



# Identifying and Ranking Marketing Strategies to Develop Iran's Leather Market: The Case of Maral Leather Company

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## Abstract

The present research aimed to identify and rank marketing strategies for the development of the Iranian leather market, using Maral Leather Company as a case study. A mixed-methods design was employed, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative phases. In the qualitative phase, the Delphi technique was utilized to extract relevant criteria. Subsequently, a conceptual model was developed and validated through a case study conducted at Maral Leather Company. The statistical population for the qualitative phase comprised academic and marketing experts with experience in Iran's leather market. Ten individuals were selected using the snowball technique for in-depth interviews. In the quantitative phase, the statistical population consisted of managers, producers, and exporters within Iran's leather market, including Maral Leather Company. Ten individuals were purposively sampled to respond to a questionnaire designed for the research. Data analysis in the qualitative phase involved open, axial, and selective coding techniques, while Friedman's test was employed in the quantitative phase using the SPSS software package. The results indicated that the most crucial criterion for the segmenting strategy in developing Iran's leather market is managers' attention to strategic beliefs. For the targeting strategy, exploiting new and innovative markets was identified as the most important criterion, while for the positioning strategy, recognizing the status and appropriateness of strategic resources within the industry was deemed paramount. Furthermore, Friedman's test revealed that the most critical criteria for targeting, positioning, and segmenting strategies in Iran's leather market include the attention of the Iranian leather industry and exporters union to appropriate strategies, identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources, and paying attention to the personality characteristics of the target market, respectively.

### Keywords:

Leather industry; marketing strategy; positioning; segmenting; targeting

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing business landscape, the need for a well-defined strategy is paramount for companies to maintain competitiveness and secure their position in their respective industries. A strategy serves as a blueprint for the future, distinguishing firms from one another even when operating within the same industry. According to [Kotler et al. \(2013\)](#), marketing strategy entails the strategic decisions made by businesses to attain their marketing objectives.

[Berndt and Tait \(2012\)](#) further elaborate on this definition by emphasizing that marketing strategy aims to fully satisfy existing customers, thereby encouraging them to engage in positive word-of-mouth advertising about their satisfaction with the products or services offered. This highlights the importance of not only acquiring customers but also ensuring their ongoing satisfaction to foster loyalty and advocacy. In essence, an effective marketing strategy aligns the company's objectives with customer needs and market dynamics, enabling it to maintain relevance and competitiveness in a dynamic business environment.

Specialized marketing strategies encompass various activities such as marketing communications, personal sales, pricing, product development, and distribution, particularly in commodity-oriented industries. These strategies play a crucial role, especially in companies that prioritize focus-based product-market strategies. The ability to establish advantageous connections with potential and existing customers hinges on the specialized capabilities of the company in these areas.

According to [Rahimzadeh et al. \(2016\)](#), both specialized marketing capabilities and marketing architecture are essential for product differentiation. Marketing architecture facilitates the implementation of distinguishing strategies by collecting market data and developing marketing programs based on these insights. Moreover, researchers like [Vorhies et al. \(2009\)](#) suggest that companies

focusing on efficiency and cost dimensions in their product-market strategies may require fewer enhancements in their marketing capabilities. Conversely, companies that prioritize distinguishing-based strategies necessitate a higher level of marketing capabilities to effectively differentiate their products and appeal to target customers.

It is incumbent upon every business to distinguish itself from competitors by leveraging its inherent strengths to effectively meet customer needs within a specific environmental context. This necessitates that company owners or managers possess a deep understanding of marketing principles and effective business management to make meaningful contributions ([Ciubotariu, 2013](#)).

According to [Schmid et al. \(2011\)](#), managers make decisions based on the sensitivity of the firm's position. To comprehend the intricacies of detailed marketing strategies, managers must consider situational factors that influence strategic decisions. This underscores the importance of contextual awareness and adaptability in formulating and implementing marketing strategies that align with the company's objectives and market conditions.

