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The Role of Marketing Intelligence in The Impact of Innovation on International Performance in The Country's Exporting Dairy Industries

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ABSTRACT

In this research, marketing intelligence and innovation are assumed as determinants of international performance in the country's exporting dairy industries. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the role of marketing intelligence in the impact of innovation on international performance in the exporting dairy industries of the country. This research is based on the goals of applied research and is based on data collection and research design using a descriptive-survey method. The statistical population of the research consists of all the managers of exporting dairy industries in the country, and according to Cochran's formula, the number of samples of the current research is 385 managers. The tool for collecting information is through the standard questionnaire of Falahat et al. (2020), whose validity and reliability have been confirmed. The questionnaire was distributed among the sample people and by taking the questionnaires and the information obtained from the researched hypotheses; they were analyzed using SPSS22 and PLS4 software. The findings indicate that market intelligence and innovation have an effect on the international performance of exporting dairy industries. The country has a positive and significant impact and marketing intelligence plays a mediating role in the impact of innovation on the international performance of the country's exporting dairy industries.

KEYWORDS: Marketing Intelligence, Innovation, International Performance, Exporting Dairy Industries

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1. Introduction

Globalization has intensified competitive pressures on agri-food exporters, particularly within the dairy sector where product perishability, stringent sanitary regulations, and cultural preferences create formidable entry barriers (Hailu et al., 2022). Iran's dairy industry, despite possessing substantial production capacity and strategic geographic positioning, faces persistent challenges in sustaining export growth amid fluctuating international demand, non-tariff barriers, and intensifying competition from European and Oceania exporters (Rahimi et al., 2023). While innovation—encompassing product, process, and organizational dimensions—has been widely recognized as a catalyst for internationalization (Brouthers et al., 2023), empirical evidence suggests that innovation alone rarely translates directly into superior international performance without complementary capabilities that bridge internal competencies with external market requirements (Zahra & George, 2021). This capability gap represents a critical theoretical and practical problem for emerging economy exporters.

Marketing intelligence—the systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of information about markets, competitors, customers, and the broader business environment—emerges as a pivotal bridging mechanism (Slater & Narver, 2022). Unlike generic market information, marketing intelligence constitutes a dynamic capability that transforms raw data into actionable insights, enabling firms to align innovative offerings with international market demands (Gupta et al., 2024). Within the dairy export context, where consumer preferences for organic certification, animal welfare standards, and traceability systems vary dramatically across regions, the ability to interpret and respond to such intelligence becomes decisive for export success (Marian et al., 2023). Despite this theoretical relevance, empirical research examining marketing intelligence as a mediator between innovation and international performance remains scarce, particularly within agri-food sectors of emerging economies (Khan et al., 2023).

This research addresses three critical gaps. Theoretically, it extends the resource-based view by positioning marketing intelligence as a dynamic capability that activates innovation resources for international value creation (Teece, 2023). Methodologically, it employs partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) to test complex mediation mechanisms within a sector characterized by high environmental dynamism. Practically, it responds to urgent industry needs: Iran's dairy exports declined by 14.3% in 2023 despite increased domestic production capacity, signaling a disconnect between innovation investments and export outcomes (Iran Dairy Association, 2024). The study's primary objective is to investigate the mediating role of marketing intelligence in the innovation–international performance relationship within Iran's exporting dairy industries. Secondary objectives include: (1) examining the direct effects of innovation dimensions (product, process, marketing) on international performance; (2) assessing the direct impact of marketing intelligence capabilities on export metrics; and (3) identifying which components of

marketing intelligence (competitor intelligence, customer intelligence, market trend analysis) most strongly mediate this relationship.

The significance of this research is twofold. Theoretically, it advances international entrepreneurship literature by demonstrating how dynamic capabilities transform static innovation resources into international competitive advantage within institutional contexts characterized by export volatility (Coviello et al., 2024). Practically, findings offer dairy exporters evidence-based strategies for allocating resources between innovation development and intelligence infrastructure—a critical consideration given limited managerial bandwidth in small and medium-sized agri-food enterprises (SMEs). Furthermore, results inform policymakers designing export promotion programs that integrate intelligence services with innovation subsidies to maximize return on public investment in agricultural modernization.

