



## Designing Marketing Strategies for Kiwifruit Export to International Markets based on Grounded Theory and SWOT Method (A Case Study of Amin Caspian Shomal co.)

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Received: 19 Aug 2019

Accepted: 14 Oct 2020

**Keywords:**

*Exports marketing, entry strategy, marketing Capabilities, managerial Capabilities, social Responsibilities*

### ABSTRACT

Given the government's support for non-oil exports and the significance of kiwifruit cultivation and related employment opportunities in the northern provinces, alongside the limitations in distribution channels and competition from producing countries in global markets, it is essential to assess the readiness of Amin Caspian Shomal Company for kiwifruit export and the factors influencing it. This descriptive research, based on the strategic studies process, is applied in nature and follows a qualitative approach. The Grounded Theory method and SWOT matrix were employed for strategic planning. Based on the research findings and data analysis, the Internal Factors Evaluation (IFE) matrix score was 2.08, and the External Factors Evaluation (EFE) matrix score was 2.24, placing Amin Caspian Shomal Company in a defensive strategic position.

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## INTRODUCTION

The field of marketing and the concept of product marketing have undergone significant changes over time. Marketing strategies have also evolved, increasingly emphasizing customer orientation in response to shifting customer needs and expectations. As new challenges emerge in marketing strategy, companies continuously adapt to gain a competitive advantage (Wymer, 2017).

Research in marketing strategy indicates that companies should align their business and development activities in a way that minimizes risks to non-renewable resources and safeguards them for the future. As such, companies—like all members of society—must assume social and environmental responsibilities for the impacts of their actions. This responsibility is not a burden or constraint but a strategic goal that can serve as a competitive advantage. It fosters customer respect and helps build long-term relationships. In line with this, Taherdangkoo et al. (2016) argue that strategic marketing management enables organizations to access sources of innovation, opportunity, and competitive advantage. With increasing global competition in agricultural markets, maintaining and enhancing the global presence of these products is essential. In Iran, expanding non-oil exports is a central objective in economic development programs, and agricultural exports play a key role in this effort, offering more stability than other sectors (Aboutrab et al., 2017).

The globalization of markets, growing competitive pressures, the proliferation of strong brands, and rapidly changing consumer lifestyles have pushed organizations to devise strategies that retain customers and strengthen loyalty. One of the primary goals of every company is to apply effective marketing models that build lasting customer relationships, improve organizational performance, and boost sales (Dehghan et al., 2014). A key agricultural policy for rural development emphasizes cultivating strategic crops suited to specific regions, as this supports a sustainable rural economy and

enhances the country's economic and political standing. In light of rapid population growth and globalization, the demand for food is rising. Therefore, identifying land and natural resource potential for specific crop production has become increasingly important (Soltani & Khouran, 2014).

The first step for companies intending to export is to assess their readiness for international markets. Once the decision to export is made, developing a strategy becomes essential. An export strategy forms the foundation of all commercial activities, guiding the company's direction and outlining how its objectives will be achieved. A well-defined export strategy provides a clear vision that can be easily understood and implemented by all organizational members. To operationalize this strategy, an export marketing plan is necessary. In essence, the company's export strategy defines its approach to competing in target international markets (Bolourian Tehrani, 2013).

Given Iran's potential in global trade, especially in agriculture, it is crucial to leverage the sector's capacities to expand exports. A clear and coherent strategy is key to this effort, enabling staff to align with organizational goals. As non-oil export growth remains a priority in national economic development plans, Amin Caspian Shomal Company has secured a prominent position in kiwifruit exports. Over the past two decades, the company has capitalized on Iran's agricultural strengths and the growing global demand for kiwifruit, reaffirming the country's status as a leading producer. Beyond its nutritional value, kiwifruit is a significant source of income for Iran's northern provinces and a major contributor to non-oil exports.

Investigations into regions suitable for kiwifruit cultivation in Iran indicate that the Caspian Sea coastal provinces—Guilan, Mazandaran, and Golestan—are the most favorable for this crop. Given the profitability of kiwifruit and its strong potential for generating foreign currency as a highly economical product, it offers a higher economic return compared to other crops grown in similar

climates. By employing precise strategies and leveraging these favorable conditions, the Amin Caspian Shomal Company can enhance profitability and contribute to increased foreign exchange earnings.

Currently, China, Italy, New Zealand, Iran, and Chile are the top global producers of kiwifruit. Iranian kiwifruit is distinguished by its superior taste, attributed to the limited use of chemical fertilizers and optimal harvesting times. If packaging standards are improved and transportation infrastructure is strengthened, Iranian kiwifruit can establish a strong presence in global markets. According to the latest FAO statistics, Iran exported approximately 112,000 tons of kiwifruit valued at over \$82 million last year. Given the production potential of Iran's northern provinces and the favorable reception of Iranian kiwifruit in international markets due to its quality in taste and size, focusing on relative production and export advantages, securing stable distribution channels, and identifying target markets are critical for developing an effective marketing strategy.

Therefore, in light of the strategic importance of kiwifruit exports and the lack of a comprehensive marketing strategy tailored to global market integration, this study aimed to design a marketing strategy model for kiwifruit. The goal is to facilitate the integration of Amin Caspian Shomal Company into the global kiwifruit market and ensure necessary steps are taken to support the company's export activities.