Therefore, the essence of strategy lies in choosing to conduct activities differently from competitors ([Porter, 2000](#)). Without a suitable strategy, a company is unlikely to succeed unless success occurs by chance. [Webb et al. \(2011\)](#) emphasize that carefully integrating marketing concepts with business processes can lead to performance improvement. [Ruhdelius \(2011\)](#) asserts that marketing can serve as a tool to empower firms in achieving their objectives. It is a strategic approach implemented by organizations to support both organizational and management goals in achieving profitability and success. [Dzisi and Ofosu \(2014\)](#) define marketing as a matrix of commercial activities structured to strategically promote, plan, price, produce, and distribute goods, services, and ideas for the satisfaction of appropriate customers and clients. This definition high-

lights the strategic nature of marketing in fulfilling customer needs and achieving organizational objectives.

Owomoyela et al. (2013) view marketing strategy as a means of delivering a unique product that meets all customer requirements, offers competitive prices, employs extensive distribution channels, and supports it with an effective promotional strategy. According to (Ghouri et al., 2011), implementing an appropriate marketing strategy enhances overall business activities and further solidifies market share and the firm's competitive advantage. Kotler and Keller (2014) emphasize the connection between marketing and marketing strategy as the "development and maintenance of consistently satisfying exchange relationships." This underscores the importance of fostering positive interactions with customers through strategic marketing efforts.

Gbolagade et al. (2013) discovered that marketing strategies significantly influence business performance. This finding is supported by Owomoyela et al. (2013), who agree with Gbolagade et al. (2013) by stating that previous studies have established a profitable relationship between marketing strategies and business performance.

Arsalan et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of formulating marketing strategies tailored to each entity, as it enables businesses to expand their market reach. Dzisi and Ofosu (2014) assert that marketing strategy is one of the key effective strategies adopted by companies to enhance performance. Van Scheers (2011) suggests that business managers should perceive and develop marketing strategies for products and services, as the success of their ventures depends on their ability to cultivate a growing base of satisfied customers. Therefore, marketing strategies are deemed the most critical pillar and contribute significantly to enhancing organizational performance (Hassan et al., 2013).

Based on the research, the leather industry in Iran recognizes that competition and gaining competitive advantages in the global

trade arena are feasible and achievable through the implementation of coherent policies and strategies, as well as the utilization of organizational strategic planning (Amirosadat et al., 2019). Having a precise understanding of the organization's strengths and strategic domains can greatly assist managers in implementing effective measures.

Despite possessing numerous competitive advantages and experiencing high sales rates domestically, the Iranian leather industry has struggled to secure a significant share in global exports for various reasons. These include the lack of proper marketing strategies, failure to adopt modern international trade techniques, and shortcomings in establishing a comprehensive customer database to identify target customers and align production with their preferences (Motafakker Azad et al., 2011). Additionally, a traditional focus on input resources such as skilled human capital, product quality, and cost reduction has diverted attention from other critical aspects. Despite the vast potential of various geographical regions for leather products, international exports from Iran's leather industry remain negligible.

The influx of both foreign and domestic competitors into the market has further threatened the industry's position, making the retention of market share a pressing concern for managers. The absence of a formulated marketing strategy exacerbates these challenges, underscoring the necessity of research to identify the criteria for an effective marketing strategy with a market development approach and rank them accordingly. However, there has been limited research on marketing strategies in Iran's leather industry, and insufficient information exists regarding the contribution of marketing strategy to the success or failure of leather companies in the country.

According to Pawan and Pawan (2013), marketing strategies play a crucial role in supporting developed marketing plans to meet market needs, while Van Scheers (2011) highlights marketing skills as one of

the most influential factors in organizational growth and survival. The lack of marketing expertise and appropriate strategies can significantly impact the success of the leather industry in Iran, further emphasizing the importance of effective marketing strategy formulation. Therefore, this research aims to delineate the marketing strategies of leather companies in Iran and contribute to current knowledge regarding the influence of marketing on the performance of Iran's leather industry. By identifying and prioritizing the criteria for an effective marketing strategy, this study seeks to provide valuable insights and recommendations to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of the Iranian leather industry in the global market.

### METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a mixed methods research design to achieve its objectives, which was implemented in two phases.