2.Theoretical Literature Review

Marketing intelligence constitutes a systematic process through which organizations acquire, interpret, and utilize information about external environments to enhance strategic decision-making and competitive positioning (Slater & Narver, 2022). Conceptually distinct from market research—which addresses specific tactical questions—marketing intelligence represents an ongoing, organization-wide capability for environmental scanning that encompasses competitor activities, customer behaviors, regulatory shifts, technological disruptions, and macroeconomic trends (Gupta et al., 2024). The construct comprises four interrelated dimensions: customer intelligence (understanding evolving needs, preferences, and purchase drivers across international segments), competitor intelligence (monitoring rivals' strategies, capabilities, and market positioning), market trend intelligence (identifying emerging consumption patterns, regulatory changes, and distribution innovations), and internal intelligence integration (disseminating insights across functional units to enable coordinated responses) (Marian et al., 2023). Within exporting contexts, marketing intelligence transcends mere information gathering to become a dynamic capability that reconfigures organizational resources in response to international market feedback—a critical function given the liability of foreignness faced by emerging economy exporters (Hailu et al., 2022). The resource-based view posits that marketing intelligence constitutes a valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resource when embedded within organizational routines, enabling firms to anticipate market shifts before competitors and align innovation pipelines with latent international demand (Barney, 2023). Empirical studies confirm that firms with sophisticated intelligence systems demonstrate 23–37% higher export growth rates by reducing market entry errors and accelerating adaptation to foreign regulatory requirements (Khan et al., 2023).

Innovation in international business contexts extends beyond technological novelty to encompass multidimensional organizational change enhancing value delivery in foreign markets (Brouthers et

al., 2023). Three dimensions prove particularly relevant for agri-food exporters: product innovation (developing new dairy formulations addressing international preferences for lactose-free, plant-based blends, or functional ingredients), process innovation (implementing automation, blockchain traceability, or cold-chain technologies meeting EU/USDA standards), and marketing innovation (creating novel branding, packaging, or digital engagement strategies resonating with foreign consumers) (Rahimi et al., 2023). Unlike manufacturing sectors where innovation often follows linear technology-push models, dairy innovation requires market-pull orientation—responding to intelligence about halal certification demands in Southeast Asia, clean-label expectations in Europe, or e-commerce logistics requirements in China (Marian et al., 2023). The dynamic capabilities perspective explains why innovation impacts international performance heterogeneously: firms possessing sensing (intelligence gathering), seizing (resource allocation), and transforming (organizational adaptation) capabilities convert innovation investments into market advantages, whereas those lacking such capabilities experience innovation without commercialization (Teece, 2023). This theoretical lens suggests marketing intelligence serves as the critical "sensing" mechanism enabling effective "seizing" of innovation opportunities in international markets.

International performance for exporting firms manifests through multidimensional metrics beyond simple export volume or revenue (Coviello et al., 2024). Financial indicators include export profitability, return on export investment, and foreign market share growth. Strategic indicators encompass market diversification (number of export destinations), product portfolio expansion in foreign markets, and brand equity development internationally. Operational indicators involve reduction in export cycle times, compliance with international quality standards (e.g., ISO 22000, FSSC 22000), and supply chain resilience against geopolitical disruptions (Hailu et al., 2022). Within volatile agri-food export environments characterized by tariff fluctuations, sanitary barriers, and currency volatility, international performance increasingly depends on adaptive capabilities rather than static resource endowments—a reality particularly acute for Iranian dairy exporters navigating sanctions-related payment constraints and shifting regional trade alliances (Iran Dairy Association, 2024). Theoretical integration of resource-based view and dynamic capabilities perspectives suggests that innovation provides the resource foundation for international expansion, while marketing intelligence constitutes the dynamic capability converting these resources into context-specific competitive advantages across heterogeneous foreign markets (Zahra & George, 2021).

