



## Cognitive Factors on Export Performance Concerning Behavioral Factors (Case Study: South Zagros Oil Exploitation Company, National Iranian Oil Company)

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### ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the influence of cognitive elements on export performance, with a focus on the mediating role of behavioral components (Case study: South Zagros Oil and Gas Exploitation Company - South Zagros Headquarters of Tehran Ministry of Oil). This research is applied in terms of purpose and a field-correlational study in terms of nature. To gather data, a library-field technique and a questionnaire were utilized. The study's statistical population included all employees at the South Zagros Oil and Gas Exploitation Company's headquarters in Tehran. The questionnaires were sent to a sample of 207 persons after the calculations were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the created scales. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as the structural equation approach, and the questionnaire data were analyzed using LISREL-8.80 and SPSS-26 software. The findings of the study show that cognitive variables influence the company's behavior and export performance. Export performance is also influenced by behavioral variables. The findings also revealed that behavioral variables mediate the influence of cognitive elements on export performance.

**Keywords:** Export performance, Cognitive factors, Behavioral factors

### INTRODUCTION

Exports are crucial in modern economies because they give consumers and businesses greater markets for their products. Strengthening economic trade, encouraging exports and imports for the advantage of all trade participants, is one of the fundamental purposes of diplomacy and foreign policy between states. Companies must identify elements impacting their export performance in order to survive and prosper in the development of export activities (Mosleh et al., 2016). A substantial portion of the basic demands of a successful export may be recognized and the necessary capabilities can be applied by evaluating the elements impacting export performance (Bakhtiari and Bakhshandeh, 2019). Examining cognitive influencing variables might help decision-makers better understand how they think about and solve challenges. Companies are facing the shadow of development and success in exports due to numerous obstacles (such as low competitiveness of export products, inadequate transportation systems, lack of accurate identification of customer needs, lack of accurate identification of climatic, cultural, social, economic, etc.). (Ghazizadeh et al., 2011). The importance of exports in the success of the economy at the micro (organizational) and macro (national, regional, and international) levels, as well as their sensitivity due to the presence of numerous obstacles, necessitates paying attention to and understanding the effective and supporting factors in this area. So far, studies have focused on either understanding the interaction between individual

and organizational level elements in the development of dynamic skills (Salvato and Vasolo, 2018) or focusing on the behavioral triggers of dynamic capacities (Arendt, 2018). However, little study has been done on how various elements interact at the firm level and the nature of their combined influence on international expansion and market debate. Many cognitive and behavioral aspects influence how investors make decisions. As a result, behavioral variables in financial concerns and even exports have emerged (Saif Elahi et al., 2015). Several studies have attempted to identify the essential measures of success in financial markets and exports, emphasizing the study of export performance as a critical topic, among which cognitive and behavioral aspects may be noted, among all the elements impacting export performance. Cognitive variables are a collection of internal and environmental elements that influence interpersonal interactions (Mahmoudi et al., 2017). According to Wojcik et al. (2020), three behavioral elements - corporate business model redesign (business modeling), participation capability, and the level of learning about foreign markets - are directly linked to export performance. These are caused by two different sorts of management cognitive processes. The first is managers' "pull strategy" thinking and their "global mindset," which allows them to learn more about overseas markets. These three behavioral characteristics when combined can lead to exceptional export success.

The Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), a subsidiary of the National Iranian Oil Company, is in charge of developing South Pars' 24 stages, which are expected to cost more than \$100 billion. Each of the 24 stages combines natural gas production with gas condensate or natural gas liquids production (NGPL). When all phases are completed, annual gas production is expected to reach 270 billion cubic meters. The initial concept for Iran's comprehensive gas plan was to use phases one to ten of South Pars for domestic consumption and re-injection of fields, while assigning the gas generated from the remaining phases to exports (Bakhtiari and Bakhshandeh, 2019).

