach is a descriptive survey study and is in fact a conclusive research; Survey hypotheses are an ultimate research goal (Malhotra, 1393). We have applied probable sampling and random sampling method in the second study of this project. In this study, a standardized questionnaire with 57 items was used which summarizes the information in the table below. We had 548 samples of petroleum companies in order to fill questionnaires in this research.

Table 2. Questionnaire structure of Quantitative study

Row	Variable name	Variable role	Scale developer	Data type	Scale	Number of items
1	Market Orientation: Cultural Market Orientation (Customer Orientation & Competiveness) and Behavioral Market Orientation (Information Generation & Responsiveness)	independent	Jaworski and Kohli, 1993 Narver and Slater, 1990	Sequential	Likert	12

Table 2 (Continued). Questionnaire structure of Quantitative study

2	Marketing Mix: product, price, distribution, marketing research	independent	Freeman, 2009	Sequential	Likert	15
3	Firm's Resources: Human resources, physical resources, organizational resources, location resources and financial resources.	independent	NJERU, 2013	Sequential	Likert	12
4	Macro Environment: economic, legal, political and technology factors	independent	Freeman, 2009	Sequential	Likert	9
5	Export Performance: Financial Performance, Customer Retention, Customer Satisfaction	dependent	NJERU, 2013	Sequential	Likert	9

Source: *Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Narver & Slater, 1990; Freeman, 2009; Njeru, 2013*

4. Validity and Reliability

Trustworthiness Criterions in qualitative research, their definitions and equivalents in quantitative research are mentioned as below.

Table 3. Trustworthiness criteria in qualitative research, their definitions and equivalents in quantitative research

Criterion & definition	quantitative equivalent
Credibility: Are research constructs valid for the creators of multiple primary reality (actors or subjects)?	Internal Reliability
Transferability: Transfer inferences from a specific sender to a specific receiver.	External Reliability
Dependability: The extent to which the review process is reliable; The ability of human components to achieve consistent and logical results.	Validity
Conformability: Product reliability; Are the results exactly from the data, are they logical? Is there a researcher bias?	Objectivity

Source: *Teddlie & Tashakori, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985*

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. To evaluate the reliability of this study, the rewriting method after coding and parallel use of the second interviewee was used in some interviews.

5. Data Analysis

Model search in data is called qualitative data analysis. In this research, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology model is used to analyze the data (Van Manen, 1997); Phenomenological analysis is the most extensive research method according to its philosophical dimensions (Mohammad pour, 2016). Coding is an essential step for analyzing qualitative data; open, pivotal and selective coding were used for qualitative analysis of this research (Heidarzadeh & Norouzi, 2015).

After each in-depth interview, the transcript of the interview was entered into the Atlas Qualitative Data Analysis software for open coding and analysis, and then the researcher proceeded to subsequent interviews; open coding is an analysis process to identify subtopics, their features and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1397). At this stage, the text of the interview was read several times, the main sentences were recognized and recorded as text code, then similar concept codes were placed in some groups, 838 open codes were identified in this research.

Axial coding was the next step related to the topics; In fact, categories were related in terms of features and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1397). 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 performed to ensure the existence of different categories; Selective coding was performed by repeating this method and the main variable was identified.

After interviews and qualitative analysis, we came to 5 categories and 20 topics that you can see in the table above and the details are listed below.

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

Initially, we consider financial issues to measure export efficiency, revenue from exporting the product to target markets (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

Measuring customer order time to shipping time (delivery time), production to sales ratio (sales efficiency), customer satisfaction that is done every 4 months, following claims and complaints through a committee to solve problems and back payment (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

When it comes to interviews and quality export performance, the topics are customer satisfaction, customer retention, and financial performance.

Proposition 1: The export performance of Iranian petroleum products includes customer retention, customer satisfaction and 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, Competitiveness, 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 significant issues for success in the export market is the interaction of employees with customers to gain a competitive advantage (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

Regarding this research forecast, the following suggestion is made.

Proposition 2: Market orientation is one of the backgrounds of Iran's petroleum products export performance, which includes cultural market orientation, (Customer orientation and competitiveness) and behavioral market orientation (information generation and responsiveness).

The marketing mix is the third prerequisite and is mentioned in more than half of the interviews by informants. Some of the interviews are listed below.