In the first phase, qualitative data were collected and analyzed from an expert panel and semi-structured interviews with academic experts and informants in Iran's leather market. A total of 10 academic experts were involved in this phase, selected through the snowball technique for in-depth interviews. The snowball technique involved initiating interviews with individuals identified as experts, who were then asked to recommend additional experts for participation in the research. The sampling adequacy was ensured through theoretical sampling, where in-depth interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The Delphi technique was utilized in the qualitative phase to identify appropriate criteria, following which a conceptual model was developed.

In the second phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed through a survey of managers or advisors of leather companies, as well as managers, producers, and exporters active in the leather market, including Maral Leather Company.

This mixed methods approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the status

of marketing strategy in Iran's leather market by integrating both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The qualitative phase allowed for a deeper exploration of expert opinions and the identification of key criteria, while the quantitative phase provided statistical data to support and validate the findings. Overall, the research design enabled a robust examination of marketing strategy in the Iranian leather industry, leading to the development of a conceptual model grounded in both qualitative insights and quantitative evidence.

In the second phase, structured interviews were conducted with experts, including managers or advisors of leather product companies, as well as managers, producers, and exporters active in the leather market, including Maral Leather Company. The aim was to validate the extracted model, clarify any ambiguities, and gather additional insights to complement the qualitative results obtained from the Delphi panel. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 participants for the questionnaire developed for this study.

To assess the status of the marketing strategy in Maral Leather Company, experts were asked to score each concept on a scale of 0 to 100. Scores between 0 and 10 indicated no support or evidence for the statement, while scores between 15 and 35 suggested a weakness in the aspect being evaluated. Scores between 40 and 60 indicated an average or acceptable performance, while scores between 65 and 85 indicated good performance. Scores between 90 and 100 were considered excellent.

Data from both phases were analyzed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. In the qualitative phase, data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding techniques. In the quantitative phase, Friedman's test was employed using the SPSS software package to analyze the ranked components in terms of targeting, positioning, and segmenting strategies. This mixed methods approach allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the marketing strategy in the

Iranian leather industry, combining both qualitative insights and quantitative data analysis for a more robust understanding of the subject matter.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the analysis of the interviews, Tables 1-3 present the criteria appropriate for the segmenting, targeting, and positioning strategies within the context of the Iranian leather market development approach. The expert panel’s opinion on the segmenting category was coded into three concepts: demographic factors, psychological and behavioral factors, and geographical concepts. The majority of the expert panel highlighted the im-

portance of segmenting strategy criteria and considered them to be key concepts to consider when designing a market strategy. Table 1 presents the indicators related to all three concepts. For instance, regarding psychological and behavioral factors, the experts emphasized that “organizational culture based on the active partnership of employers, workers, and the market” and “the youth’s perception of the use of leather products as prestigious” should be taken into account in market strategy formulation.

After interviewing the experts, the appropriate targeting criteria for identifying the international target market with the Iranian leather market development approach were

Table 1  
Concepts and Categories Identified for the Segmenting Strategy Criteria

Category	Concept	Final codes
Segmenting	Demographic factors	The impact of employment status and unemployment rate on leather market production and sales. Lack of planning for the recruitment of the active population in the leather market. The increasing rate of the young population and their interest in leather products as the target community. The immigration of experts and the loss of specialized human resources in the production and export fields of leather products. Human resource management and the impact of product diversity and market variety on overall productivity. Extensive communication between employees and managers with partners in the leather market.
	Psychological and behavioral factors	Organizational culture characterized by an active partnership between employers, workers, and the market. The perception among youth that using leather products is prestigious. Social class restrictions on the use of leather products, particularly clothing. Cultural adaptability in evolving management practices. The personality traits of the target market. Managers’ attention to strategic beliefs Market adjustment and stability of developed strategies Capacity of risk-taking in international markets Attention to innovation in the production and distribution of goods and services.
	Geographical factors	The impact of climatic and geographical conditions on product usage and acceptance by the target community. Ideological and cultural instances in customs and traditions regarding the use of leather products. Having a dynamic and efficient product transportation system Proximity of production centers to consumption centers Ease of access to domestic resources and raw materials

identified, as shown in Table 2. The panel indicated 25 statements or concepts grouped into three categories: exportation, competitors, and target market.