Generally, the majority of study in the topic of export performance reveals a worse than ideal condition in businesses. The improper position of cognitive-behavioral elements among the members of the organization appears to be one of the causes of this problem. As a result, the influence of cognitive and behavioral aspects on export performance must be investigated. While determining the state of cognitive and behavioral elements, attention and relevance to this problem also exposes the impact of these factors on export performance.

### **Theoretical foundations**

#### ***Export performance***

The relative success or failure of a company's or country's efforts to sell domestically produced products and services in foreign nations is known as export performance. Because exports indicate a country's success in international commerce, export performance is an important aspect of international rivalry (Tavalier and Conte, 2021). Different performance indicators may be used to evaluate the amount of export performance, including objective performance indicators such as profit, subjective performance indicators such as customer behavior indicators, or a mix of these two indications (Mosleh et al., 2016). In recent years, many research on export performance have been examined, but there is still no universal and complete idea for it. The export performance of a corporation is one of the metrics used to determine its success rate (Sanobar et al., 2019). In the study of export marketing, export performance has been an important structure. In this sense, objective indicators are connected to indications of absolute



performance, whereas subjective indicators are related to the business' performance in comparison to its primary rivals or in comparison to the company's expectations.

### **Cognitive factors**

There are two types of cognitive factors: (Wojcik et al., 2020):

**1. Stretching mindset:** Regardless of the resources available, stretching stresses strategy formulation, the necessity of creativity, activism, risk-taking, and grabbing chances. In reality, the traction strategy mentality is linked to an element's managerial understanding at the individual level of worldwide dynamic capability. In other words, business leaders must concentrate on solutions that involve more time and risk.

**2. Global mindset:** A global mindset demonstrates an awareness of cultural and market variety, as well as a desire and capacity to merge this diversity. As a result, the global mentality assists businesses in finding possibilities in foreign markets and enhances the international economic activity process.

### **Behavioral factors**

One of the key concerns of these firms' executives is the factors that influence their export performance. One of the most essential components in achieving a balance between the country's economy and the global economy is identifying the variables that influence export performance and improving it. Lack of attention to the elements impacting the development of export performance in these firms will result in several obstacles that will ultimately limit exports, profitability, and the company's position, while also having a negative impact on the economy (Aghazadeh et al., 2020).

#### **1. Business modeling**

A business model is a collection of managerial decisions and their repercussions. Business process modeling may be thought of as an analytical method for charting an organization's growth. As a result, it is an excellent tool for corporate management. Also, because business modeling is about changing how a firm functions, it must reorganize its resources and skills in some way (Wojcik et al., 2020).

#### **2. Participation capability:**

Mutual commitment between the firm and its peers is required for successful worldwide export performance. As a result, the establishment and maintenance of inter-firm partnerships has become a typical organizational capability for internationalizing in a step-by-step and quick manner since it gives access to external resources (such as information) and competencies that a focal business lacks. As a consequence of this feature, the export performance will improve, and as a result, it will impact the choice to enter the international market (Wojcik et al., 2020).

#### **3. Learning about foreign markets**

Background, trends, and results are all factors in foreign market learning. The integrated model comprising multiple methodologies demonstrates how businesses may profit from and learn from variations in international markets, as well as the outcomes. The findings of a model of dependence on suitable resources to enter foreign markets are the outcomes of a resource dependency model for foreign market entrance mode in competition for developing markets (Manafzadeh Hir et al., 1400).

When it comes to upgrading internationalization models, knowledge development is crucial. International markets may present both challenges and possibilities for managers, as well as impact company export success (Sanobar et al., 2019). Tensile and global mentality techniques,



in particular, have an impact on the development of business modeling and participation, enhancing one's capacity to engage, model business, and learn about international markets (Wojcik et al., 2020). The research's conceptual model is depicted in Figure (1).