A 2017 study titled "Sociological Analysis of Energy Management Strategies: A Case Study of Citizens of Sanandaj" by Loghman Emamgholi et al. employed structural and psychological approaches to assess energy consumption behavior. The study examined three core components: attitudes toward subsidy targeting, perceived efficiency, and incentive policies. Results indicated a significant relationship between these factors and energy consumption behavior, showing that improvements in any of the three components lead to more responsible energy use (Emamgholi et al., 2017). In

another study conducted in 2017, titled "Formulating Strategies for the Development of the Tourism Industry in Ilam Province", the authors analyzed the province's strategic position and concluded that the region is in a favorable state for adopting growth and development strategies. Based on SWOT analysis, a combination of strategic approaches was proposed for tourism development, emphasizing alignment with Ilam's specific strategic position (Omid et al., 2017). A 2018 study titled "Study of the Impact of Social Media Marketing Activities on Brand Equity and Customer Response in the Airline Industry" analyzed how social media marketing influences brand value and customer behavior. It found that popularity is the most influential component of social media marketing. The study also revealed that social media marketing significantly affects brand awareness, which in turn influences brand commitment and brand image—further affecting online word-of-mouth and customer commitment (Eun-Ju Seo & Jin-Woo Park, 2018). Another 2018 study, "The Impact of Entrepreneurship, Market, Knowledge Management Approaches on Detergent Producers and Sustainable Competitive Advantage", highlighted the critical role companies play in regional sustainable development. It showed that strategic drivers—entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and knowledge management—are closely correlated. When used together, they significantly enhance sustainable competitive advantage in SMEs (Julio Cesar Ferro et al., 2018). A 2017 study titled "The Importance of Email Marketing in Online Commerce" emphasized that email marketing remains a key element of e-commerce. With high click-through rates, it was shown to be among the most effective tools for customer engagement, alongside content marketing, social media, and affiliate marketing (Martin Hudak et al., 2017). In another 2017 study, "The Effect of Marketing Communications on the Financial Situation of the Company", findings indicated that effective marketing communication serves as a fast, efficient way to inform customers. It

contributes to customer acquisition and sales growth, although it involves costs related to transforming marketing concepts into actionable communication through various channels (Lukas Falata & Martin Holubcikk, 2017).

### METODOLOGY

Strategy design in this study is classified as prescriptive research, aiming to propose actionable strategies rather than merely describe existing phenomena. However, to identify the foundational components of the strategy, qualitative research—specifically grounded theory—was employed due to the high level of environmental change and organizational dynamism. This approach was chosen because the uncertainty and complexity of both internal and external conditions make it impractical to rely on predefined theoretical models. Instead, strategy formulation was guided by grounded theory to extract core strategic factors directly from empirical data. After identifying key variables through grounded theory, the SWOT analysis method was applied to align the internal capacities and external opportunities and threats, ultimately informing a strategic entry model for international markets. Grounded theory, being an inductive and reality-based approach, enables theory generation based on actual data rather than existing frameworks, making it particularly suitable for contexts characterized by rapid change and evolving dynamics. The qualitative nature of this research focuses on interpreting relationships and meanings between concepts, often dealing with non-quantifiable elements. This methodology allows deeper insight into subjective experiences and strategic thought processes of stakeholders. The statistical population consists of two distinct groups: academic experts (university faculty) and experienced commercial/export managers with at least 15 years of industry experience. Sampling was purposive, targeting individuals with direct relevance to the research question, and utilized the snowball method, where initial participants refer additional qualified individuals to the study.

The modus operandi involved initially selecting a primary group for interviews. Based on their recommendations, subsequent groups were identified and interviewed. This process continued until no new insights emerged—i.e., theoretical saturation was achieved. Notably, repetition of codes was observed from the fourteenth interview onward. However, data collection continued until the twentieth interview to ensure full theoretical saturation. In total, 20 interviews were conducted.

The key principle in analyzing data from interviews is coding. This involves reading the data line by line and breaking it down into the smallest possible components (Adib Hajbagheri et al., 2007). Codes represent the outcome of a microscopic analysis of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 2006). Among the most common methods in Grounded Theory research is the interview, which fosters deep engagement with participants' experiences (Graham, 2007). Accordingly, this study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. After coordinating with participants and obtaining written consent, interviews were held at locations chosen by the participants. Before each interview, the researcher explained the research objectives and posed a series of questions. Each interview lasted between 90 and 100 minutes. Following the interviews, the researcher extracted preliminary codes. The interview data were then analyzed using MAXQDA software to enhance precision and accelerate the process. Open coding was performed first. Preliminary codes were grouped to form concepts, which were then linked to develop themes. In Grounded Theory, open coding is the initial step in data analysis. It is termed "open" because the researcher approaches the data without constraints regarding the number of codes or themes (Golding, 2002). This process entails discovering concepts in the data, comparing them to identify similar phenomena, and organizing them into themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Thus, open coding involves disaggregating, comparing, conceptualizing, and thematizing data

(Danaee Fard & Emami, 2007). At the open coding stage, 469 codes were extracted from 20 in-depth interviews with experts and specialists. These codes were distilled into 95 abstract concepts, which were further organized into 10 themes. The outcomes of this stage, including the identified concepts and related themes, are presented in **Table 1**.

