

# Identify the export market attractiveness of Iran's free zones

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## Abstract

Increasing competition on a global scale has led to an increase in the number of companies looking for opportunities in international markets to achieve their goals, survive and maintain their market position. In a knowledge-based economy, the organizations' intangible is increasingly becoming a competitive factor. Such assets are seen as the essence of competitive advantage. However, companies operating in international markets and unknown export environments face environmental uncertainty. The literature has merely addressed some aspects of export market attractiveness and comprehensive models with no comprehensive theories developed in the field. Therefore, this paper aims to systematically review and identify the factors and components of export market attractiveness in free zones. This paper adopts a Meta-synthesis method. This paper content analysis shows that the export market's attractiveness in comprehensive themes includes internal and external factors. The building blocks of internal factors include marketing factors, information factors, and performance factors. The building blocks of external factors include procedural factors, government factors, customers, international markets, and the business environment.

Keywords: Export, Export Market, Export Market Attractiveness, Free Zones  
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## 1 Introduction

Today, production and exports play an essential role in any healthy economy in the global economy [1]. The role of exports and their importance in the growth and prosperity of the economies of developing countries is well known [28]. Companies have followed many approaches to enter the global market, including the export development approach. Since exports based on the least resources is the least risky with the minimum organizational commitment; therefore, this approach is the most available and straightforward approach adopted by companies in trying to enter and penetrate foreign markets [17]. Exporting brings many benefits, including the economic benefit of domestic companies from foreign operations. The exporting advantages are not limited to the personal interests of companies. They promote social and economic development, increase employment, production, and affect social welfare by aiding local industries to increase productivity [32]. Attention to the nuances and sensitivities of exporting and selling goods in foreign markets seems essential; thus, overlooking this may lead to wasted financial and human investment [23]. Increasing competition on a global scale has led to an increase in the number of companies looking for opportunities in international markets to achieve their goals, maintain their market position, and survive. In the meantime, exports

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are of particular importance as one of the most critical and vital activities for the success of businesses and nations [27]. Accordingly, the attractiveness of export firms is one of the main issues in question among researchers, business stakeholders, and policymakers in each country [11].

Free zones provide grounds for the creation, development, and expansion of trade. Free zones are based on the philosophy that capital is the engine of a country's economic growth and development. Free zones with different types of free trade zone, export processing zone, special economic zone, tourist-free zone, and free zone of companies are established and managed to achieve this goal [5]. Free trade and special economic zones have been formed mainly to develop exports and attract foreign capital. Although the free zone may be outside the physical, legal, and administrative boundaries of customs facilities (like the Arvand Free Zone), it is within the country's territory. These zones facilitate the entry and exit of capital and profits and the movement of specialized labor. Moreover, not prohibited by law goods and imported materials can be stored in warehouses or factories without any customs and transit barriers and transformed and turned into other goods [44].

Accordingly, economic policymakers have established free trade-industrial zones in recent decades, taking into account many objectives. These objectives include increasing the competitiveness of the national economy, gradual connection with the global economy, regional development, elimination of deprivation, attracting foreign and domestic capital, creating new job opportunities, access to advanced technology, and increasing exports. Free zones are special for achieving economic and political goals such as job creation, regional economic development, attracting foreign investment and export development through financial incentives, and administrative and economic benefits [47]. The issue of supporting national production and Iranian goods has always been one of the main concerns of the Iranian economic system [36]. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic OF Iran called 2018 the year to promote the protection of Iranian goods to counteract the unfair conditions imposed by Western sanctions and the need to strengthen the system of domestic goods production and export. The Supreme Leader, in September 2010, due to the economic pressure of the enemies, coined the term resistance economy [21]. In addition, the national economy remains the main priority of the country. The development of Iranian goods exports (non-oil exports) is a sub-sections of the policy to protect Iranian goods.

