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## Investigating the Impact of Digital Marketing and Its Effectiveness on Career Growth through Export Performance (Case Study of Top Commercial Companies in East Azerbaijan Province in Iran)

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### ABSTRACT

The issue of growth is one of the fundamental issues in economics, which is very important both from a micro and macro perspective. It is no secret that in order to achieve sustainable growth, exports are one of the most fundamental variables, which is the main channel of monetization. For optimal export, you should have a good market share. Digital marketing is one of the most widely used tools to expand the market, so the present study has studied the effectiveness of digital marketing on job growth through export performance. The statistical population of the present study consists of 500 commercial companies in East Azerbaijan province, of which 271 companies have been selected as a statistical sample according to Morgan table and using Cochran's formula. Also, the data collection tool in this study is a questionnaire with Likert scale. Structural equation modeling and SPSS software version 25 and Smart PLS version 3 were used to analyze the data. The results indicate that digital marketing and export performance have a positive effect on job growth and micro and macro development.

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## 1. Introduction

Today the world is moving towards a global village. Global Village means shortening the distance and closing the borders so that all countries try to increase their communication and exchanges with other countries. In the meantime, export is one of the ways to increase the amount of communication with the world, so that developed countries have the highest amount of exports and communication with other countries. In the meantime, the more effective the marketing of the countries and the more they can occupy a market share; they will have high production and growth and will follow the path of development faster (Ghahremani Nahr, et al., 2021).

The advent of virtual net markets over physical hypermarkets has boosted digital marketing (Nahaei, & Bahrami, 2021). There are many types of marketing, each of which affects the expansion of companies' market share in some way, including network marketing, digital marketing, and social media marketing. Digital marketing is the form of marketing products and services that is used through digital channels and the use of digital technologies to promote the brand, gain customers, retain customers and increase sales (Kannan & Li, 2017). Emphasis on digital marketing requires a wide combination of quantitative and qualitative skills in the company's marketing processes, from senior management to operational forces (Ghahremani Nahr, et al., 2021). Export performance is defined by the extent to which a company achieves its goals at the time of export. Export performance is the result of organizational operations that include the achievements and internal and external goals of the company. Here, the success rate of a company in the field of export can be evaluated by its export performance. However, (Albaum, 2004) stated that export performance is the extent to which a firm's goals (including strategic and economic goals) for exporting a product are achieved through the design and implementation of export marketing strategies. It has various dimensions that an indicator or a factor cannot explain. Important factors affecting export performance are marketing effectiveness and marketing capabilities. Understanding these factors and the manner and extent of the impact of each on exports provides the necessary basis for improving the performance of exports and, consequently, job growth. The combination of these factors leads to increased production and economic growth and ultimately leads to sustainable development of various production sectors in the country. The various dimensions of marketing effectiveness are categorized as customer orientation philosophy, integrated marketing efforts, marketing information, strategy orientation, and operational efficiency.

The COVID-19 crisis has affected many issues in the world, including marketing (Parviznejad, & Akhavan, 2021). The COVID-19 crisis is taking an unprecedented scale (Parviznejad, & Bahrami, 2021). Hence, in the pandemic era, digital marketing has become more important. Therefore, considering the importance of the role of marketing effectiveness in the success of companies, this study evaluates the effectiveness of digital marketing through the export performance of the top trading companies of East Azerbaijan Province in Iran.

## 2. Literature review

Export performance is the amount that a company achieves its goals when exporting its products to foreign markets (Navarro, et al., 2010). Erem and Menguc (2015) suggested that the relationship and importance of performance dimensions vary among different stakeholders (investors, employees, customers) and depend on whether the focus is short-term or long-term. Researchers have highlighted three main dimensions of performance. The first is the effectiveness of the firm's products and programs against competitors. Indicators such as sales growth can show effectiveness. The second dimension is performance, which focuses on business outputs relative to inputs. Profitability is the main indicator that