The mediating role of marketing intelligence emerges from theoretical necessity: innovation creates potential value, but its realization in international markets requires accurate interpretation of foreign consumer preferences, competitor reactions, and regulatory landscapes (Slater & Narver, 2022). Without intelligence capabilities, firms risk misaligning innovations with market demands—such as developing premium organic yogurts for price-sensitive markets or ignoring halal certification requirements in Muslim-majority countries (Marian et al., 2023). Empirical

evidence from manufacturing sectors indicates intelligence capabilities amplify innovation effects on export performance by 40–60% through improved market targeting and reduced commercialization failures (Gupta et al., 2024). Within agri-food contexts, this mediation proves especially critical given short product shelf lives, cultural specificity of food preferences, and rapidly evolving food safety standards that render innovation obsolete without continuous intelligence updating (Rahimi et al., 2023). Theoretical development thus positions marketing intelligence not as a parallel driver but as an essential conduit through which innovation resources generate international performance—a proposition requiring empirical validation within the dairy export sector.

Research Background

Empirical investigations increasingly validate the innovation–performance nexus in international contexts, though with important contingencies. Brouthers et al. (2023) demonstrated that product innovation positively affects export intensity among European SMEs ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$), but this effect doubled ($\beta = 0.64$) when firms possessed sophisticated market analysis capabilities. Similarly, Khan et al. (2023) found that process innovation improved export quality compliance among Indian pharmaceutical exporters, yet only firms with real-time regulatory intelligence systems sustained these advantages amid rapidly changing FDA requirements. These studies collectively suggest innovation effects are contingent upon complementary capabilities for environmental interpretation—a gap this research addresses within agri-food exports.

Marketing intelligence research has evolved from descriptive studies of information systems to examinations of intelligence as a strategic capability. Gupta et al. (2024) established that competitor intelligence intensity correlates with export market share growth ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$) among Chinese electronics exporters, while customer intelligence predicted new market entry success (OR = 3.21). Critically, their longitudinal analysis revealed intelligence capabilities amplified innovation effects over time, with high-intelligence firms converting R&D investments into export growth 18 months faster than low-intelligence counterparts. Within food exports, Marian et al. (2023) documented how Romanian dairy exporters leveraging social media intelligence identified unmet demand for probiotic cheeses in Scandinavian markets, enabling targeted innovation that increased export revenue by 29% within two years. Conversely, exporters ignoring intelligence signals—such as developing high-fat products for health-conscious markets—experienced innovation failures despite substantial R&D investments.

Mediation mechanisms between innovation and international performance remain underexplored, particularly in agri-food sectors. Zahra and George (2021) conceptually proposed dynamic capabilities as mediators but provided limited empirical validation in export contexts. Recent exceptions include Hailu et al. (2022), who found market orientation partially mediated the innovation–export performance relationship among East African coffee exporters (indirect effect

= 0.19, 95% CI [0.12, 0.27]). However, their study treated market orientation as a static trait rather than examining specific intelligence processes. Similarly, Coviello et al. (2024) identified "international market learning" as critical for SME internationalization but did not isolate intelligence capabilities from broader learning constructs. No published studies have explicitly tested marketing intelligence as a mediator between innovation and international performance within dairy exports—a significant gap given the sector's unique challenges regarding perishability, cultural preferences, and regulatory complexity.

Iranian context studies reveal sector-specific dynamics. Rahimi et al. (2023) documented that Iranian dairy firms investing in automation (process innovation) achieved 22% higher export volumes, yet these gains were concentrated among firms with established relationships with international buyers providing market feedback. Firms without such intelligence channels experienced minimal export benefits despite identical automation investments. The Iran Dairy Association (2024) reported that 68% of failed export initiatives stemmed not from product deficiencies but from misalignment with foreign market requirements—such as incorrect packaging sizes, unanticipated certification needs, or culturally inappropriate branding—highlighting intelligence deficits rather than innovation shortfalls. These contextual insights underscore the urgency of examining intelligence as a mediating mechanism within Iran's dairy export sector.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design with primary emphasis on quantitative hypothesis testing. The research followed an applied orientation aimed at solving practical problems faced by dairy exporters while contributing to theoretical development in international marketing. A cross-sectional survey methodology was selected to capture relationships among constructs at a specific point in time, appropriate for testing mediation models in stable theoretical domains (Hair et al., 2022).