In addition, by supporting the producer and the labor force active in the production of Iranian goods, the policy of import substitution can be implemented, and the wheel of the national economy can be turned more quickly to increase the resilience of the country's macroeconomy [2]. Evaluating the attractiveness of markets is the most common goal in international marketing research. This paper aims at providing a model to investigate the factors affecting the export market attractiveness of Iran's Free zones compared to Free zones in the southern Persian Gulf and use the potential of the Arvand free zone to enter the export market to Iraq. Managers' ignorance of foreign markets sometimes leads to the decision to abort global markets entering instead of solving the problem. A review of a number of 70 export managers' views active in different industries showed that they mainly face problems identifying the foreign export markets. Moreover, no company seems to have the resources to enter all of the 200 countries in the world. Entering a foreign market and choosing a target market is an issue imposing a lot of study and planning costs on organizations. As organizations' resources are limited, and competition intensifies, organizations seek to include productivity in all their decisions, including entering foreign markets.

Therefore, the search for attractive export markets is one of the essential actions of companies to become international. Choosing the right market to enter is crucial because it forms the basis for the company's future development. In the absence of a thorough analysis of foreign market opportunities, managers become confused about the diversity and complexity of foreign markets. The marketing literature has addressed the importance of properly selecting foreign markets in detail, emphasizing identifying, evaluating, and selecting foreign markets. Market evaluation is important, so researchers have proposed different methods to study attractive foreign markets and different models for evaluating and selecting foreign markets.

International trade has fewer barriers to entry, increased growth, and excellent opportunities for development for the increasing trend of globalization. Because the firms tend towards globalization, the specific environment in which the firm operates results from various strategic decisions that it makes in the process of globalization. One of these strategic decisions is the segmentation and selection of international markets. Achieving export development and, more importantly, economic development necessitates establishing effective economic and trade relations with other countries and the optimal allocation of domestic facilities and resources. Accordingly, to establish and maintain export relations between Iran's Free zones and other countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf, and the analogy of the Arvand Free Zone with Jabal Ali Free Zone, Iran's foreign trade must be considered and analyzed comprehensively. The relationship between the Arvand Free Zone and other Free zones and its impact on the export of goods to Iraq is one of the aspects in expanding trade and export potential, leading to the expansion of Iran's presence in export markets. This paper provides a model to examine the Arvand Free Zone markets' attractiveness compared to the

Free zones of the countries south of the Persian Gulf. Indeed, the global experience shows a broad awareness of the role of Free zones in economic development and expanding relations with global markets. The primary role of Free zones in countries like Iran is to change economic attitudes to bring the national economy into line with the global economy. Nonetheless, despite this situation, it seems that playing such a role is faced with many limitations, and Iran has been less able to achieve the desired advantages. Therefore, this paper aims at providing a model for the export market attractiveness of Iran's free zones, based on which it is possible to establish a wise and rational move toward a sustainable and profitable organization. Therefore, this paper's main question is: "what is the export market attractiveness of Iran's free zones?"

## 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Export market

Organizations and businesses experience a dynamic environment globally. Therefore, the issues of change, including the business, globalization, technology, strategic behavior in the right export market, and other elements of the organization and managers, require review and re-examination. Organizations, especially senior managers, must identify the elements of change in the export of their organization before taking any fundamental organizational action [12]. Increasing competition on a global scale has led to an increase in companies seeking opportunities in international markets to achieve their goals and maintain their market position and survival [30]. However, companies operating in international markets and unfamiliar export environments face more environmental uncertainty. Under turbulent conditions, the company's products are more likely not to fit the customers' needs and competitors' products, and reduce the company's actions effectiveness. Thus, in a more turbulent export environment, exporters rely heavily on information as a tool to increase their knowledge of changing export conditions [24]. Research shows that strategic behavior in the export market has a positive effect on the performance of companies. Export market orientation is essential because international markets structure is more complex than domestic markets. This complexity increases the need for companies to produce and disseminate market information and accountability. Thus, the international arena needs policies to improve the structure of exporting companies and increase their country's share in international trade [22].

In addition, the costs incurred by the company in the export process can be significantly reduced by using marketing techniques [9]. Accordingly, it is necessary to create business processes ensuring marketing effectiveness. In addition, activities that increase marketing effectiveness can only be achieved with the participation of all aspects of the business [22]. Gallego and Casillas argue that strengthening the market with an international strategic approach leads to higher business performance in export because the export orientation determines the focus and mission of the organization's strategies and also leads to pride in the organization. Organizational pride manifests itself in increasing international marketing capability [7]. Accordingly, effective marketing systems in products and production processes are fundamental mechanisms for creating comparative and competitive advantage in today's industry's dynamic and evolving environment. Also, it is inevitable to attract continuous attention to quality and customer needs to adopt the desired export market orientation. Thus, managers must take on roles tailored to changing environmental conditions [18]. However, entering different international markets increases the complexity of export market orientation. Therefore, a company intending to enter new markets through export business will face different complexities from the domestic market [24].