shows this dimension. The third dimension is adaptability, meaning how the business responds to changing environmental conditions and opportunities. A review of the export marketing literature shows that export performance studies can be divided into two main types: exporters and non-exporters (Filatotchev & Hou., 2016). A group of studies the behavior of exporters and non-exporters. In general, the purpose of this research is to determine the variables that simulate export activities. Common metrics in these studies are the categorization of exporters and non-exporters based on export inclination, export engagement, and export intensity. The second group includes studies that focus on exporters achieving financial and strategic goals. Criteria for the effectiveness of a company's marketing unit It is believed that the integrated customer-oriented power depends on the level of the entity. The dynamism that exists in the market today brings companies to always seek competitive advantages to evaluate their activities such as marketing and finance economically and effectively. These evaluations provide the company with valuable information, especially in the field of market knowledge, which is considered as a key player and key factor in the competitive market today (Hou & Chien, 2010). It is clear that a marketing-based approach requires effective marketing research. This category not only requires a complete understanding of the market and knowledge of its characteristics, but also requires the analysis of the effectiveness of marketing activities, so the research should have the necessary capacity to include all the resources and skills of the company to compare with Have competitors (Kayabasi, 2020).

According to Cutler's definition of the effectiveness of marketing activities in the 1990s, marketing effectiveness consists of five parts: customer philosophy, integrated marketing, sufficient marketing information, strategic orientation, and operational efficiency. First of all, knowing the market, being aware of the opportunities, selecting the segments of the market in which we are going to operate, and constantly striving to create superior customer value and their needs are of paramount importance. In addition, the company's employees must be able to carry out marketing or implementation plans. As a result, managers have enough information to allocate and resources for different market segments and products so that managers can achieve their mission of making a profit for the company. Ultimately, marketing effectiveness depends on the successful implementation of marketing programs at different levels of a company (Appiah-Adu, 2001). According to Nurburn, a business can achieve a high level of marketing effectiveness if it has a close relationship with its customers and continues to operate by providing a set of values to customers and market orientation. Sheth and Sisodia (2015) also state that marketing will be more effective if it is customer-centric. This process begins with identifying customers who are somehow connected to the marketing system. Of course, it should be borne in mind that not only end users are considered, but also intermediaries and shareholders are often considered in proportion to the role they play in the marketing system (Layton, 2011). According to Cutler and Keller, the most important task in marketing research is to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing activities.

The effectiveness of marketing is not necessarily manifested by current sales and profitability. Satisfactory consequences may be due to the fact that a department is located in the right place and time, and not necessarily has good and effective marketing management. Correcting the marketing of that sector may change its status from good to excellent. The other part may not perform well despite proper marketing planning. The measure of marketing effectiveness is that the power of customer-oriented integration and organizational performance depends on the level of the integrated marketing effectiveness of the entity that covers the various topics of marketing operations. Digital marketing is a type of marketing that is done through online and offline digital channels. In this method, all the facilities and channels available in the digital space are used to convey information to the customer or consumer (Behera, et al., 2020). Digital marketing is like an umbrella of technology and digital that can be used to market products or services, with or without the Internet. Digital tools that require the Internet include

websites such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, e-books, etc. and digital marketing tools that do not require the use of the Internet include cell phones, display advertising, and any other digital media such as television, radio, satellite, etc. (Suryawardani & Wiranatha, 2017).

Due to the growing importance of the subject, many studies have recently discussed digital marketing and there is also room for extensive studies.