All kinds of export facilities (distribution of products and their proximity to borders, road and rail transportation), as well as transportation facilities have led to costs (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

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

After conducting interviews with experts and managers, 4 topics in this research such as product, price, distribution and marketing research have been obtained. This proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

Proposition 3: Marketing mix is one of the export performance antecedents of Iran's petroleum products which concludes product, price, distribution and marketing research.

The next antecedent of export performance is company's resources; several examples are given in the interviews.

Employees' skills and experiences in the field of export, ability to negotiate and bargain, knowledge of petroleum products and its market, familiarity with pricing strategies, training on operational issues are significant issues (National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company).

This company has continuous resources, which is a sustainable competitive advantage and can meet the needs of countries for materials on a regular basis (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, the following proposition is suggested.

Proposition 4: Firm's resources is one of the export performance antecedents of Iran's petroleum products which concludes 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.

It is very confusing for brokers to set domestic rules and change them constantly, which creates an unstable and unpredictable situation (Mehr Petrochemical Company).

Lack of similar rates for foreign currency exports that mean exporting at foreign exchange rates and receiving Nima[1] currency from the government. This exchange rate difference is very detrimental to 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 technological factors. This proposition is suggested regarding this research prediction.

Proposition 5: Macro environment is one of the export performance antecedents of Iran's petroleum products which concludes economic, legal, political and technological factors.

Using a new marketing research method and reviewing the existing literature on export performance; also, reviewing qualitative research, opinions of managers and experts; objectives, backgrounds and performance variables of Iranian petroleum products exports and their relations were recognized.

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[1] Iran's domestic Forex Management Integrated System (locally known as NIMA)
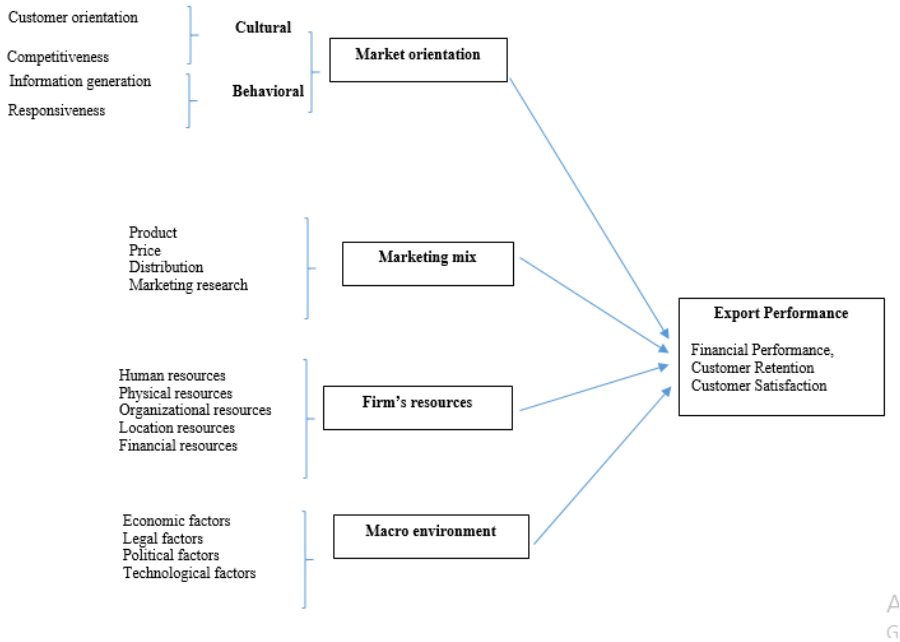
Figure 2. conceptual model
Source: *Research findings*

6. Findings

We have used exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling for analyzing quantitative data; for this purpose, two software such as AMOS and SPSS, have been used.

Table 4. Results of model fit indices

abbreviation of fitness index	Suggested threshold	Proponents	Model value
GFI	≥ 0.90	Filippini and Forza (1998, p. 14)	.896
NFI	≥ 0.90	Filippini and Forza (1998, p. 14)	.891
CFI	≥ 0.90	Jun et al. (2006, p. 803)	.971
IFI	≥ 0.90	El-Adly AND Eid, (2016. P. 225)	.971
RMSEA	≤ 0.05	Jun et al. (2006, p. 803)	.024
X2/df	≤ 3.00	El-Adly AND Eid, (2016. P. 225)	1.325

Source: *Forza & Filippini, 1998; Jun et al. 2006; El-Adly & Eid, 2016*

According to the results of the structural model, all antecedents have a direct and positive influence on export performance of Iranian oil products. Details of test results and indicators, regarding coefficient indicators impact, coefficient of determination, test statistics and the level of significance are calculated and mentioned in the table below.