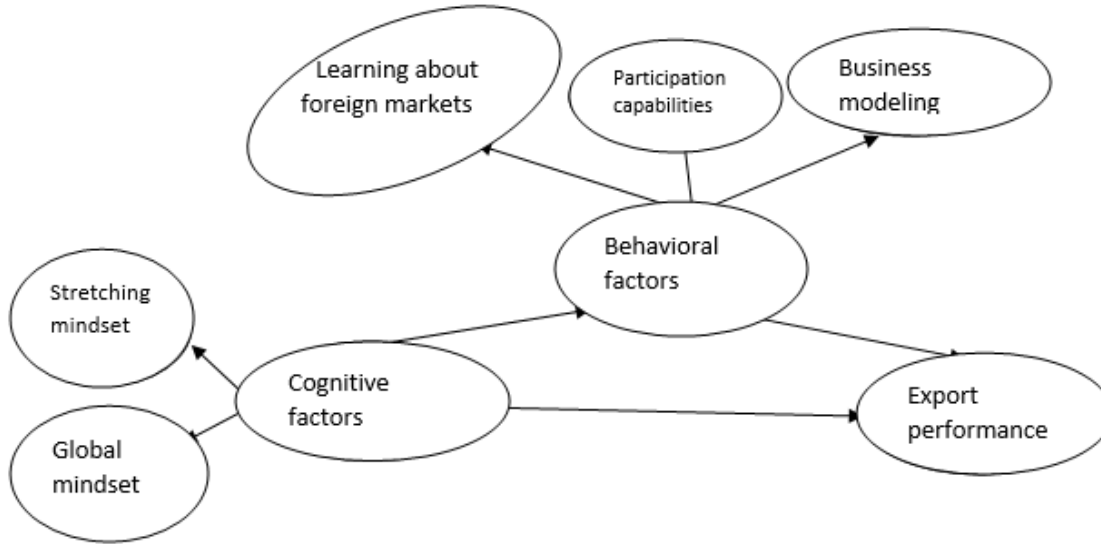


Figure 1. Conceptual research model (Wojcik et al., 2020)

#### Literature review

The effect of customer orientation on the export performance of home appliance exporting companies, considering the effect of modulators of trust, communication, and behavioral commitment, was investigated by Mohammadi et al. (2016), who found that all three variables of trust, communication, and behavioral commitment affect the relationship between customer orientation and export performance.

The goal of Alavi and Ghiasabadi's (202) study was to see if the influence of investors' behavioral emotions on credit and business rank might be moderated by systematic investor competition. Investors' behavioral emotions, according to the findings, have an impact on the company's credit and corporate reputation. Furthermore, the link between investors' behavioral emotions and the company's credit and commercial reputation is moderated by systematic investor competition.

Using a structural equation technique, Rezaei et al. (2021) investigated the influence of variables impacting the development of halal food exports. All health, religious, behavioral, and marketing aspects have a substantial impact on the export of halal food goods, according to the findings. When comparing the four elements that determine the export of halal food brand items, marketing considerations have the most impact. The health of the product, as determined by health factors, the transparency of the production process, as determined by behavioral factors, advertising and proper brand introduction, as determined by marketing factors, and how to present the halal product and halal brand, as determined by religious factors, all had the greatest impact on the export of halal brand food products.

Wojcik et al. (2020) examined the influence of cognitive and behavioral components on export performance from a dynamic capacities approach in another study. The findings revealed that "traction strategy" has a favorable and significant impact on two behavioral elements: business

modeling and involvement. The global mindset has a big and good impact on business modeling and learning about other markets, but it has a detrimental impact on participation. Only two of the three behavioral factors had a favorable impact on export success. The direct route coefficient from learning about foreign markets to export performance was positive but small, contrary to expectations.

Mata et al. (2021) studied the influence of institutional assistance (financial and marketing support) on the success of export-oriented or so-called global enterprises. Their findings suggest that government marketing support improves competitiveness and export performance. Sponsorship, on the other hand, has no impact on competitiveness or export performance. They identified competition as an important mediator in enhancing the link between marketing assistance and export performance.