In the international market effectiveness and marketing capabilities have a significant impact on the export performance of firms for its the dynamic nature and continuous innovations. On the other hand, one of the fundamental features of such markets is that companies use marketing strategies based on internal capabilities to quickly innovate and offer new products to improve their export performance. Therefore, the development of the National Gas Company, its exports should be seriously considered in planning and policies for its added value. This industry, with its many advantages, has gained special importance in recent years and has experienced great growth in the group of materials and export products. Hence, producing most products of Gas industry are justified economically. the absence of an export plan with a strategic vision, and lack of understanding of the appropriate marketing strategy and orientation include the primary problems in Gas industry [7]. Export market orientation is one of the most essential components for companies to gain a competitive advantage and profitability, and companies must have a high ability to retrieve to provide superior services to their customers than competitors. On the other hand, processes based on export market orientation are much deeper and more professional concepts and the slightest negligence in keeping pace with changes and needs of the export market can lead to the organization death [8]. On the other hand, globalization in recent years has forced businesses to start looking for new learning-based opportunities in international markets alongside their domestic and traditional markets. Meanwhile, exports are more attractive because they have fewer

requirements and obligations than other methods of entering foreign markets, joint ventures, etc. Export managers allow organizations to respond to strategic changes to align organizations with the general operating environment, and affect their export performance. Meanwhile, fundamental information and communication technology changes in recent decades have made companies and institutions think of looking for ways to increase their marketing capabilities. Accordingly, Green conducted a study to examine market orientation and export performance. Their results examining the role of adjusting the distribution of canals and institutional distance showed that companies with stronger capabilities can use hierarchical channels and export to markets more organizationally. Also, companies that value export market orientation improve export performance accordingly. A better understanding is how companies can use their capabilities when exporting, using the capabilities of the United Nations [33].

## 2.2 The export market attractiveness

Export is the most common way for companies, especially small and medium enterprises, to enter foreign markets. Compared to other internationalization methods, the main reason is that exports require fewer resources. Hence, the correct assessment of international markets and export sales has increasingly been considered a suitable way for the company's growth and, ultimately, the countries' economic growth. Significant challenges in export marketing include selecting the right markets or countries through marketing research and deciding how to formulate a marketing mix strategy properly. This decision is more influenced by the firm's accepted philosophical underpinnings on how to operate in foreign markets. Exporters are usually influenced by one of the specific philosophical approaches in this field and base their marketing mix process directly on the primary strategy derived from this approach [26].

### 2.2.1 Demand attractiveness

Demand attractiveness is the demand for goods and services within the sectors, affected by product-related indicators, including per capita consumption of product type, macroeconomic indicators (GDP per capita), and macro-non-economic indicators, i.e., the importing country people's attitude towards the origin country products. Accordingly, the dimensions affecting demand attractiveness are [42, 43].

- Product-related indicators
- Macroeconomic indicators
- Macro-non-economic indicators

### 2.2.2 Access attractiveness

Access attractiveness refers to tariff and non-tariff restrictions and cost restrictions such as goods transporting and services costs to the destination country. The access attractiveness will increase by fewer restrictions and lower the cost of delivering goods and services to the destination country. In case of shallow access attractiveness, it will be practically impossible to enter the market through some options such as export. Accordingly, the dimensions that affect the access attractiveness are [45]:

- Legal restrictions
- Cost
- Political indicators

Legal restrictions can be categorized into tariff restrictions, non-tariff restrictions, and other legal barriers. Legal restrictions on tariff barriers include customs tariffs, import taxes, and preferential tariffs. In addition, non-tariff barriers include commodity standards set by a foreign country (packaging of goods, required labels, safety rules), required documentation, import procedures, quotas set by the foreign government, and other restrictions. In addition, legal restrictions may include restrictions on travel to a foreign country, patents, copyrights, and the degree of brand protection [42, 43].