**Table 1**  
*Concepts and Themes Extracted From The Interviews.*

No.	Concept	Theme	Factors
1	Establish and maintain relationships with foreign customers	Marketing mechanisms	Marketing capabilities
2	The location of the company and the appropriate geographical distance between the company and the target market		
3	Quality of customer service		
4	Financial condition and working capital of the company		
5	Ability of sales force		
6	Power distribution network		
7	Speed of new product introduction		
8	Knowledge about customers and competitors		
9	Skills in segmenting and targeting the market		
10	Having the necessary legal licenses for export		
11	Advertising		
12	Pricing		
13	Competitors' arrival time	Marketing Information	Internal Factors
14	Position and position of competitors in the target market		
15	Field survey of stores in target countries to assess needs and tastes		
16	Recognize competitors		
17	Identify favorable markets		
18	The amount of competitors' capital		
19	Global competition of competitors		

Table 1

Continued				
20	Increase or limit the amount of exports			
21	Increase exports to expand the market			
22	Timely supply of export products and goods			
23	Develop and improve export performance by interacting with global markets			
24	Select a target market			
25	Benefit from advanced technologies for export			
26	Familiarity with global markets and customer tastes			
27	Determine long-term financial strategies			
28	Participate in specialized and international exhibitions			
29	Timely monitoring of news and information of international markets			
30	Value creation management with the aim of developing products and expanding exports			
31	Use marketing research to identify foreign customers and competitors			
32	Forming a working group and think tank on exports			
33	Understand international trade laws			
34	Comply with international trade standards			
35	Development of research and development activities (R & D)			
36	Establish coordination and coherence for marketing and export affairs			
37	The mission and plans of the leader of the organization to motivate			
38	Informing the company about news, rules and events regarding exports			
39	Possessing skills and knowledge in the field of export			
40	Access to sufficient financial resources and capital for export activities			
41	Value creation management			

Ability In Export Marketing

Managerial capabilities

Internal Factors

Managerial Competencies

Table 1

Continued				
42	Scientific level of company management			
43	Promote the idea of globalization among company executives	Managerial Competencies		
44	Access to political knowledge and technical and managerial experience			
45	Sales force training			
46	Hiring experienced and skilled salesmen		Managerial capabilities	
47	Teaching cultural differences			
48	Knowledge management and conducting studies and research in the field of sales and exports	Training		
49	Having staff familiar with international banking and marketing techniques			
50	Strengthen foreign languages and learn new and different languages			
51	Teach communication and customer orientation to employees			
52	Use of information and communication technology			Internal Factors
53	Appropriate quality of distribution and timely completion and delivery of orders			
54	Suitable packaging for flawless supply of export products			
55	Properties and quality of export products			
56	Increase sales revenue	Improve Performance In The Export Market		
57	Increase information and advertising			
58	Increase profit margin			
59	Improve competitiveness			
60	Reduce marketing costs by using state-of-the-art technologies			
61	Reasonable price of export product			
62	Attractive packaging of export product based on the psychology of the target country		Marketing performance	
63	Maintain a position in the market in terms of quantity			

Table 1

Continued				
64	Maintain a position in the market in terms of quality			
65	Update and improve technology-based capabilities	Improve Performance In The Export Market	Marketing performance	Internal Factors
66	Creating social networks for marketing			
67	Export product promotion and advertising programs			
68	Development of promotion programs and creating a favorable image of Iranian products in the target countries			
69	Awareness of the type and method of advertising in the destination country			
70	Creating a competitive advantage of goods and services in terms of promotion and discounts			
71	Humanitarian responsibilities	Social Responsibilities		
72	Ethical responsibilities			
73	Legal responsibilities			
74	Cultural responsibilities			
75	Informing government officials and legislators of the need for exports	Organizational Innovation		
76	Company management knowledge about export management and global marketing			
77	Decide on the best way to distribute goods with the lowest cost and safe delivery			
78	Inter-organizational partnerships			
79	Development of participation in production and distribution			
80	Strategic and strategic views of the company's management to participate in global markets	Marketing Innovation	Innovation	
81	Decide on the price of a product compared to similar goods in the target market			
82	Decide on the type of product packaging compared to similar goods available in the target market			
83	Find business partners			
84	Develop participation in after-sales service			
85	Improving the level of response to foreign customers			
86	Lack of market control due to the variability of the inflation growth process			

Table 1

Continued				
87	Lack of supervision and laws governing hoarding and the domestic market			
88	Increase marketing costs and proper packaging	Economic Stability	Economic Factors	
89	Lack of guarantee of long-term investment due to the political situation and global relations			
90	Easy payment methods through efficient global banks			
91	Possibility of cooperation with reputable global banks	Existence of Efficient International Banks		
92	Provide timely facilities by efficient global banks			
93	Providing fair and easy facilities by efficient global banks			
94	Having advanced infrastructure of banking and financial system in the country			
95	Lack of transparency of administrative and customs laws	Challenge Of Customs Offices		External Factors
96	Reduce domestic bureaucracies for exports			
97	Requirement to refrigerate export products			
98	Stability of domestic laws regarding exports			
99	A small amount of Iran's relationship with other countries in the world	Government Policies	Terms and Conditions	
100	The type and depth of Iran's relations with other countries in the world in economic, social, political and cultural terms			
101	Support for the production of quality agricultural products then exports			
102	Government incentives for exports in Iran, such as export awards			
103	Iran's membership in the World Trade Organization			
104	Holding exhibitions and seminars by the government			
105	Existence of political problems of the country and security atmosphere			
106	Selection and appointment of competent and skilled diplomats in the target countries			
107	Increase the export knowledge of officials to coordinate policies with export affairs			
108	Establishment of international unions and joint global organizations (such as free trade zones)			