Finally, the 61 extracted codes were classified into eight concepts, three sub-categories, and eight categories. The data analysis procedure resulted in the development of a theoretical model, encompassing segmentation, targeting, and positioning strategies, which elucidates the main phenomenon: the development of an appropriate marketing strategy with a developmental approach to Iran's leather market.

After formulating a conceptual model of marketing strategy with a leather market development approach, structured interviews were conducted with experts from a specific brand in Iran's leather market, Maral Leather Company, to assess the conceptual model for

this case study. This section presents the results of the structured interviews with representatives of Maral Leather Company within the context of an intra-case analysis, focusing on the categories of segmenting, targeting, and positioning.

Regarding the segmenting strategy category in Maral Leather Company, it was found that class restrictions on the use of leather products, especially clothing, emerged as the most significant concept in the company's strategy.

Table 5 presents the status of Maral Leather Company's targeting strategy category. Setting long-term and medium-term goals (88.4) holds the highest rank in this company. Conversely, increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region (5.5) is ranked last (Table 5).

In terms of the positioning strategy cate-

Table 2

*Concepts and Categories Identified for the Targeting Strategy Criteria.*

Category	Concept	Final codes
Targeting	Exportation	Legal facilitation of the export platform of leather products to neighboring countries.
		Facilitation of customs regulations for export to international markets
		Specific subsidies to compete with neighboring leather-producing countries
		Addressing legal gaps in the production and export processes of leather products.
		Exogenous characteristics of international markets
		Export profitability
		Exchange rate fluctuations and their impact on the export of leather products
		How to be present and advertise in international markets
		Features of manufacturing and trading companies in the domestic leather market
		Attention of Iranian leather industry and exporters union to the appropriate strategy
Competitors	Competitors	Gradual and feasible shifts in the competitive resources within international markets.
		How to exploit new and innovative markets
		Setting long-term and medium-term goals
		Increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region
		Improving bargaining power with customers and suppliers
		Strategies for providing alternative services to competitors
Targetmarket	Targetmarket	Studying and analyzing the working method of current competitors
		Recognizing the characteristics and goals of customers
		Examining the characteristics of the target market
		How to choose a target market
		Having the necessary capacity to invest
		Setting the goal to differentiate products from competitors' products
		Setting the goal to provide special services to customers
		Having a history in the leather industry
Adopting modern methods to advertise the products		

Table 3

Concepts and Categories Identified for the Positioning Strategy Criteria.

Category	Concept	Final codes
Positioning	Advantages	Determining the company's performance based on customer feedback
		Establishing a monitoring and response system for customer feedback and recommendations.
		The competitiveness of the manufactured products versus the global market context
		Identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources
		Recognizing and having the values demanded by the target market
		Enhancing the dissemination of managerial and marketing mindset within both internal and external spheres.
		Creating synergies in the process of international trade
		Taking a high risk in decision-making
		Enhancing the management and business relations and capabilities of the company.
	Distinctions	Identifying weaknesses and threats in domestic and international markets
		Enhancing the efficiency and performance of the company
		Improving the quality of manufactured and exported products
		Providing appropriate in-service and after-sales services
		Developing an optimal recruitment protocol for employing capable forces in the field of marketing
		Proportionality of measures related to customer perception of the brand
		Necessary potential to promote sales in domestic and international markets

gory, recognizing and having the values demanded by the target market (84.3) and improving the management and business relations and capabilities of the company (4.6) are the strongest and weakest strategies in Maral Leather Company, respectively.

Friedman's test was employed to rank the marketing strategy with the approach of developing the Iranian leather market. Table 7 presents the results as to the significance of Friedman's test.

According to Table 7, the significance of Friedman's test is confirmed. Since the significance level of the Friedman test for ranking marketing strategy was 0.00, the difference is significant, indicating that the importance of the factors is different.

Tables 8-10 present the results of the ranking of marketing strategy criteria with the approach of developing the Iranian leather market for the segmenting, targeting, and positioning strategies. According to the results, the criteria for segmenting strategy in Iran's leather market are prioritized as follows: attention to the personality characteristics of

the target market, ease of access to domestic resources and raw materials, cultural flexibility in changing management practices, organizational culture based on active partnership of employers, workers, and the market, managers' attention to strategic beliefs, capacity of risk-taking in international markets, market adjustment, and stability of developed strategies, and attention to innovation in the production and distribution of commodities and services (Table 8).