### 2.2.3 Adapting attractiveness

Adapting attractiveness refers to the change required in the marketing mix and processes. This attractiveness is directly influenced by structural indicators such as compliance with the legal system, business culture, distribution system, and cultural (psychological/psychological) compliance with the foreign market. Accordingly, the more the firm's manufacturing goods and services can be combined with fewer changes and marketing processes in the target market, the more attractive it will be to adapt to that market. Thus, the dimensions affecting the adapting attractiveness are [35].

- Structural indicators
- Marketing mix
- Resources and marketing processes
- Cultural distance

Structural indicators refer to the implementation of the legal system and the structure and business culture of the destination country. These indicators are considered factors affecting the adapting attractiveness in the model entitled "structural adapting indicators". Indicators related to marketing mix adapting refer to the coordination of controllable marketing tools with target markets. The more marketing mix used in the domestic market can be used with fewer repairs in foreign markets, the more attractive the marketing mix is. This index includes the amount of change required in product specifications (packaging and design), change in promotional activities, change in pricing, change in activities related to distribution, and adapting the name and brand with customer demands [42, 43].

### 2.2.4 Competition attractiveness

The competition attractiveness is the competition structure attractiveness, the current position of the firm in the destination country and the domestic policies of the destination country. The more competition there is in the destination country and the stronger the firm is in the destination country, the more attractive the firm is to compete in that country. In addition, this attractiveness is directly influenced by the domestic policies of the destination country such as political stability, patent law, advertising, and promotion law. Therefore, the competition attractiveness components are [39].

- Competition structure
- Enterprise stance
- Domestic policies of the destination country

The competition structure includes the analysis of the industry and the forces influencing it. This structure is influenced by the intensity and quality of competition, number of competitors, variety of brands, industry integrity, bargaining power of buyers in the destination country, citation of the type of product offered in the destination country, and so on. Porter's model explicitly considers the analysis of the industry and the forces influencing it. Also, the structure of competition as a factor influencing the competition attractiveness is called "competition" by [48] model, "intensity of competition", "risk of alternative goods", "barriers to entry", and "customer bargaining power" by [41] model, "competitiveness with competitors" by Sarabia [39] in the assessing quality level of competition in the potential market, and "actual and potential competitors' strategies" by Cauda [42, 43].

## 3 Research methodology

This paper uses a meta-synthesis method. The meta-synthesis method is a research method used for interpretive translations or theory building using the integration and comparison of different findings. The overarching goal is to create a creative interpretation of qualitative findings. In general, two views govern the meta-synthesis. The first approach, called integration, emphasizes the collection, aggregation, and integration of previous studies. This approach identifies similar points of the findings of previous studies and integrates them based on variables with high reliability and also results in causal relationships between phenomena, and the generalizability of the findings. The second view, which is an interpretive combination, emphasizes the interpretation of previous studies. In this view, comparison and

interpretation are important, because they use a kind of induction to predict what might happen in similar situations and how the categories relate to or interact with each other [13]. This paper has used the first approach, namely the meta-synthesis approach in accordance with the model of [38]. This model consists of seven steps. All dimensions of this paper will be explained in the model's seven steps:

**Step 1: To set the research question:**

This step includes to set various parameters such as the study population, what, when, and how the method is used. In this study, the question was: "What are the factors and components of the export market attractiveness of Iran's free zones?"

**Step 2: Systematic literature review:**

The statistical population of this study includes studies that have addressed the export market attractiveness of Iran's Free zones from different aspects and dimensions. Therefore, domestic literature since 2009 and foreign literature since 1980 were reviewed to collect data. The keywords export, export market and the export market attractiveness were searched in the centers of domestic scientific databases (ASID, Mag Iran, Silioka, Noor Magaz) and foreign (Emerald, ProCost, Science Direct, Google Scholar, Ilment, Otad, Sage Pop) and libraries and research centers, to complete the search process.

**Step 3: Search and select appropriate texts:**

Based on the preliminary results of the search, 150 related articles were identified and to select appropriate articles based on the algorithm shown in Figure 1, various parameters such as title, abstract, content were evaluated and finally 18 source was selected.