The influence of export promotion programs (EPPs) on export performance was investigated by Motta et al. (2021). The findings revealed that participation in EPP had a beneficial impact on company export success, particularly for enterprises with prior export expertise, demonstrating the value of utilizing these programs. Company size has a positive link with export success, but firm longevity has a negative relationship with export performance, according to the data. Companies' export performance suffers when they do not adapt their tactics. Finally, membership in the EPP did not appear to have an impact on the export performance of enterprises who had never exported before.

### Methods

The current study is of the correlation type (due to the study of the effect of variables on each other), field (due to the use of questionnaires as data collection tools), applied nature (due to the study title in a specific community), and cross-sectional time (due to the study title in a specific community) (due to time constraints). The sample size for this study was 450 participants, and 207 samples were chosen to distribute the questionnaire using Cochran's method with a 0.05 error rate. The approach of random sampling was applied. Data were gathered via a questionnaire. Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire (1).

Table 1. Specific information of the questionnaires used in the research

| Questionnaire      | Dimensions                     | Number of items | Authors   |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Cognitive factors  | Stretching mindset             | 3               | Hamel and Prahalad, , 1995                        |
|                    | Global mindset                 | 6               | Nummela et al., 2004                              |
| Behavioral factors | Business modeling              | 9               | PiotrWojcik and Mariola Ciszewska-Mlinaric (2020) |
|                    | Participation capability       | 4               | Theoharakis et al., 2009                          |
|                    | Learning about foreign markets | 11              | Musteen et al., 2014                              |
| Export performance | -                              | 3               | PiotrWojcik and Mariola Ciszewska-Mlinaric (2020) |



The validity of the questionnaire is assessed using the face validity approach in this study. A number of specialists, including the instructor, will be handed the questionnaire, and questions concerning the questions and the evaluation of the hypotheses will be asked. The confirmatory factor analysis test is also used to assess the study construct's validity.

**Table 2.** Reliability of research variables

| Variable           | Dimensions                     | Cronbach's alpha |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Cognitive factors  | Stretching mindset             | 0.76             |
|                    | Global mindset                 | 0.85             |
| Behavioral factors | Business modeling              | 0.82             |
|                    | Participation capability       | 0.81             |
|                    | Learning about foreign markets | 0.78             |
| Export performance | -                              | 0.79             |

This study's data analysis is divided into two sections: descriptive statistics and analytical or inferential statistics. The statistical Lisrel-SPSS software was employed in this case.

### Findings

There were 137 males and 70 females among the 207 workers of the South Zagros Oil and Gas Exploitation Company in Tehran who responded to the survey. The age group of 30 to 40 years old had the largest frequency of responders, accounting for 37.2 percent of the total sample size with 77 participants. Participants with a bachelor's degree also had the largest sample size (113 people), while those with 6 to 10 years of employment history had the greatest frequency (65 people). The state of descriptive statistics of variables is shown in Table 3. SPSS software was used to compute the figures in this table.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics of research variables

| Variable                       | Sign | Mean | SD   | Variance | Skewness | Elongation |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|----------|----------|------------|
| Stretching mindset             | CF1  | 3.73 | 0.57 | 0.32     | -0.10    | 0.21       |
| Global mindset                 | CF2  | 3.57 | 0.66 | 0.44     | -0.28    | 0.00       |
| Cognitive factors              | CF   | 3.62 | 0.56 | 0.32     | -0.22    | 0.21       |
| Business modeling              | BF1  | 3.62 | 0.61 | 0.38     | -0.05    | -0.21      |
| Participation capability       | BF2  | 3.45 | 0.78 | 0.60     | -0.16    | -0.51      |
| Learning about foreign markets | BF3  | 3.83 | 0.53 | 0.28     | -0.38    | 0.23       |
| Behavioral factors             | BF   | 3.69 | 0.51 | 0.26     | -0.08    | -0.31      |
| Business performance           | EP   | 3.29 | 0.73 | 0.54     | -0.06    | 0.35       |