**Table 1**

Continued

109	Improving the country's transportation facilities in terms of sea, air and land						
110	Improving the transportation situation and observing the standard of roads and transfer routes						
111	Government capital support in the field of non-oil exports						
112	Upgrading transportation routes and roads						
113	Large area under cultivation of export agricultural products						
114	Existence of efficient managers as marketing intermediaries by the government	Government Policies	Terms and Conditions	External Factors			
115	Financial assistance to increase favorable agricultural lands						
116	Superior quality of Iranian products compared to competitors in export markets						
117	Ensuring the security of export orders and completing and delivering them on time						
118	Provide technical support and management consulting services to export companies						
119	Increase cooperation and communication between export companies						
120	Strengthen the capacity of export companies in the field of exports						
121	Effective and targeted marketing activities of competitors						
122	Intensification of global competition and the presence of new competitors				Status Of Competitors	Environmental Factors	
123	Increasing market costs						

Axial coding is the second stage of the Grounded Theory method and requires more focus. Coding at this stage is done by linking categories in terms of their specifications and dimensions. The researcher selects a category and explores it as the central phenomenon at the core of the process, determining the relationships between other categories and the central one. At this stage, the data that were broken down during the open coding process are reassembled to provide a more accurate explanation of the phenomenon. To achieve this, the categories and the relationships

between them are identified using the axial coding model, as illustrated in the following paradigm model in **Figure 1**.

The central category of the process is examined, to which other categories are related. Causal conditions are categories that precede and influence the central phenomenon. Underlying conditions are specific circumstances that affect strategies. Intervening conditions are general factors that can either facilitate or constrain strategies. Strategies are actions or interactions implemented to manage the central phenomenon, and the consequences

are the outcomes of these actions and interactions (Danaei Fard & Emami, 2007).

*Selective coding*

Selective coding is the third stage of the grounded theory method, which is essentially the process of refining the theory and theorizing. In other words, this stage of coding involves integrating and enhancing categories to form a theory, based on the results from the previous two stages of coding. This process systematically connects the central category to other categories and their relationships. The researcher then organizes and presents the paradigm model as a narrative, according to their understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this study, As shown in Figure 2, the results of open and axial coding lead to selective coding, which suggests that export performance is a function of causal conditions (marketing capabilities), axial conditions (managerial capabilities), underlying conditions (rules and regulations), intervening conditions (economic and environmental factors), and strategies (marketing performance).

After the preliminary data were obtained from the open coding stage, an interview was conducted with the managing director of the Amin Caspian Shomal company. Following various investigations surrounding the company to develop a marketing strategy, the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors) and opportunities and threats (external factors) were identified. Subsequently, using the SWOT analysis method, these internal and external factors were analyzed to formulate

an export marketing strategy for the kiwifruit product, with the aim of entering global markets. Overall, the framework of the SWOT analysis is as follows in Figure 3.

The SWOT matrix is one of the methods used in strategic planning for organizations. As shown in Table 2, SWOT matrix and the mode of determination of the strategies, determination of short-term and long-term development strategies Building on this method, the strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T) of the organization are determined. In the SWOT method, strategic planners can evaluate external factors such as economic and social factors using the External Factors Evaluation matrix, and at the same time, identify and assess the relationship between different issues and develop solutions using the Internal Factors Evaluation matrix (Nayebpour et al., 2013).

*Internal Factors Evaluation (IFE) matrix*

In the Internal Factors Evaluation (IFE) matrix, strengths and weaknesses are determined and analyzed. These factors are controllable by the organization, and organizations aim to choose strategies that enhance their strengths and address their weaknesses. Strengths are factors that provide advantages for the organization, whether in terms of its history, the industry average, or in comparison to competitors. On the other hand, weaknesses are factors where the organization lacks adequate capabilities, while competitors possess those capabilities (Amini & Samavatian, 2010).

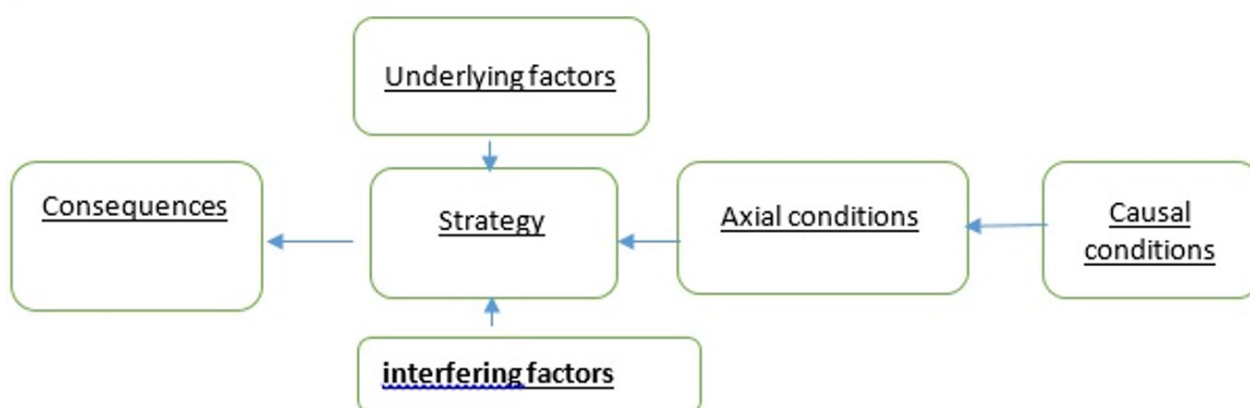


Figure 1. The Main Elements of the Paradigm in Axial Coding.