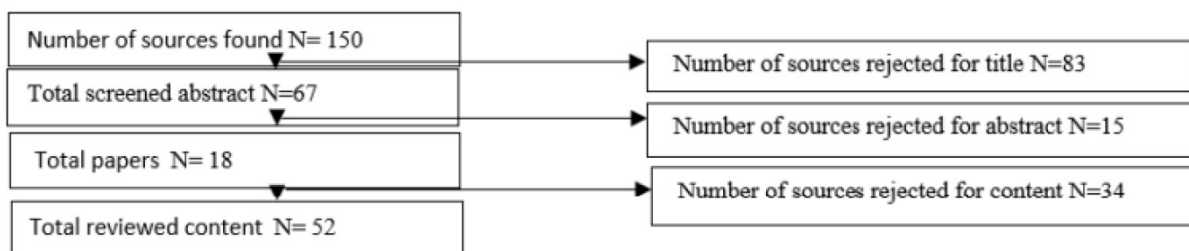


Figure 1: A summary of search results and selection of appropriate sources

**Step 4: Extracting textual information:**

the research data on the export market attractiveness were categorized in Table 1. This table is based on the names of the theorists, the year and the key components.

**Step 5: Analyze and Combine Qualitative Findings:**

The overarching goal is to create an integrated and new interpretation of the findings. This method has been used to clarify concepts, patterns and results in refining existing states of knowledge and the emergence of operational models and theories. In the analysis phase, the researcher searches for the topics that have emerged among the studies in the meta-synthesis, and as soon as the topic is identified, the researcher presents a classification that best describes the topic. In this research, first all related components were identified and considered as primary codes and in the next steps were placed in the form of concepts and categories.

**Step 6: Quality Control:**

In this study, the following procedures were followed to maintain the quality of the study:

- Extensive review of Persian and English sources
- Efforts to prioritize and accurately identify components

**Step 7: Presenting the Findings:**

This step presents the meta-synthesis method findings from the previous steps, as below.

Table 1: Export market attractiveness literature

Code	Theorist	Components of export market attractiveness	Theorist Code
1	[6]	Product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), having the product quality necessary standards, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service), price (providing a satisfactory price to customers, adaptation price with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), problem communication with foreign customers, difficulty in communication with foreign customers	
2	[16]	Unreliability of information in international cultural markets (unfamiliarity with foreign business, different cultural and social characteristics, differences in dialect)	
3	[4]	Lack of working capital to finance exports, fierce competition in foreign markets	
4	[28]	Strong competition in foreign markets	
5	[31]	Strong competition in foreign markets	
6	[14]	Product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), having the product quality necessary standards, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service), distribution (complexity of external distribution channels, access to external distribution channels, obtaining a reliable foreign agency, the problem of securing inventory in foreign markets, price (offering satisfactory prices to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), promotions (price promotions, nonprice promotions)	
7	[20]	Fierce competition in foreign markets	
8	[32]	Product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), having the product quality necessary standards, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service), economic (deteriorating economic conditions abroad From the country, currency price fluctuations)	
9	[3]	Price (providing satisfactory prices to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), lack of time for managers to deal with export issues, untrained export staff, lack of excess capacity for exports, lack of working capital to finance exports	
10	[46]	Distribution (complexity of external distribution channels, access to external distribution channels, obtaining a reliable foreign agency, difficulty in securing inventory in foreign markets, limited information for market analysis, unreliability of information in international markets, identification of foreign business opportunities, inability to contact with foreign customers, unfamiliarity with export processes, difficulty in communication with foreign customers, payback period	
11	[40]	Different habits and attitudes of foreign customers, intense competition in foreign and cultural markets (unfamiliarity with foreign business, different cultural and social characteristics, differences in dialect)	
12	[25]	Promotions (price promotions, non-price promotions), limited information for market analysis, unreliability of information in international markets, identification of foreign business opportunities, inability to contact foreign customers, political (political instability in foreign markets, strict rules in foreign markets, high tariffs and non-tariff barriers)	
13	[29]	Price (providing satisfactory prices to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), lack of time for managers to deal with export issues, untrained export staff, lack of excess capacity for exports, lack of working capital to finance exports	
14	[10]	Economic (deteriorating economic conditions abroad, exchange rate fluctuations)	
15	[15]	Economic (deteriorating economic conditions abroad, exchange rate fluctuations)	
16	[49]	Unfavorable laws and regulations, no government incentives	
17	[1]	Unfavorable laws and regulations, no government incentives	
18	[34]	Product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), the product having the required standards quality, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service), distribution (complexity of external distribution channels, access to external distribution channels, obtaining a reliable foreign agency, the problem of securing inventory in foreign markets, price (offering satisfactory prices to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), lack of time for managers to deal with export issues, untrained personnel for exports (lack of excess capacity for exports, shortage in working capital to finance exports	