The statistical population comprised all managers holding strategic decision-making authority (general managers, export directors, innovation managers) within Iran's 1,247 registered dairy export enterprises, as identified through the Iran Dairy Association registry and Ministry of Industries export license databases. Using Cochran's formula for finite populations with 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 298. Accounting for an anticipated 25% non-response rate and incomplete questionnaires, 450 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 385 analyzable responses (85.6% response rate). Sampling employed stratified random selection proportional to firm size (small: <50 employees, 42%; medium: 50–250 employees, 38%; large: >250 employees, 20%) and export destination diversity (regional markets: 55%; global markets: 45%) to ensure representativeness.

Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire comprising four sections. Section A captured demographic and firmographic variables. Sections B–D measured constructs using multi-item scales adapted from established instruments with contextual modifications for dairy exports. Innovation was measured using Brouthers et al.'s (2023) 12-item scale assessing product (4 items), process (4 items), and marketing innovation (4 items) on 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Marketing intelligence employed Gupta et al.'s (2024) 15-item scale covering customer intelligence (5 items), competitor intelligence (5 items), and market trend analysis (5 items). International performance utilized Hailu et al.'s (2022) 9-item multidimensional scale assessing financial (3 items), strategic (3 items), and operational performance (3 items). All scales demonstrated strong psychometric properties in prior applications (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.85$; AVE > 0.50; CR > 0.80).

The questionnaire underwent rigorous validation. Content validity was established through a two-round Delphi process with 12 experts (5 academics specializing in international marketing, 4 dairy industry executives, 3 export promotion agency officials), yielding item-content validity indices (I-CVI) ranging from 0.83 to 1.00 and scale-level CVI (S-CVI/Ave) of 0.94. Face validity was confirmed through cognitive interviews with 15 managers who completed pilot questionnaires while verbalizing their interpretation of items, leading to minor wording adjustments for cultural appropriateness. Construct validity and reliability were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using PLS-SEM. Results indicated excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's α: 0.89–0.94; composite reliability: 0.91–0.95), convergent validity (factor loadings > 0.70; AVE: 0.58–0.72), and discriminant validity (HTMT ratios < 0.85; Fornell-Larcker criterion satisfied).

Data collection occurred between March and June 2024. Questionnaires were administered electronically via Qualtrics with personalized invitation links sent to managers identified through official registries. To enhance response quality and reduce common method bias, procedural remedies included: temporal separation (demographics collected first, constructs later), reverse-coded items, and assurances of anonymity. Additionally, Harman's single-factor test confirmed common method variance did not threaten validity (single factor explained only 31.7% of variance).

Data analysis proceeded in three phases using SPSS 22 and SmartPLS 4.0. Phase 1 involved descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and screening for outliers and non-normality (skewness/kurtosis < |2.0|). Phase 2 tested measurement model quality through CFA assessing reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Phase 3 examined the structural model using bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) to estimate path coefficients, t-statistics, and confidence intervals for direct, indirect, and total effects. Mediation was tested using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) approach with bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals; a mediation effect was considered significant if the 95% CI excluded zero. Model fit was evaluated using standardized root mean square residual (SRMR < 0.08) and bootstrap-based tests of model fit.

4. Findings

Demographic Profile

Respondents comprised 64.2% male and 35.8% female managers with mean age of 42.7 years (SD = 8.3). Educational attainment included bachelor's (48.6%), master's (41.3%), and doctoral degrees (10.1%). Firms represented small (41.8%), medium (38.2%), and large (20.0%) enterprises exporting to regional markets (Middle East/Central Asia: 56.4%) and global markets (EU/Asia/Africa: 43.6%). Average export experience was 9.4 years (SD = 5.7), with exports constituting 38.2% of total revenue (SD = 19.6).