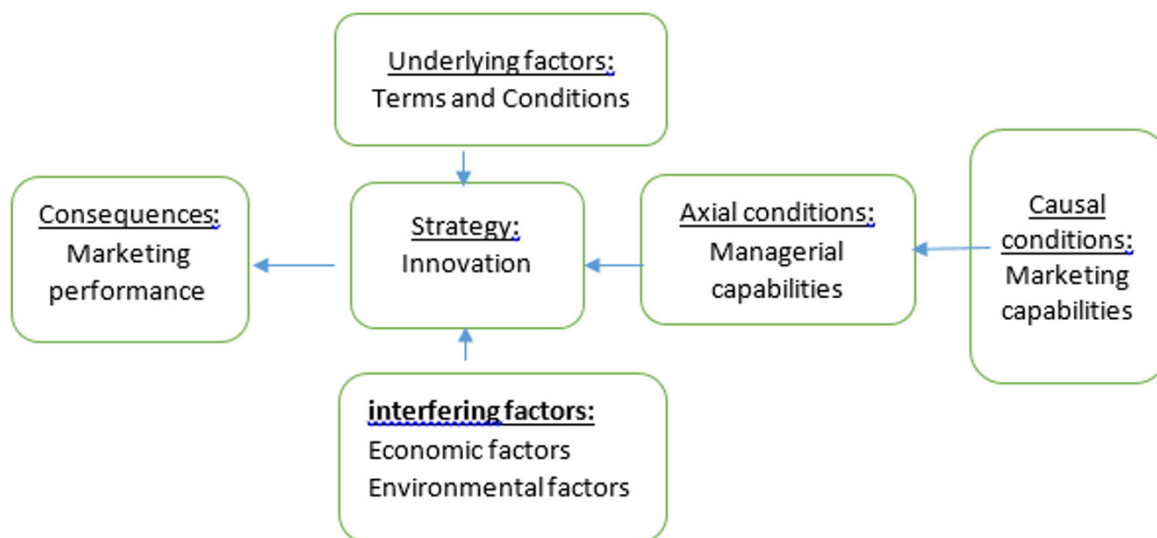


Figure 2. The Main Elements of the Paradigm in Axial Coding with Details.

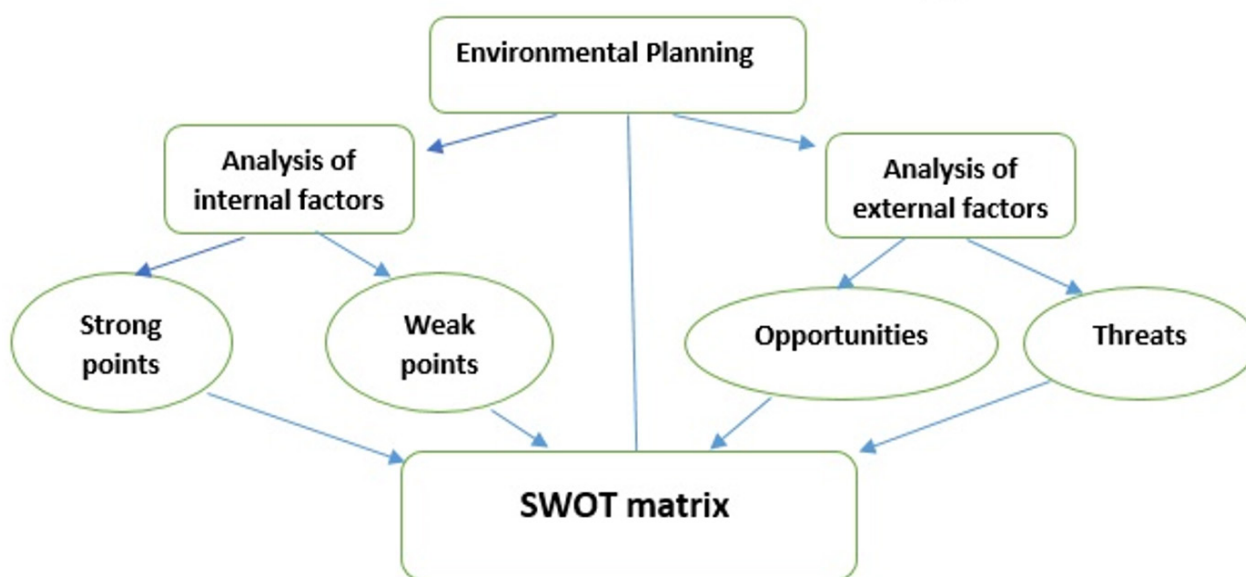


Figure 3. SWOT Matrix Process.

Table 2  
SWOT Matrix.