## 4 Data analysis

Since the export market attractiveness is one of the new topics that has recently entered the field of free zones, so far no systematic studies have been observed that address all aspects, with each theorist addressed an aspect. Therefore, this paper has extracted all the codes considered by theorists, through content analysis 2. After that, the identified codes are classified into 7 constructive themes which include marketing and information factors, performance factors, procedural factors, government factors, customers and international markets and business environment and then into 2 comprehensive themes (Internal factors and external factors). Basic themes include product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), product quality of the required standards, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service), distribution (complexity of external distribution channels, access to foreign distribution channels, obtaining a reliable foreign agency, the problem of stock supply in foreign markets), price (providing a satisfactory price to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers), promotions (price promotions, non-price promotions), limited information for market analysis, unreliable information in international markets, identification of foreign business opportunities, inability to contact foreign customers, shortage in time for managers to deal with export issues, untrained export personnel, lack of excess capacity for exports, absence of working capital for export financing, unfamiliarity with export processes, difficulty in communication with foreign customers, return on investment, unfavorable rules and regulations, no government incentives, different habits and attitudes of foreign customers, strong competition in foreign markets, political (political instability in foreign markets, strict rules in foreign markets, high tariffs and non-tariff barriers), economic (deteriorating economic conditions abroad, exchange rate fluctuations), cultural (unfamiliarity with foreign business, different cultural and social characteristics, differences in dialect). The frequency of constructive themes includes marketing factors (14), information factors (14), performance factors (13), procedural factors (4), government factors (4), international customers and markets (6), and business environment (60). The frequency of comprehensive themes of internal factors and external factors are 41 and 20, respectively.

## 5 Discussion and conclusion

Free zones seek to eliminate uselessness and increase value-added activities; so that businesses can have perfect and more successful businesses and products without the need for significant external investments. The main idea must first be formed to improve the export market attractiveness. The idea is sometimes created by environmental changes, including new laws, new government decisions, or community-level decisions that can be best exploited. Later on, a control group must be formed to control the process at each stage and then issue permission to enter the next stage and if the work was incomplete, stop and review it.

There is a high degree of uncertainty about the internal evolutionary factors of business development and external issues (macroeconomic and market issues). This uncertainty results from the rapid development of the market of innovative companies and the volume of businesses that are considered innovations, emphasizing the real challenge inherent in the management process. This significant management challenge extends sharply to the external environment, thus increasing the uncertainty associated with this market. Also, the time between the emergence of an innovative idea and the product launch is another factor highlights the export market attractiveness importance.

However, there is a lack of models that cover the level of export market attractiveness in free zones. As mentioned, the export market attractiveness is one of the topics that has recently entered the field of management and so far, both in domestic and foreign studies, no article has been seen that addresses all aspects of the issue. Therefore, this paper summarizes the results of literature through meta-analysis and analysis of existing opinions and principles in the field of export market attractiveness. The export market attractiveness in comprehensive contexts includes internal and external factors. Also, the constructive themes of internal factors include marketing factors, information factors, performance factors. The constructive themes of external factors include procedural factors, government factors, customers and international markets, and the business environment.

Comprehensive themes that include internal and external factors and constructive themes that include internal factors including marketing factors results are consistent with that of [6, 14, 32, 34, 50]. Information factors results are consistent with that of [25, 37, 46] and functional factors results are consistent with that of [3, 4, 16, 29, 34]. In addition, the results of constructive themes of external factors including procedural factors results are consistent with that of [6, 46]. Governmental factors results are consistent with that of [1, 49]. Customers and International Markets results are consistent with that of [4, 20, 31, 37, 40]. Business environment results are consistent with that of [4, 10, 15, 16, 19, 25, 32, 40].