According to the results in Table 9, the prioritization of targeting strategy criteria in Iran's leather market is as follows: attention of Iran's leather industry and exporters union to the appropriate strategy, having a history in the leather industry, strategies for providing alternative services to competitors, exogenous characteristics of international markets, having the necessary capacity to invest, how to be present and advertise in international markets, how to exploit new and innovative markets, reducing legal gaps in the process of production and export of leather products, exchange rate fluctuations and

Table 4

*The Final Status of the Segmenting Strategy Category in Maral Leather Company.*

Concepts	Description	Score
The effect of employment status and unemployment rate on leather market production and sales	Considering the employment conditions and the decrease in the production level of this company, it can be said that the reduction in human resources and the unemployment of employees have had an impact on the company's status, particularly in the Iranian leather products market.	37.5
Lack of planning for the recruitment of the active population in the leather market	No plan has been developed for the recruitment of the active population in this company due to unprecedented economic sanctions and the lack of raw materials on the one hand and the challenges of modernizing and upgrading equipment on the other.	41.7
The growing rate of the young population and their interest in leather products as the target community	No plan has been developed for recruiting the active population in this company due to unprecedented economic sanctions and a lack of raw materials, as well as challenges related to modernizing and upgrading equipment. Additionally, the loss of the company's economic capacity and human resource cuts have further exacerbated the situation.	34.5
The immigration of experts and the loss of specialized human resources in the fields of production and export of leather products	Over the past decade, numerous experts and specialists in various fields of production and trade have immigrated from this company.	65.3
Human resource management and the effect of product multiplicity, and market diversity on ultimate productivity	In this company, the human resources unit is very proactive, and despite the challenges ahead, it remains highly focused on productivity and achieving a favorable final return.	79.8
Extensive communication of employees and managers with leather market partners	In this company, there are not enough considerations for extensive communication between employees and managers, but the relationship between partners and managers is appropriate.	39.5
Organizational culture based on active partnership of employers, workers, and the market	In this company, there are no significant considerations for promoting the participation-oriented organizational culture.	32.5
The youth's perception of the use of leather products being prestigious	Many managers in the company believe that leather products hold a certain social prestige among youth in certain societies. Therefore, efforts should be made to institutionalize this belief within the target market in Iran through advertising programs.	74.3
Class restrictions on the use of leather products, especially clothing	The average price of the company's products compared to domestic competitors has somewhat mitigated the class restrictions on the use of leather products and clothing in the Iranian target market.	87.0
Cultural flexibility in changing management practices	There is no significant flexibility in changing management methods in this company and there is an unwritten insistence on traditional management methods.	35.7
The personality characteristics of the target market	In this company, the personality traits of the target market have been ignored as an effective factor in formulating a marketing strategy.	11.5
Managers' attention to strategic beliefs	Managers' strategic beliefs for overcoming potential competitors follow a traditional and new logic.	21.7
Market adjustment and stability of developed strategies	Due to market fluctuations, the marketing strategies of the company do not have proper stability and executive guarantee.	15.6
Capacity of risk-taking in international markets	The company's ability to take risks versus international markets is very low due to international issues and challenges and restrictions on foreign exchange.	18.3
Attention to innovation in the production and distribution of commodities and services	In this company, no attention has been paid to innovation in the production and distribution of neglected goods and services.	12.5
The effect of climatic and geographical conditions on the use of products and the absorption of the target community	Not much attention has been paid to the geographical factor and the impact of climatic conditions on product usage and attracting the target community in the marketing efforts of this company. The advertising focus is primarily on large cities, regardless of the climatic situation.	20.6
Ideological and cultural instances in customs and traditions for the use of leather products	Some company managers believe that in certain segments of Iranian society and international markets, there is a particular aversion to using leather and leather products due to ideological beliefs prevalent in those regions. Therefore, it is necessary to cultivate a culture that encourages the use of these products, and synthetic leather should be introduced as an alternative. However, at present, synthetic leather has no place in the company's plans.	11.5
Having a dynamic and efficient product transportation system	The company does not require a dynamic and efficient product transportation system, as it already operates through active agencies in several large cities and metropolises, as well as online stores.	60.8
Proximity of production centers to consumption centers	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	9.8
Ease of access to domestic resources and raw materials	Due to economic turmoil, an unprecedented increase in inflation, and the prevalence of low-quality and cheap imported products, access to high-quality domestic resources required by the company has become increasingly risky.	56.3