In a study entitled *Marketing Effectiveness, Effective Strategic Marketing Criteria* conducted by Milichovsky and Simberova in 2015. In this research, marketing effectiveness has been mentioned as one of the important factors in today's competitive environment, which plays a very important role in the success of short-term and long-term plans of companies. According to the study, marketing effectiveness not only helps companies better prioritize their plans and goals, but also improves the quality of their marketing plans. Accordingly, with the help of marketing effectiveness, the goals of improving the company's performance level, both domestically and internationally and export, such as increasing market share and increasing customer satisfaction can be achieved. Kayabasi, et al. (2020) in their study entitled "Investigating the effect of marketing effectiveness and marketing capabilities and export market orientation on export performance: a case study of Turkey". In this study, which was conducted on companies exporting to Turkey's Agair region, after a complete listing of companies through cluster sampling, 443 companies sent questionnaires to managers and senior experts in person and virtually. In their research, they concluded that the hypothesis of marketing capabilities and export market orientation on export performance is rejected. But other hypotheses of this research were confirmed. In this way, the trend towards the export market affects the effectiveness of marketing. The effectiveness of retrieval has a significant positive effect on export performance. Marketing capabilities also affect the effectiveness of marketing. Bianchi and Mathews (2016) study a conceptual model to evaluate the effectiveness of "e-marketing on the expansion, export of emerging markets" in order to determine the effect. The results show that Internet marketing capabilities have a positive effect on the level of access to export information and this affects the development of business network communications and, consequently, the growth of the export market (Fallah & Nozari, 2020).

Pelsmacker, et al. (2018) in a study examines the impact of digital marketing strategies on the performance of hotels directly on their revenue and indirectly on the volume and capacity of online hotel visits. Modifiers of this effect are the difference in the number of hotels and the difference in their independence and chains. This article is conducted in 132 hotels in Belgium and examines 10 aspects of digital marketing strategies. The results show that digital marketing tactics and strategies affect the volume and capacity of online visits and indirectly affect the performance of the hotel. Junaidi (2020) examines the effect of digital marketing on small businesses and the results show that the increasing use of the Internet and smartphones facilitates the impact on the target market. The seller must be very targeted and focused on virtual advertising tools. To form an effective targeting and raw market environment to achieve its goals well.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Hypotheses and conceptual model of research

Based on the description of the problem and the theoretical foundations of the research topic and also in terms of the relationship between research variables, hypotheses and conceptual model of the research to be presented. In the proposed conceptual model, digital marketing variable as an independent variable, job growth as a dependent variable and export performance variable as an independent-dependent variable play a role in this study.

Hypothesis 1: Digital marketing has a direct and significant effect on export performance.

Hypothesis 2: Digital marketing has a direct and significant effect on job growth.

Hypothesis 3: Export performance has a direct and significant effect on job growth.

Hypothesis 4: Digital marketing has an indirect and significant effect on job growth through export performance.