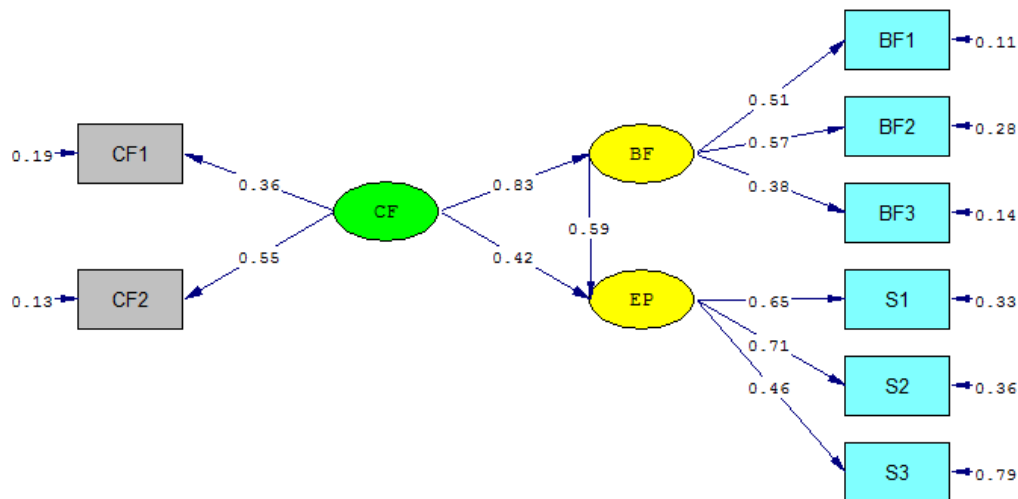
Descriptive statistics indices such as the mean, which indicates the propensity to center, have been utilized, as shown in Table (4). The results indicated that the average of all components is more than 3, and that an average greater than 3 implies that the status of that variable in the above statistical population is agreed upon. As a result, this factor suggests that respondents concur with these elements. Variance and standard deviation, on the other hand, were utilized

as dispersion indexes. The variable dimensions of behavioral components have the biggest standard deviation for the participation ability component, which shows the degree of data dispersion in this index relative to the average.

Furthermore, the findings of the Cognitive Factors Questionnaire's factor analysis revealed that the measurement indicators of each of the scales employed had a t-value larger than 1.96 at the 5% confidence level, indicating that the observed correlations are significant.

The measurement indicators of each of the scales utilized at the 5% confidence level of t-value are more than 1.96, indicating that the observed correlations are significant, according to the results of confirmatory factor analysis of the Behavioral Factors Questionnaire. The Export Performance Questionnaire's factor analysis revealed that the observed factor load is more than 0.3 in all situations, indicating that the correlation between hidden variables (dimensions of each of the primary structures) and observable variables is satisfactory. The measurement indices of each of the scales utilized at the 5% confidence level of t-value are more than 1.96, indicating that the observed correlations are significant, as shown in Figure (2).