Table 5

*The Final Status of the Targeting Strategy Category in Maral Leather Company.*

Concepts	Description	Score
Legal facilitation of the export platform of leather products to neighboring countries	Due to legal gaps for export in the Iranian market, competitiveness and related targeting are limited.	46.3
Facilitation of customs regulations for export to international markets	The company uses up-to-date mechanisms, as well as experts familiar with customs laws, in international markets	74.6
Specific subsidies to compete with neighboring leather-producing countries	The company needs subsidies and bank loans with low interest rates and long intermission to be able to successfully compete with neighboring producing countries.	34.5
Reducing legal gaps in the process of production and export of leather products	Reducing legal gaps in the production and export process of leather products enhances the company's competitiveness and targeting.	69.6
Exogenous characteristics of international markets	The company uses up-to-date mechanisms, as well as experts familiar with the features and rules of international markets.	75.1
Export profitability	In this company, the profitability of exports is moderate and is more affected by foreign policy fluctuations and international sanctions than domestic mechanisms.	37.2
Exchange rate fluctuations and their impact on the export of leather products	Exchange rate fluctuations, sanctions, and a sudden rise in inflation have had a significant effect on the company's exports.	51.5
How to be present and advertise in international markets	The company has employed people familiar with the characteristics of international markets.	73.0
Features of manufacturing and trading companies in the domestic leather market	There is a working group in the company to monitor and identify the characteristics of manufacturing and trading companies in the domestic leather market.	81.6
Attention of Iranian leather industry and exporters union to the appropriate strategy	The company has a good two-way relationship with the union of Exporters of leather products.	88.3
Gradual and possible changes in the competitive resources of international markets	The company has a working group to monitor and identify gradual and possible changes in the competitive resources of international markets.	73.5
How to exploit new and innovative markets	The company has a working group to deal with how to exploit new and innovative markets.	70.3
Setting long-term and medium-term goals	The company has a mission statement and long-term, medium-term and short-term goals.	88.4
Increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region	The company does not have significant competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region.	5.5
Improving bargaining power with customers and suppliers	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	9.3
Strategies for providing alternative services to competitors	The company has plans to provide alternative services and reduce the price of products through this.	79.1
Studying and analyzing the working method of current competitors	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	8.6
Recognizing the characteristics and goals of customers	The company needs powerful and serious mechanisms to recognize the characteristics and goals of customers.	14.5
Examining the characteristics of the target market	The company needs powerful and serious mechanisms to recognize the characteristics of the target market.	16.6
How to choose a target market	The company needs powerful and serious mechanisms to recognize how to select the target market	44.3
Having the necessary capacity to invest	The company has the necessary capacity to invest in the domestic and international markets with a focus on regional countries.	73.7
Setting the goal to differentiate products from competitors' products	The company does not have a significant strategy to target differentiating its products from competitors' products.	11.3
Setting the goal to provide special services to customers	The company does not have a significant strategy to provide special services to customers.	15.2
Having a history in the leather industry	The managers of the company have an acceptable history and experience in the leather industry.	82.5

their impact on the export of leather products, setting the goal to differentiate products from competitors' products, and increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with

countries in the region.