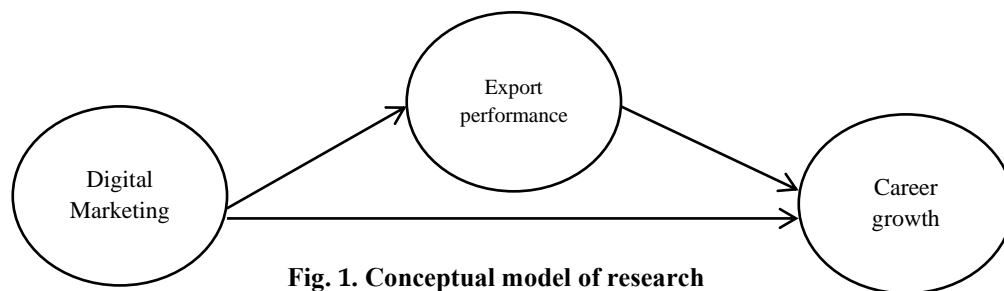


Fig. 1. Conceptual model of research

#### 3.2. Research methodology

The research method is a set of reliable and systematic rules, tools and valid ways to investigate facts, discover unknowns and find solutions to problems (Khaki, 2020). The method of the present research is applied based on the purpose of the research and is descriptive-survey in nature. The data collection tool in this study is a questionnaire with Likert scale (Nahaei, et al., 2021). In this regard, Kayabasi (2020) scale was used to measure marketing effectiveness and export performance. Yousefi scale was also used to measure job growth. The face validity of the instrument has been calculated by experts of review and verification and reliability of the questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient and has been confirmed at a high level. The statistical population of this research is the top 500 commercial companies in East Azerbaijan province. Cochran's formula has been used to estimate the sample size. The sample size has been selected through this formula with a 5% error equal to 217 companies and research questionnaires have been provided to them. 138 questionnaires have been collected for analysis. The face validity of the instrument has been calculated by experts of review and verification and reliability of the questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha coefficient and has been confirmed at a high level. Structural equation modeling and SPSS software version 25 and Smart PLS version 3 were used to analyze the data. This method is the best tool for analyzing research in which explicit variables have measurement error and also the relationships between variables are complex. Structural equation modeling consists of two parts: measurement model and structural model, and model variables are divided into two categories of explicit and implicit variables. In this study, to measure the research measurement model, the indicators of combined reliability, one-dimensional reliability, convergent and divergent validity have

been used and the fit of the measurement model has been evaluated by CV COM index. Also, to measure the structural model and to evaluate the effect of research variables on each other in two cases, significant numbers were used to test the hypotheses and standard estimates were used to evaluate the intensity of the effect of the variables. Also, in order to evaluate the good fit of the structural model, three indicators (R2, Q2 and GOF) were analyzed.

**Table 1. Questionnaires used for research and Cronbach's alpha**

questionnaire	Item	reference	Cronbach's alpha
Marketing effectiveness	11	Kayabasi (2020)	0.81
Export performance	6	Kayabasi (2020)	0.75
Career growth	18	Yousefi (2016)	0.78

## 4. Findings

In the present study, 138 top commercial companies in East Azerbaijan province participated. First, the demographic characteristics of the responding companies in terms of industry, service history and the number of employees operating in the sample company were examined by SPSS software, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of the respondents**

Variable	period	Frequency	Percentage	Total
Gender	Man	98	71.0	138
	Woman	40	29.0	
Age by year	Up to 30	43	31.2	138
	31-41	16	11.6	
	41-50	27	19.6	
	Over 50	52	37.7	
History by year	Less than 2	24	17.3	138
	2-4	44	31.8	
	5-6	36	26.3	
	Higher than 6	34	24.6	
education	Associate Degree	9	6.5	138
	Bachelor	62	44.9	
	Masters	55	39.9	
	P.H.D	12	8.7	

In this study, the AVE criterion was used to evaluate the convergent validity of the measurement model. The criterion for its acceptance level is 0.5 and indicates the degree of positive correlation between one item and other items of a variable. To evaluate the divergent validity of the measurement model, the

proposed Fornell and Larcker criteria as well as the transverse load test have been analyzed. Fornell and Larcker (1981) stated that divergent validity is acceptable when the amount of AVE for each structure is greater than the common variance between that structure and other structures (i.e. the square of the value of correlation coefficients between structures) in the model. The results of this criterion are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Convergent validity results and Fornell and Larcker test**

AVE	Fornell and Larcker test			
	Career growth	Export performance	Effective marketing	Variables
0.736			0.858	Effective marketing
0.777		0.882	0.693	Export performance
0.966	0.983	0.816	0.771	Career growth

As can be seen from the matrix above, the square root of each structure is greater than the correlation coefficients of that structure with other structures, which indicates the acceptable validity of the divergence of the structures. In the transverse load test, the degree of correlation between the characteristics of one structure and other structures is compared, and if it is determined that the degree of correlation between the characteristics of a structure is greater than the degree of their correlation with other structures, and therefore, the divergence validity of the model is acceptable. As can be seen from the results in Table 4, the correlations or values of all items are greater than their own hidden variable, meaning that these numbers are larger than the numbers on the left and right. Therefore, we can claim that the research measurement model has a good divergent validity.