Table 5. Test the coefficients and factor loads of the relationship between variables in the structural equation model

Components and items			Impact factor		Test statistics And detection coefficient			
comp onent	dire ctio n	ite m	standar d	Non-stand ard	Stand ard error	critical test	Probabilit y of error	Coefficien t of Determina tion
E.P	--->	TE	.109	.057	.026	2.205	.027	
E.P	--->	LP	.122	.078	.029	2.692	.007	
E.P	--->	EE	.091	.063	.029	2.215	.027	
E.P	--->	MR	.101	.052	.023	2.286	.022	
E.P	--->	DI S	.117	.067	.033	2.014	.044	
E.P	--->	PRI	.097	.055	.027	2.032	.042	
E.P	--->	PR O	.117	.074	.031	2.371	.018	
E.P	--->	FR	.113	.054	.022	2.399	.016	
E.P	--->	LR	.090	.054	.026	2.069	.039	.985
E.P	--->	OR R	.094	.043	.020	2.189	.029	
E.P	--->	PR	.095	.053	.027	1.990	.047	
E.P	--->	HR	.086	.043	.021	1.986	.047	
E.P	--->	R	.074	.040	.020	2.032	.042	
E.P	--->	IP	.108	.066	.028	2.350	.019	
E.P	--->	RO	.091	.059	.029	2.023	.043	
E.P	--->	CO	.111	.048	.019	2.542	.011	

Table 5 (Continued). Test the coefficients and factor loads of the relationship between variables in the structural equation model

CR	--->	E.P	.729	1.253	.112	11.201	***	.532
CS	--->	E.P	.746	1.323	.115	11.470	***	.557
FP	--->	E.P	.643	1.000				.413

Source*: Research findings*

According to the structure and measurement of research, Structural Equation Model[2] technique is a suitable method for conceptual model analysis; Covariance-Based SEM techniques have been used to investigate the research model of structural equation. We have 16 antecedents in this conceptual model and export performance as a core concept; so, there are 16 hypothesizes as follows and all of them have been confirmed in this project.

H1: Market Orientation improves the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H1-1: Customer orientation has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H1-2: Competitor orientation has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H1-3: information generation has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H1-4: responsiveness has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
H2: Firm's Resources improve the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H2-1: human resources have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H2-2: physical resources have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H2-3: organizational resources have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H2-4: location resources have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H2-5: financial resources have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H3: Marketing Mix improves the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.
  H3-1: product has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

[2] SEM

H3-2: price has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H3-3: distribution has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H3-4: marketing research has a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H4: Macro Environment improves the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H4-1: economic factors have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H4-2: legal /political factors have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

H4-3: technological factors have a positive influence on the export performance of Iranian oil products companies.

Table 6. The role of variables, zero and opposite hypotheses and the final results of research hypotheses

Main hypothesis	Sub-hypothesis	Hypothesis items		zero hypotheses $\beta \leq 0$	opposite hypotheses $\beta > 0$	Test result
		independent	dependent			
Hypothesis 1	H1-1	Customer orientation	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H1-2	competitor Orientation	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H1-3	information generation	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H1-4	responsiveness	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
Hypothesis 2	H2-1	human resources	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H2-2	physical resources	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H2-3	organizational resources	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H2-4	location resources	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H2-5	financial resources	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect

Table 6 (Continued). The role of variables, zero and opposite hypotheses and the final results of research hypotheses

Hypothesis 3	H3-1	product	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H3-2	price	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H3-3	distribution	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H3-4	marketing research	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
Hypothesis 4	H4-1	economic factors	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H4-2	legal /political factors	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect
	H4-3	technological factors	export performance	✗	✔	positive & direct effect

Source: Research findings

7. Conclusion

Regarding the first proposition (question 1), export performance items of Iranian oil products are customer retention, customer satisfaction and financial performance; These results are in line with a study from (Njeru, 2013), entitled "Market Orientation, Marketing Blend, Company Characteristics, Macro Environment and Export Performance in Kenya" and Njeru has considered the components of export performance in this study as follows: customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction, customer retention, efficiency, productivity, communication 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 of export performance and company features relationship.

Regarding the second proposition (question 2), market orientation includes cultural market orientation (customer orientation & competitiveness) and behavioral market orientation (information generation & responsiveness), which 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 et al., 2009; 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 impact on export improvement; also, environmental tensions like technological factors and competition intensity are influential on exporting.