SWOT matrix	Strong points	Weak points
Opportunities	SO strategies	WO strategies
Threats	ST strategies	WT strategies

As shown in Table 3, 8 internal strengths and 11 internal weaknesses were identified as factors influencing the strategy formulation for Amin Caspian Shomal company. Based on the Likert scale questionnaire, the weight of internal factors (2.08), which is smaller than 2.5, indicates that the weak points outweigh

the strengths of Amin Caspian Shomal company.

External Factors Evaluation (EFE) matrix  
In the External Factors Evaluation (EFE) matrix, opportunities and threats encompass events and political, economic, social, technological, legal, governmental, and

competitive factors that can bring significant benefits or risks to the organization in the future. Opportunities and threats are largely beyond the control and jurisdiction of an organization. To capitalize on external opportunities and avoid or mitigate the

consequences of threats, organizations must develop specific strategies. Therefore, identifying, monitoring, and evaluating external opportunities and threats is essential to ensuring the organization's success (Amini & Samavatian, 2010).

**Table 3**  
*Internal Factors Evaluation (IFE) Matrix for the Amin Caspian Shomal Company.*

Internal factors	Weight	Score	Final coefficient
<b>Strong points</b>			
1- Location of Amin Caspian Shomal company in northern Iran	0.006	4	0.24
2- High scientific potential of the manager of Amin Caspian Shomal company	0.004	3	0.12
3- Sound and reliable financial status of the Amin Caspian Shomal company	0.004	3	0.12
4- Favorable political relationships of the manager of Amin Caspian Shomal company	0.004	3	0.12
5- Favorable social relationships of the manager of Amin Caspian Shomal company	0.004	3	0.12
6- Foreign marketing experience of the manager of Amin Caspian Shomal company	0.005	4	0.20
7- Possessing shipping license	0.004	3	0.12
8- Company's financial potential in recruiting workforce	0.004	3	0.12
<b>Weak points</b>			
1- Absence of knowledge management and lack of studies and research in the direction of profitability in the organization	0.07	1	0.07
2- Incapability in attracting foreign customers	0.05	1	0.05
3- Absence of staff familiar with international banking affairs and novel marketing techniques	0.06	1	0.06
4- Absence of long-term financial strategies	0.06	2	0.12
5- Inadequacy in personnel training	0.05	2	0.10
6- Lack of exports affairs think tank	0.05	2	0.10
7- Absence of comprehensive and complete databank functioning as work template	0.06	1	0.06
8- Unfamiliarity with global markets and the preferences of customers	0.07	1	0.07
9- Lack of active participation in international exhibitions	0.06	2	0.12
10- High costs of distribution and marketing	0.05	2	0.10
11- Absence of publicity and advertisement	0.07	1	0.07
	1		2.08

**Table 4**  
*External Factor Evaluation (EFE) Matrix.*

External factors	Coefficient	Rank	Score
<b>Opportunities</b>			
1- Cooperation with credible banks	0.06	3	0.18
2- Vast under cultivation area of kiwifruit in northern Iran	0.07	4	0.28
3- Supreme quality of Iran's kiwifruit as compared to other competitors	0.07	4	0.28
4- Favorable agricultural lands for production	0.06	4	0.24
5- Government's capital support in the realm of non-oil exports	0.06	2	0.12
6- Increasing cooperation and communication between export companies	0.06	2	0.12
7- Holding exhibitions and seminars on improving product quality by the government	0.06	4	0.24
8- Enjoying export awards	0.05	2	0.10
9- Support for the production of quality agricultural products	0.05	2	0.10
<b>Threats</b>			
1- Absence of international trade infrastructure	0.04	1	0.04
2- Obstructing regulations	0.05	2	0.1
3- Obligation to loading the kiwifruit product with fridge in order to prevent the crops' corruption	0.05	2	0.1
4- Iran's non-membership at the World Trade Organization	0.05	3	0.15
5- Selection of competent and skilled diplomats in the target countries	0.05	3	0.15
6- Competitors' effective and purposeful marketing activities	0.04	1	0.04
7- Intensification of global competition and introduction of new competitors	0.05	2	0.1
8- Absence of suitable and efficient management functioning as marketing intermediary	0.04	1	0.04
9- The rise of costs for marketing and suitable packaging	0.04	1	0.04
10- The country's political problems and the securitized climate of the economy	0.05	2	0.1
	1		2.52

As shown in Table 3, 8 internal strengths and 11 internal weaknesses were identified as factors influencing the strategy formulation for Amin Caspian Shomal company. Based on the Likert scale questionnaire, the weight of internal factors (2.08), which is smaller than 2.5, indicates that the weak points outweigh the strengths of Amin Caspian Shomal

company.

*External Factors Evaluation (EFE) matrix*

As shown in Table 4, a total of 9 external opportunities and 10 external threats were identified as factors influencing the strategy of Amin Caspian Shomal company. Following this, a poll was conducted using a Likert scale questionnaire to determine the weight

of these factors, with the results reflected in Table 3. According to the table 3, the weight score of the external factors, 2.52, which is higher than 2.5, indicates the dominance of opportunities over threats at Amin Caspian Shomal company. As seen in the internal and external factors matrices, the sum of internal

factors is 2.08, while the sum of external factors is 2.52. To identify the main strategy, the values obtained were plotted in a four-cell internal-external matrix. As shown in Figure 4, the main strategy identified for Amin Caspian Shomal company is a conservative one.