**Table 4. Transverse load test results**

Item	C.g	E.m	E.p	Item	C.g	E.m	E.p
CG1	0.855	0.406	0.474	EM1	0.773	0.932	0.805
CG2	0.852	0.743	0.805	EM2	0.745	0.960	0.796
CG3	0.686	0.665	0.757	EM3	0.761	0.850	0.808
CG4	0.880	0.727	0.767	EM4	0.430	0.901	0.287
CG5	0.841	0.415	0.486	EM5	0.387	0.799	0.245
CG6	0.851	0.402	0.475	EM6	0.311	0.860	0.189
CG7	0.840	0.710	0.688	EM7	0.383	0.906	0.262
CG8	0.825	0.635	0.658	EM8	0.352	0.795	0.224
CG9	0.928	0.559	0.766	EM9	0.327	0.912	0.204
CG10	0.929	0.559	0.759	EM10	0.370	0.983	0.266
CG11	0.979	0.813	0.761	EM11	0.373	0.983	0.253
CG12	0.968	0.790	0.771	EP1	0.336	0.253	0.970
CG13	0.988	0.790	0.764	EP2	0.406	0.241	0.986
CG14	0.979	0.784	0.768	EP3	0.414	0.246	0.984
CG15	0.974	0.796	0.765	EP4	0.390	0.240	0.984
CG16	0.974	0.787	0.763	EP5	0.423	0.249	0.818
CG17	0.995	0.811	0.755	EP6	0.423	0.253	0.868
CG18	0.983	0.796	0.749	EP7	0.425	0.251	0.984

The reliability of the measurement model has also been evaluated according to two criteria: one-dimensional reliability and combined reliability. In one-dimensional reliability (measurement of factor loads), each explicit variable must be loaded with a large amount of factor load, i.e. only one hidden variable, and the desired value is 0.7. The results of one-dimensional reliability are shown in Table 5. In hybrid reliability (CR), the reliability of structures is calculated according to the correlation of their structures with each other. The value of the combined reliability is between 0 and 1, and the closer this value is to 1, the higher the reliability of the variable. If the CR value for any structure is higher than 0.7, it indicates the appropriate internal stability for the measurement model.

**Table 5. One-dimensional reliability results**

Item	Agent load	Item	Agent load
CG1	0.855	EM1	0.974
CG2	0.852	EM2	0.974
CG3	0.868	EM3	0.995
CG4	0.880	EM4	0.983
CG5	0.841	EM5	0.985
CG6	0.851	EM6	0.981
CG7	0.840	EM7	0.993
CG8	0.825	EM8	0.971
CG9	0.928	EM9	0.991
CG10	0.929	EM10	0.983
CG11	0.979	EM11	0.982
CG12	0.968	EP1	0.978
CG13	0.988	EP2	0.980
CG14	0.979	EP3	0.995
CG15	0.795	EP4	0.984
CG16	0.912	EP5	0.818
CG17	0.983	EP6	0.868
CG18	0.983	EP7	0.984

The quality of the measurement model is calculated by the CV Com index. This index actually measures the ability of the path model to predict observable variables by their corresponding hidden variable values. If this indicator shows a positive number, the measurement model has the required quality. Table 6 shows the results of this test, which show that the values of the CV Com index for each of the hidden numerical variables show a positive number, so the measurement model is of good quality.

**Table 6. Results of combined reliability and quality test of the measurement model**

Variable	Career growth	Export performance	Marketing effectiveness
CR	0.944	0.933	0.999
CV COM	0.620	0.617	0.954



The relationships between the latent variables themselves are also measured in the structural model section by Smart pls 3 software. For this purpose, the effect of research variables on each other in two cases of significant numbers or t-coefficients (T-values) has been studied to test the hypotheses and standard estimates to examine the intensity of the effect of variables. Their results are presented in Table 7. If the value of significant numbers is more than 2.58, it can be said that at the confidence level of 0.99, the effect of variables is significant; therefore, considering that the t-coefficients related to the main constructs of the research are all above 2.58, then the accuracy of the relationship between the structures is confirmed. Also, according to the output results related to the path coefficient, which shows the cause-and-effect relationship between the latent variables of the research, it can be concluded that the relationship between the four main constructs of the research is significant and direct.