According to the third proposition (question 2), marketing mix consists of product, price, distribution, marketing research, which 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 tour firms in Kenya"; he considered marketing mix includes: product, price, distribution and marketing research dimensions. 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, which 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 of economic, legal, political and technological factors, which 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 risks in trade, 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 of the company's resources and plans for export development is as follows: access to new markets, change of financial mechanisms, having an internal center next to the factory for timely delivery and customer satisfaction. Due to the depletion of raw materials and the avoidance of selling raw materials, it is suggested that services be exported instead of materials.

According to this study, the most important solution to deal with export barriers to sanctions is to have a strategic and comprehensive plan for exports and its implementation in any situation. Another solution is to circumvent sanctions. For example, in an interview the following is mentioned; Iranian furnace oil is sold in Fujairah, UAE, we are in contact with a company in Fujairah that is in contact with the end consumer in the UAE on our behalf, because today Iranian companies are not allowed to cooperate with international companies.

Having enough energy is very important for developing countries and one of the ways to balance energy is to improve prices and achieve improvement technology. Therefore, foreign policy plays an essential role in maintaining the country's mines and the security of oil production, distribution and exports. Even a country with rich domestic resources cannot provide all resources needed for the development process. Therefore, it must obtain some of them from international sources. International resources play a key role for developing countries. Therefore, the government's foreign policy and their relations with other countries play a key role in attracting these resources.

For future research, it is recommended that future researchers address other categories of general system policies in the field of energy. The study was conducted on the oil, gas and petrochemical industries, which included their products. Therefore, the generalization of the research decreased. It is recommended that this research be done 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 important limitation of this research was the 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 limitation of the research was the political behavior of the interviewees.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, methodology, validation, formal analysis, resources, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing: all authors. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in the study were taken from http://www.opex.ir/.

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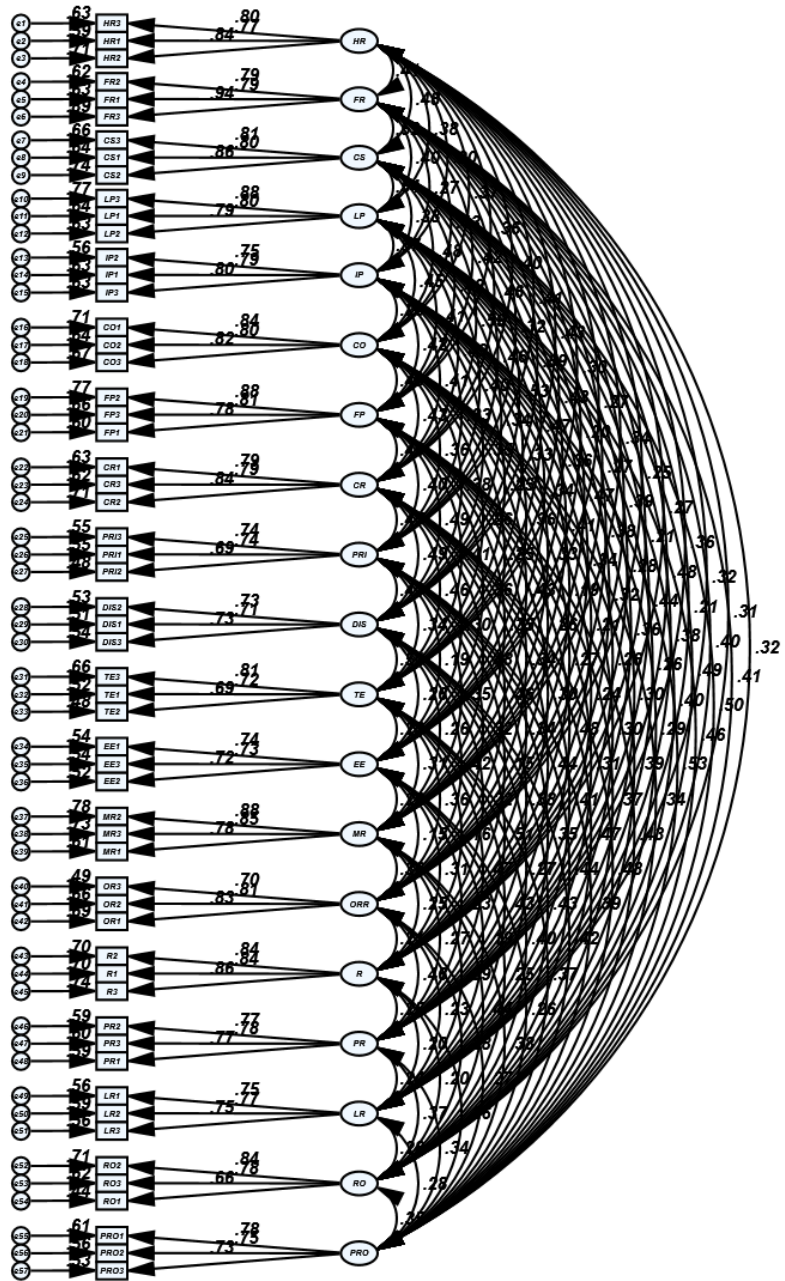
Appendix