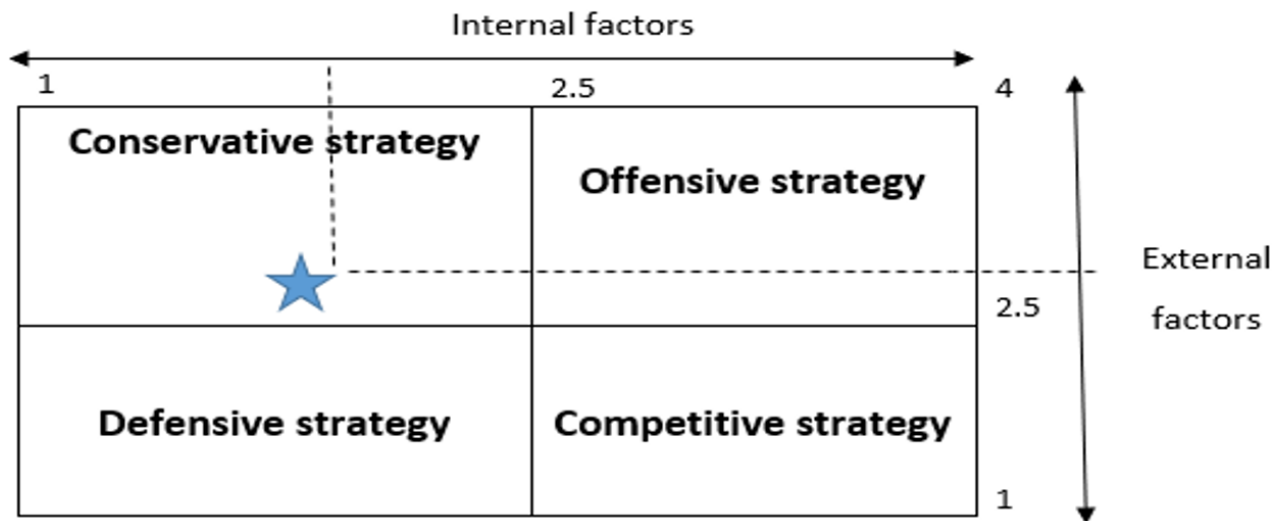


Figure 4. Determination of the Strategy of Amin Caspian Shomal Company.

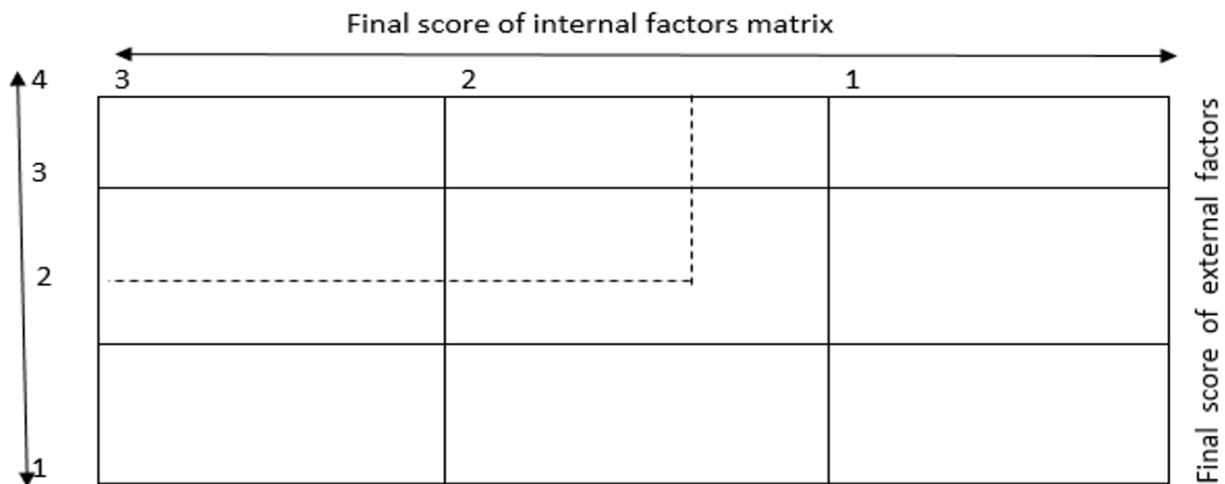


Figure 5. Internal External Matrix.

Considering the results obtained and Figures 3,4 and 5, which respectively show the determination of the main strategy and the Internal-External Matrix, it was determined that Amin Caspian Shomal company must implement a conservative strategy focused on maintaining and preserving the status quo while ensuring development. Therefore, based on the analysis of the aforementioned matrices, it was concluded that the company is progressing at a slow pace and holds a weak

competitive position. The company must implement swift and infrastructural reforms to prevent its dissolution, significantly reduce costs, reallocate resources from current activities, and focus on areas such as recruiting a new, skilled workforce. Otherwise, it may be necessary to sell off some company stocks or face eventual dissolution.