**Table7. Results of structural model path analysis**

Structural path	direct impact	Indirect effect	Total effect	The value of t	Result
Digital marketing → export performance	0.39	-	0.39	6.46	Confirm
Digital Marketing → Career Growth	0.54	-	0.54	8.30	Confirm
Export performance → Career growth	0.27	-	0.27	3.40	Confirm
Digital marketing → Export performance → Career Growth	-	0.10	0.10	3.08	Confirm

In order to evaluate the good fit of the structural model, three indicators ( $R^2$ ,  $Q^2$  and GOF) have been analyzed and the results of their analysis are shown in Table 8. As can be seen in Table 8, considering that the value of the organizational culture variable is (0.74) and the organizational effectiveness variable is (0.07), so it can be concluded that these values confirm the model fit well. If the value of  $Q^2$  for an endogenous structure achieves three values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35, it indicates the weak, medium and strong predictive power of the structure or structures, respectively. It has to do with the fact that in the research model, these values indicate the strength of the model. Also, the value of GOF in Table 8 is equal to 0.51, which is a good fit index or GOF higher than 0.5 indicates the proper fit of the model.

**Table 8.: Measurement quality assessment index values**

Variable	$R^2$	$Q^2$	GOF
Marketing effectiveness	-	-	
Export performance	0.72	0.76	0.55
Career growth	0.74	0.71	

## 5. Conclusion

The dramatic increase in the number of Internet users and social networks, as well as the increasing dependence of people on these cases, made companies and institutions pay special attention to the digital field. As a result, digital marketing has become a hot topic in the business market today. As a result, the market need for digital managers and marketers has grown significantly. The nature of the marketing role as a business venture has been significantly adapted to the digital trend. Data and trust issues and how to move in the complex world of technology affect any organization and in any size. Marketers must play a vital role in advancing, and organizations must increasingly rely on marketing to protect and grow their brand identity and revenue. On the other hand, the advancement and widespread use of digital marketing allows companies to do so. Use the new set of capabilities to create the degree of global connectivity needed to improve export performance and, consequently, job growth. Therefore, in the present study, we sought to investigate the effects of digital marketing on improving export performance and job growth. Based on this, we proposed hypotheses and tested them using structural equation modeling. The first finding of the present study showed that digital marketing has a positive and significant effect on export performance. Because of according to the standard output coefficients of smart PLS software and significant t numbers, digital marketing with a path coefficient of 0.39 and a significant number equal to 6.46 has a direct, positive and significant effect on export performance. This means that for one-unit increase in digital marketing we will see a 0.39 increase in export performance. The second finding of the present study showed that export performance has a positive and significant effect on job growth. Because according to the standard output coefficients of Smart PLS software and significant t numbers, export performance with a path coefficient of 0.37 and a significant number equal to 3.40, has a direct, positive and significant effect on job growth. This means that for every unit increase in export performance, we will see a 0.54 increase in job growth. Another finding of the present study showed that digital marketing through export performance has an indirect and significant effect on job growth. Because according to the standard output coefficients of Smart PLS software and significant numbers t, export performance with a path coefficient of 0.10 and a significant number equal to 3.08, has an indirect, positive and significant effect on job growth. This means that for every unit increase in digital marketing, we will see a 0.10 increase in job growth due to the impact of digital marketing on export performance. Therefore, according to the theoretical foundations of the research and the results of data analysis, in order to create more job opportunities using digital marketing capabilities, it is recommended that managers and marketers provide a catalog of online services / products to customers, Promotion and promotion of products, services and capabilities of the company, online ordering of products/ services, presentation and online payment of invoices. Ability of online access to seller price/product/ performance information, online payment to suppliers and customers, participation in the position of electronic market and to realize or deliver online; Because with proper digital marketing, it is possible to reach markets that can be even miles away from us. Thus, by creating a favorable market share in these markets, we can see an increase in exports. At the same time, it will lead to job growth and production growth, and will follow the inflow of foreign exchange to the economy.

## Conflicts of Interest

All co-authors have seen and agree with the contents of the manuscript and there is no financial interest to report. We certify that the submission is original work and is not under review at any other publication.

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