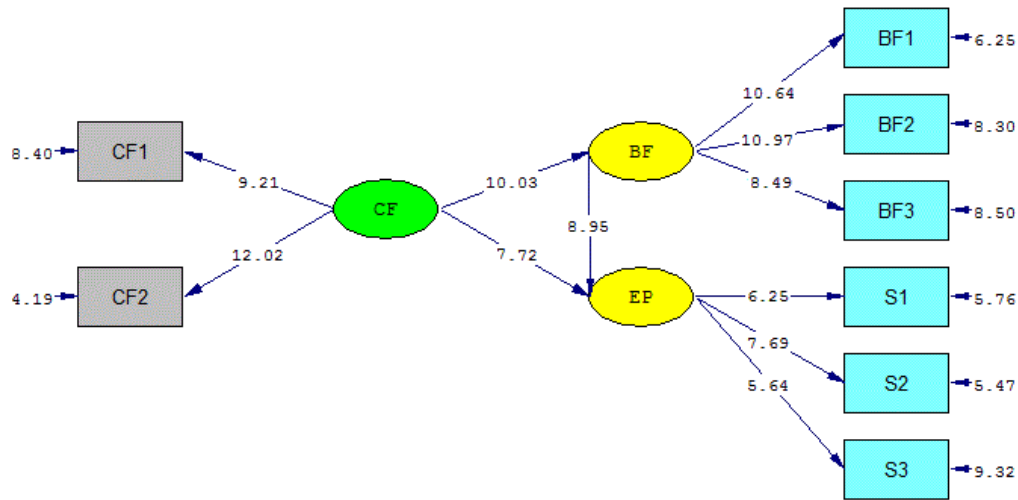
Figures (2) and (3) show the final model for testing the study hypotheses (3). This model was created by modifying the LISREL program output.



Chi-Square=27.72, df=17, P-value=0.07429, RMSEA=0.034

Figure 2. Results of confirmation of the final model of the relationship between research variables





Chi-Square=27.72, df=17, P-value=0.07429, RMSEA=0.034

Figure 3. t-value statistics, the results confirm the final model of the relationship between research variables

Figures (2) and (3) depict the outcomes of the research's final model. All communications have a factor load of observation larger than 0.3, indicating that the correlation between the study variables is adequate. Furthermore, the t-value is larger than 1.96 at the 5% confidence level, indicating that the observed correlations are significant. Because the value of its normal chi-square index is equal to 1.63, which is a number between 1 and 3, this model has a decent fit. The model also fits well since the root mean index of the mean squared is around 0.034. Other goodness-of-fit indices are allowed in the range in Table (4).

Table 4. Goodness of fit indices of research hypotheses

| Fitness indicators | $\frac{\chi^2}{df}$ | RMSEA | (GFI) | (AGFI) | (NFI) | (NNFI) | (IFI) |
|--------------------|---------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| Acceptable values  | 3-1                 | <0.05 | >0.9  | >0.9   | >0.9  | >0.9   | >0.9  |
| Calculated values  | 1.63                | 0.034 | 0.94  | 0.95   | 0.98  | 0.93   | 0.97  |

Table 5. Test results of the main hypothesis

| Path  | Standard coefficient       | Significance number | Test result                                      |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Cognitive factors - export performance (direct impact)                        | 0.42                       | 7.72                | Confirmed  |
| Cognitive factors - Behavioral factors  | 0.83                       | 10.03               | Confirmed  |
| Behavioral factors - export performance                                       | 0.59                       | 8.95                | Confirmed  |
| Cognitive factors - Behavioral factors - Export performance (indirect effect) | 0.59<br>$\times 0.83=0.49$ | 6.68                | Confirmation of the partial mediation hypothesis |

|              |                  |
|--------------|------------------|
| Total impact | $0.49+0.42=0.91$ |
|--------------|------------------|

The direct influence of cognitive elements on export performance has been established at a 5% error level, according to the data in Table (5). (significant number 7.72). The interaction between cognitive and behavioral components was 0.83 and significant (10.03), and the interaction between behavioral and export performance was also significant (8.95). Because of the importance of the two pathways of cognitive factors - behavioral factors and behavioral factors - export performance, the indirect influence of cognitive factors on export performance with the presence of behavioral factors is substantial. Total cognitive components have an influence on export performance of 0.91, which is higher than the direct effect. As a consequence, the behavioral elements variable in this path may be considered a partial mediator, and the research's primary premise is verified. Figures (2) and (3) reveal that the strength of the link between cognitive characteristics and export performance is 0.42, indicating that the correlation is positive. The test's t-test result is 7.72, which is higher than the critical value of t at a 5% error level, i.e. 1.96, indicating that the observed correlation is significant. As a result, cognitive characteristics can be stated to have a beneficial impact on export success.