*Preparation of SWOT matrix*

In the SWOT analysis method, a 4×4 matrix is used to analyze existing factors,As shown

in Table 5. Each cell of the matrix contains one of the factors influencing the system, which is then analyzed in relation to the other factors. In each case, the organization's strengths and weaknesses, along with

available opportunities and external threats (limitations), are examined from both internal and external perspectives. Based on the identified factors, four categories of strategies can be derived from the matrix, which include:

**Table 5**  
*SWOT Matrix.*

SWOT matrix	Strong points	Weak points
Opportunities	SO strategies	WO strategies
Threats	ST strategies	WT strategies

- a) SO strategy: using these strategies, the company is seeking to build on strong points maximally to benefit from maximum opportunities
- b) ST strategy: using these strategies, the company attempts to neutralize the peripheral threats taking into account its strong points
- c) WO strategy: using these strategies, the company is looking to mitigate the weak points and increase capitalization on peripheral opportunities
- d) WT strategy: using these strategies, the company seeks to counter weak points and threats as much as it can, such as merger, dissolution, etc.

coding—and the final scores of the internal and external factor evaluation matrices, Amin Caspian Shomal's position in terms of kiwifruit exports falls within the WO quadrant. These results suggest the adoption of conservative strategies, As shown in Table 6 , whereby the company should focus on reducing its weaknesses and leveraging available opportunities, with an emphasis on growth and development strategies. However, given that its position within the conservative quadrant is moderate, the company should also consider strategies aimed at maintenance, stability, and preservation. Therefore, based on the conservative WO strategy derived from the Internal-External (IE) matrix and the strategy determination matrix, the marketing strategies for kiwifruit exports to international markets for Amin Caspian Shomal should include both growth-oriented and preservation-focused approaches.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the paradigm model derived from the grounded theory method—using open coding, axial coding, and selective

**Table 6**  
*List of Strategies.*

List of strategies	No.
Recruitment and training of specialized and educated marketing	S1
Use knowledge management and conduct research and research in the field of sales and exports	S2
Pay attention to research and development on the culture and tastes of customers by sales forces	S3
Active participation in international exhibitions	S4
Planning for continuous training of new export marketing techniques to sales personnel by reputable educational institutions	S5
Establish a marketing committee and think tank on exports	S6
Continuous referral to orchards in the north of the country to increase the production efficiency of high quality kiwi product	S7
Establish statistical and analytical databases of marketing and sales	S8
Invest in fundamental and efficient research for the kiwi crop	S9
Use of centralized digital markets and online sales	S10
Allocation of a percentage of profits for education and marketing	S11

## CONCLUSIONS

Kiwifruit exports have grown by 35 percent over the past five years. Producers, by adhering to marketing and packaging principles, have successfully introduced their products to international markets. According to global data, 4.27 million tons of kiwifruit are produced annually worldwide, with Iran producing 294 thousand tons, ranking as the fourth-largest producer globally. Of this, Iran exports approximately 112 thousand tons, valued at over USD 82 million. Despite Iran's relative advantages—such as resource availability, substantial cultivation areas, and a strategic location in northern Iran near major markets like Turkey and Russia—Amin Caspian Shomal has underperformed in the export sector due to inefficient marketing operations compared to its competitors. To secure a stronger position in the global kiwifruit trade and given the significant market demand in neighboring countries, the company must capitalize on its export potential beyond current volumes. This requires strategic, long-term planning for sustained international presence through consistent exports and long-term contracts. Therefore, establishing robust kiwifruit export marketing strategies is essential for Amin Caspian Shomal. The following solutions are recommended:

- Develop and expand research focusing on domestic producers with an export-oriented approach, promote export-oriented production processes, initiate export-based research, and establish a dedicated research committee on kiwifruit exports.
- Strengthen relationships with northern Iranian kiwifruit producers by leveraging support policies—especially pricing—and providing training on cultivation and harvesting practices to ensure the production of high-quality export goods.
- Establish and empower an export marketing committee, set up sales offices in target countries, participate in specialized international exhibitions, and cultivate strong political and economic ties to reduce trade barriers and facilitate exports.

- Utilize digital marketplaces and online sales platforms to expand and develop target markets.

- Improve inventory management, transport infrastructure, and distribution cost-efficiency to boost product availability and sales growth.

- Diversify target export markets based on export potential, considering the differences between prospective and current markets to enhance market development.

- Conduct market research on consumer tastes, preferences, and cultural practices in target markets, identify intermediaries, and analyze competitor strategies to shape effective marketing processes and ensure optimal performance.

### *Research limitations*

Every research project has its limitations due to its specific nature. The main limitation in this study was the small size of the statistical population regularly responding to the questionnaire. Additionally, to ensure proper understanding of the questionnaire content and objectives, the researcher had to read and explain the questions and clarify the purpose during the interviews, so that the interviewees could receive accurate qualitative information.

### *Suggestions for future researchers*

Future researchers are encouraged to prioritize strategies and apply decision-making techniques using grey numbers to achieve more accurate and effective results. Moreover, a combination of multiple methods can be employed simultaneously. To better reflect real-world conditions, methods such as the Analytic Network Process (ANP) can be used to identify interdependencies between strategies.

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**How to cite this article:**

Madadkhah, M., Chirani, E. & Owshak-Saraee, M. (2024). Designing marketing strategies for kiwi-fruit export to international markets based on grounded theory and SWOT method (A case study of Amin Caspian Shomal co.). *International Journal of Agricultural Management and Development*, 14(1), 99-117. DOI: [10.71877/ijamad.2024.16828](https://doi.org/10.71877/ijamad.2024.16828)