Table 10 shows the ranking of criteria for a positioning strategy. Identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources,

Table 6

*The Final Status of the Positioning Strategy Category in Maral Leather Company.*

Concepts	Description	Score
Determining the company's performance based on customer feedback	The company has no significant strategy to determine the company's performance based on customer opinions.	20.5
Setting up a monitoring and responding system for customer critiques and recommendations	The company intends to set up a monitoring and responding system for customer critiques and suggestions.	61.8
The competitiveness of the manufactured products versus the global market context	The company has the necessary capacity to compete in the domestic and international markets with a focus on regional countries.	72.3
Identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources	The company has the necessary capacity to invest in the domestic and international market with a focus on regional countries.	82.0
Recognizing and having the values demanded by the target market	The company has up-to-date mechanisms, as well as experts familiar with the values demanded by the target market.	84.3
Improving the transfer of managerial and marketing mentality to internal and external arenas	The company does not have a significant strategy to improving the transfer of management and marketing mentality in the domestic and foreign arenas.	16.1
Creating synergies in the process of international trade	The company has a working group to monitor and identify gradual and possible changes in the competitive resources of international markets in order to create synergy in the international trade process.	72.5
Taking a high risk in decision-making	The company has a high capacity for risk-taking in decision-making.	64.6
Improving the management and business relations and capabilities of the company	There are no significant considerations in the company to improve the relations and managerial and commercial capabilities of the company.	4.6
Identifying weaknesses and threats in domestic and international markets	The company has a working group to monitor and identify gradual and possible changes in the competitive resources of international markets to identify weaknesses and threats in domestic and international markets.	73.9
Enhancing the efficiency and performance of the company	The company has a serious concern and long-term plan to increase its efficiency and performance.	61.5
Improving the quality of manufactured and exported products	In this company, there is a serious concern and long-term plan to improve the quality of manufactured and exported products.	79.3
Providing appropriate in-service and after-sales services	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	12.1
Developing an optimal recruitment protocol for employing capable forces in the field of marketing	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	19.5
Proportionality of measures related to customer perception of the brand	This category is not the concern of managers in this company.	8.0
Necessary potential to promote sales in domestic and international markets	The company has a working group to monitor and identify gradual and possible changes in the competitive resources of international markets to enhance its potential to promote sales in domestic and international markets.	72.4

improving the quality of manufactured and exported products, and identifying weaknesses and threats in domestic and international markets are ranked first to third, respectively.

**Conclusion and policy implications**

According to the results, the most important segmenting strategy criterion influenc-

ing the development of a product market for Iran's leather industry, from the perspective of interviewed experts, is managers' attention to strategic beliefs. Following this, attention to the personality characteristics of the target market and market adjustment and stability of developed strategies rank second and third, respectively. This highlights the significance of adopting a segmenting-based

Table 7

*The Significance of Friedman's Test.*

Number of observations	$\chi^2$	Degrees of freedom	P-value
10	43,211	7	0.000

Table 8

*Ranking of Segmenting Strategy Criteria in the Iranian Leather Market.*

Final indicator	Mean rank	Rank	
Segmenting strategy	Attention to the personality characteristics of the target market	3,94	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Ease of access to domestic resources and raw materials	3,93	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Cultural flexibility in changing management practices	3,89	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Organizational culture based on active partnership of employers, workers, and the market	3,87	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Managers' attention to strategic beliefs	3,86	5 <sup>th</sup>
	Capacity of risk-taking in international markets	3,84	6 <sup>th</sup>
	Market adjustment and stability of developed strategies	3,80	7 <sup>th</sup>
	Attention to innovation in the production and distribution of commodities and services	3,77	8 <sup>th</sup>

Table 9

*Ranking of Targeting Strategy Criteria in the Iranian Leather Market.*

Final indicator	Mean rank	Rank	
Targeting strategy	Attention of Iranian leather industry and exporters union to the appropriate strategy	3,75	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Having a history in the leather industry	3,74	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Strategies for providing alternative services to competitors	3,73	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Exogenous characteristics of international markets	3,71	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Having the necessary capacity to invest	3,69	5 <sup>th</sup>
	How to be present and advertise in international markets	3,65	6 <sup>th</sup>
	How to exploit new and innovative markets	3,63	7 <sup>th</sup>
	Reducing legal gaps in the process of production and export of leather products	3,52	8 <sup>th</sup>
	Exchange rate fluctuations and their impact on the export of leather products	3,43	9 <sup>th</sup>
	Setting the goal to differentiate products from competitors' products	3,35	10 <sup>th</sup>
	Increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region	3,32	11 <sup>th</sup>

strategy for developing the product market in Iran's leather industry. It suggests that marketing and business experts in the Iranian leather industry emphasize the importance of developing and maintaining a marketing strategy among all segmenting criteria.