We acknowledge that this research has some limitations that affect the results and it is expected that the readers will interpret and apply the findings and results presented taking into account these limitations. As stated in the



Table 2: Coding the export market attractiveness in Free zones on the literature

Comprehensive themes frequency	Constructive themes frequency	Basic themes frequency	Basic themes source code	Basic themes	Constructive themes	Comprehensive themes
41	14	4	1-6-8-18	Product (development of new product for foreign markets, adaptation of export products with foreign counterparts (design and application), having the quality of the product of the required standards, prominence of product packaging, after-sales service)	Marketing factors	Internal factors
		3	6-10-18	Distribution (complexity of external distribution channels, access to external distribution channels, obtaining a reliable foreign agency, the problem of securing inventory in foreign markets)		
		5	1-6-9-13-18	Price (providing satisfactory prices to customers, matching prices with competitors, granting credit to foreign customers)		
		2	6-12	Promotions (price promotions, non-price promotions)		
	14	2	10-12	Limited information for market analysis	Information factors	
		8	1-10-12	Unreliable information in international markets		
		2	10-12	Identify foreign business opportunities		
		2	10-12	Difficulty in communication with foreign customers		
	13	3	9-13-18	Untrained personnel for export	Functional factors	
		3	9-13-18	Lack of managers' time to deal with export issues		
		3	9-13-18	Untrained personnel for export		
		4	3-9-13-18	Shortage in working capital to finance exports		
	20	4	1	10	Unfamiliar with export processes	
2			1-10	Difficulty in communication with foreign customers		
1			10	Return on investment		
4		2	16-17	Unfavorable rules and regulations	Government factors	
		2	16-17	No government incentives		
6		1	11	Different habits and attitudes of foreign customers	International customers and markets	
		5	3-4-5-7-11	Strong competition in foreign markets		
6		1	12	Political (political instability in foreign markets, strict rules in foreign markets, high tariffs and non-tariff barriers)	Business environment	
		3	8-14-15	Economic (deteriorating economic conditions abroad, exchange rate fluctuations)		
	2	2-11	Cultural (unfamiliarity with foreign business, different cultural and social characteristics, differences in dialect)			

Methodology section, for the absence of access to paper copies of many older publications in the period under review, the search scope was limited to available published works and online sources. In some cases, researchers have been unable to access certain issues of the journal or they were not publishing them online. Also, despite the online access to the journal website in a few cases, the full text file of the published works was not available. As mentioned earlier, the initial selection of research lists is based on a search for titles, keywords, and abstracts of published works in the journals in question. Given the breadth of the conceptual scope of export market attractiveness and possible shortcomings in the publication of research findings, it is possible that research in the main text is related to the concepts of export, export market and export market attractiveness in free zones, but in the titles, the keywords and their abstracts should not be observed and have not been identified in this study. Also, depending on the scope of application of the concepts of export, export market and the export market attractiveness, the relevant research may be published in other fields and scientific journals. This paper has focused on domestic and foreign publications in management to maintain the integrity in the analysis of published works and obtain the necessary result. Therefore, pre-research does not necessarily reflect the status of published works related to exports, the export market, and the export market attractiveness in other specialized areas.

Also, due to the poor performance of search engines in some journal-related databases, research works have been searched manually and the published works that were available have been reviewed, so there is a possibility of human error. Exports, export markets and export markets attractiveness are topics that despite the growing trend of research in these fields at the global level, based on the findings of this study, have the lowest share in published domestic research in the field of export market attractiveness. Given the growing importance of the issues of export market attractiveness, further studies seem necessary.

This paper examined the published research papers on the export market attractiveness in domestic and foreign journals. Therefore, a comparative study of the master's and doctoral dissertations submitted by Iranian and foreign researchers at home and abroad is suggested. Also, it is suggested to review international scientific journals to complete the coverage of research activities related to the export market attractiveness in Iran and gain a more complete insight of the research process in Iran. The high share of quantitative research shows that domestic research is more focused on testing common theories in the field of exports.

Therefore, attention should be paid to increasing the share of qualitative research to promote the level of innovation and the creation of indigenous knowledge in the field of export and export market and the export market attractiveness in free zones. Also, most published works are the result of student research and are mainly derived from mandatory research, the depth of research is not appropriate and of course we see less chain research done on specific topics. Given that academic research is largely adapted from the theory of international researchers, there is no serious innovation in domestic research that has led to the presentation of the concept or development of theory in the field of export market attractiveness.

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