Figure 3. Structures impact coefficients on model items in first-order confirmatory factor analysis
Source*: Research findings*

CMIN/DF=1.325, GFI=.896, CFI=.971, NFI=.891, IFI =.971, RMSEA=.024, PNFI=.782, PGFI=.759
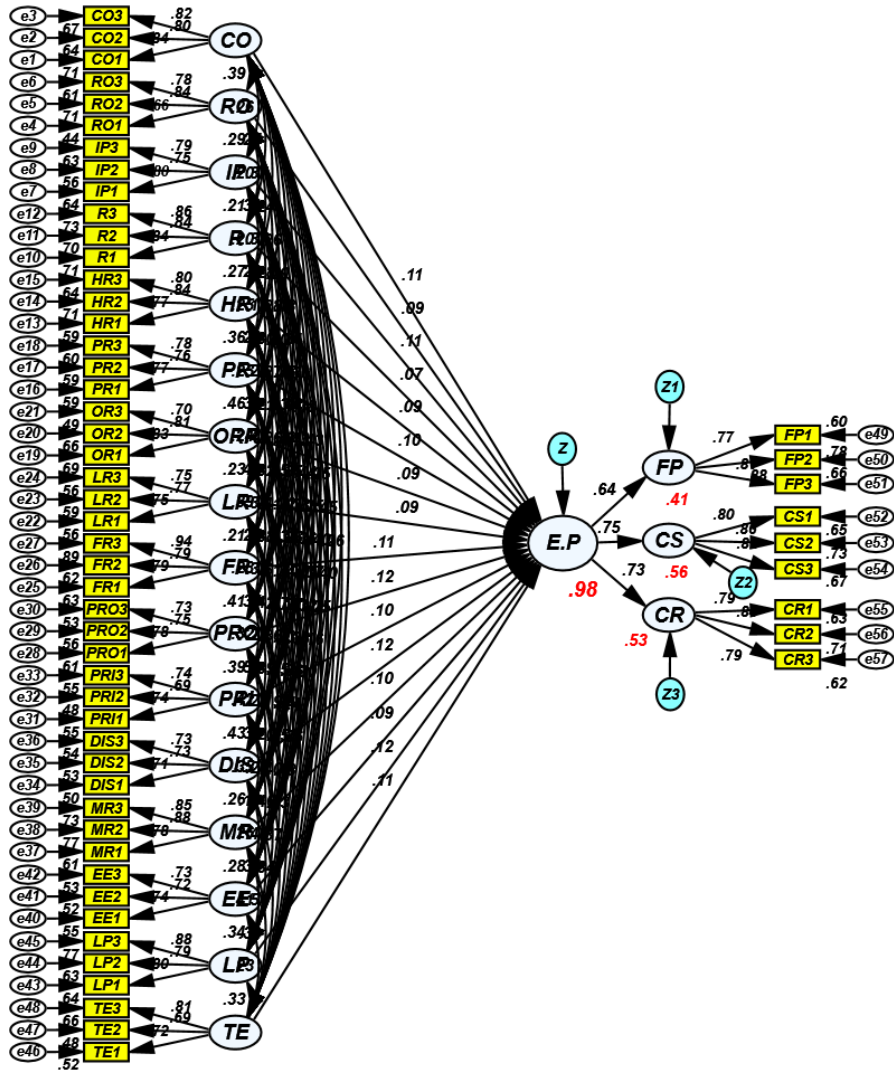
Figure 4. Structures impact coefficients on items and the effect of exogenous structures on endogenous structures in structural modeling

Source: *Research findings*