For the targeting strategy, the most crucial criteria influencing the development of the

product market in the Iranian leather industry are how to exploit new and innovative markets, increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with regional countries, and having the necessary capacity to invest, ranking first, second, and third, respectively. This underscores the importance of factors related to competitiveness and the target market in

Table 10

*Ranking of Positioning Strategy Criteria in the Iranian Leather Market.*

	<b>Final indicator</b>	<b>Mean rank</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Positioning strategy	Identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources	3.87	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Improving the quality of manufactured and exported products	3.86	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Identifying weaknesses and threats in domestic and international markets	3.84	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Necessary potential to promote sales in domestic and international markets	3.80	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Creating synergies in the process of international trade	3.74	5 <sup>th</sup>
	The competitiveness of the manufactured products versus the global market context	3.73	6 <sup>th</sup>
	Taking a high risk in decision-making	3.71	7 <sup>th</sup>
	Improving the transfer of managerial and marketing mentality to internal and external arenas	3.69	8 <sup>th</sup>
	Developing an optimal recruitment protocol for employing capable forces in the field of marketing	3.65	9 <sup>th</sup>

the development of a product market for Iran's leather industry. Experts in marketing and business fields in Iran's leather industry emphasize focusing on the target market and competition more than other targeting criteria when developing a marketing strategy.

Regarding the positioning strategy criteria influencing the development of a product market for Iran's leather industry, experts suggest that identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic strategies is of utmost importance, followed by the competitiveness of products in the global market and improving the transfer of managerial and marketing mentality to internal and external arenas, ranking second and third, respectively. Thus, improving competitive advantages in the international context plays an important role in developing a market for Iran's leather industry. Marketing and business experts in this industry argue that the most critical positioning criterion is to develop a strategy based on improving and distinguishing products in competitive international markets.

Based on the results of Friedman's test, the criteria of the segmenting strategy for Iran's leather market are ranked as follows: "attention to the personality characteristics of the target market," "ease of access to domestic resources and raw materials," "cultural flexibility in changing management practices,"

"organizational culture based on active partnership of employers, workers, and the market," "managers' attention to strategic beliefs," "capacity of risk-taking in international markets," "market adjustment and stability of developed strategies," and "attention to innovation in the production and distribution of commodities and services," respectively.

Similarly, the criteria of the targeting strategy for Iran's leather market are ranked as follows: "attention of Iranian leather industry and exporters union to appropriate strategy," "having a history in the leather industry," "strategies for providing alternative services to competitors," "exogenous characteristics of international markets," "having the necessary capacity to invest," "how to be present and advertise in international markets," "how to exploit new and innovative markets," "reducing legal gaps in the process of production and export of leather products," "exchange rate fluctuations and its impact on the export of leather products," and "increasing competitiveness in the leather industry with countries in the region," respectively.

Finally, Friedman's test ranked the criteria of the positioning strategy as follows: "identifying the status and appropriateness of strategic resources," "improving the quality of manufactured and exported products," "identifying weaknesses and threats in do-

mestic and international markets," "necessary potential to promote sales in domestic and international markets," "creating synergies in the process of international trade," "the competitiveness of the manufactured products versus the global market context," "taking a high risk in decision-making," "improving the transfer of managerial and marketing mentality to internal and external arenas," and "developing an optimal recruitment protocol for employing capable forces in the field of marketing," respectively.

Based on the results, it is recommended to the Iranian Leather Exporters Union or the companies in this industry to conduct free training courses to educate leather product marketing and development strategists. Additionally, plans should be developed to increase the awareness of leather market managers and activists about the importance of strategic beliefs, market adjustment, and stability of strategies. Furthermore, officials and policymakers should adopt macro-level strategies to introduce the status and appropriateness of the Iranian leather industry's strategic resources at the global level.

Since the research data were collected through interviews, the respondents' personal opinions may have influenced them, potentially introducing bias into the results. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, not all respondents could be interviewed face-to-face, resulting in most interviews being conducted online or by telephone, which may have imposed limitations on the accuracy of information gathered from the participants. It is recommended to consider these points in future research endeavors.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was solely responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the results, and preparation of the manuscript.

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