Figures (2) and (3) also reveal that the strength of the association between cognitive and behavioral components is 0.83, indicating that the correlation is positive and strong. The test's t-test score is 10.03, which is higher than the crucial value of t at the 5% error level of 1.96, indicating that the correlation is significant. As a result, cognitive considerations can be considered to have a beneficial impact on behavioral elements. According to Figures (2) and (3), the strength of the link between behavioral characteristics and export performance is 0.59, indicating a positive correlation. The test's t-test result is 8.95, which is higher than the critical value of t at the 5% error level, which is 1.96, indicating that the observed correlation is significant. As a result, behavioral characteristics can be stated to have a beneficial impact on export success.

### Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effect of cognitive factors on export performance with respect to behavioral factors in the South Zagros Oil Exploitation Company, National Iranian Oil Company. With regard to the mediating influence of behavioral components, the findings revealed that cognitive aspects had a considerable impact on export performance. The findings of this hypothesis' research revealed that cognitive variables had a direct influence of 0.42 on export performance and an indirect effect of 0.49 owing to the mediating function of behavioral factors. As a result of the indirect path's stronger influence than the direct path's, the presence of a mediating variable boosted the effect, confirming the mediating function in the current hypothesis. In addition, the indirect path had a substantial value of 6.68 (more than 1.96). Wojcik et al. (2020) investigated cognitive and behavioral aspects on export performance in a similar way to the current study, with the exception that they found two of the three behavioral elements to have substantial and positive impacts on export performance.

The findings revealed that cognitive characteristics had a direct impact on export performance, with a 0.42 effect and a significant path coefficient of 7.72. (more than 1.96). As a result, an increase in cognitive components correlates to an increase in export performance at a 95% confidence level. The indicators of cognitive characteristics explored in this study, such as the tensile mentality index and the global mindset, may be stated to have an impact on export



performance. This is in accordance with the findings of Ilbeigi et al. (2015), who found that export market dynamics had an impact on export performance since they alluded to the stretching of cognitive elements. According to Altern and Tadvaran (2016), the more predictable and stable the export market environment, the more likely the exporter is content with the amount of complaints and the percentage of margins that pointed to the stretched attitude, which is consistent with this study. Mata et al. (2021) discovered that competitiveness has a substantial role in improving the association between marketing support and export success, which is consistent with our study.

Furthermore, because the strength of the association between cognitive and behavioral components was 0.83 and the t-test value was 10.03, it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the two variables and that cognitive factors directly impact behavioral aspects. Because the strength of the link between behavioral variables and export performance was 0.59 and the t-test value was 8.95, the results indicated that behavioral factors had a direct impact on export success. As a result, behavioral characteristics appear to have a direct impact on export performance. To put it another way, concentrating on business modeling, involvement, and learning about overseas markets can have an impact on export performance. Given that the oil and gas industry is the backbone of our country's economic development, behavioral variables must be given specific consideration. This issue is consistent with the findings of Khademinia and Oshk Sarai (2016), Mazraati and Ravanbakhsh (2016), and Jafari and Naghiloo (2017), who found behavioral commitment to be useful in improving export performance. Rezaei (2016), who believed international marketing tactics were successful in improving export performance, mentioned the need of learning about other markets, which is in line with this study. In their research, Kavou et al. (2019) found that marketing analysis had a favorable influence on marketing choices and product development management.

Because each company has its own culture and climate, the conclusions of this study cannot be applied to any other. It is suggested that firm management assess assumptions about how companies compete and carry out hazardous initiatives on a regular basis. Regardless of the activities of rivals, corporate management should plan development independently based on its judgment of opportunities. Furthermore, based on the findings, it is preferable for firm executives to select the appropriate technique of communication with overseas markets (existing media, methods used, type of message, costs).

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