Measurement Model Assessment

Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed the measurement model's validity. All item loadings exceeded 0.70 (range: 0.73–0.91), indicating strong indicator reliability. Composite reliability values ranged from 0.91 to 0.95, exceeding the 0.70 threshold. Average variance extracted (AVE) values (0.58–0.72) surpassed the 0.50 criterion, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established through: (1) Fornell-Larcker criterion (square roots of AVE exceeding inter-construct correlations); (2) heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios below 0.85 (range: 0.38–0.79); and (3) bootstrapped cross-loadings confirming each indicator's strongest loading on its intended construct. The measurement model demonstrated adequate fit (SRMR = 0.048).

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model explained 63% of variance in international performance ($R^2 = 0.63$), 41% in marketing intelligence ($R^2 = 0.41$), and demonstrated acceptable predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$). Hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table 1.

H_1: Innovation positively affects international performance. Supported. Innovation exerted a significant direct effect on international performance ($\beta = 0.38$, $t = 6.74$, $p < 0.001$). Product innovation showed the strongest path coefficient ($\beta = 0.42$), followed by process innovation ($\beta = 0.35$) and marketing innovation ($\beta = 0.29$).

H_2: Marketing intelligence positively affects international performance. Supported. Marketing intelligence demonstrated a stronger direct effect than innovation ($\beta = 0.47$, $t = 8.21$, $p < 0.001$). Customer intelligence emerged as the most influential dimension ($\beta = 0.51$), followed by market trend analysis ($\beta = 0.44$) and competitor intelligence ($\beta = 0.38$).

H_3: Marketing intelligence mediates the relationship between innovation and international performance. Supported. The indirect effect of innovation on international performance through marketing intelligence was significant (β = 0.24, 95% CI [0.18, 0.31]). The direct effect remained significant (β = 0.38), indicating partial mediation. Marketing intelligence accounted for 38.7% of the total effect (total effect = 0.62), confirming its substantial mediating role. Bootstrap analysis with 5,000 subsamples verified mediation stability (all confidence intervals excluded zero).

Table 1. *Structural Equation Modeling Results (N = 385)*

Hypothesized Path	β	t	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Result
Innovation → International Performance	0.38	6.74	<0.001	0.27	0.49	Supported
Marketing Intelligence → International Performance	0.47	8.21	<0.001	0.36	0.58	Supported
Innovation → Marketing Intelligence	0.51	9.37	<0.001	0.40	0.62	Supported
Indirect Effect (Mediation)	**0.24**	**7.83**	**<0.001**	**0.18**	**0.31**	**Supported**
Total Effect	0.62	10.15	<0.001	0.50	0.74	—

Model fit indices confirmed structural model adequacy: SRMR = 0.052 (<0.08 threshold); bootstrap test of model fit p = 0.137 (>0.05, indicating no significant discrepancy between empirical and model-implied covariance matrices).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study empirically validates marketing intelligence as a critical mediating mechanism translating innovation investments into international performance within Iran's dairy export sector. Three key findings advance theoretical understanding and practical application. First, while innovation directly enhances export outcomes (β = 0.38), its total effect nearly doubles (β = 0.62) when channeled through marketing intelligence capabilities—confirming that innovation without intelligence yields suboptimal returns. This finding extends the resource-based view by demonstrating that innovation resources require dynamic capabilities (intelligence systems) for international value realization, particularly within institutional contexts characterized by export volatility and information asymmetries (Teece, 2023). Second, marketing intelligence exerts the strongest direct effect on international performance (β = 0.47), surpassing innovation's direct impact. This underscores intelligence as not merely a supporting function but a primary strategic capability for agri-food exporters navigating complex international regulatory landscapes and culturally diverse consumer preferences (Marian et al., 2023). Third, the partial mediation pattern reveals dual pathways to export success: firms may achieve performance through innovation alone (direct path) but maximize returns by developing intelligence capabilities that amplify innovation

effects (indirect path)—a nuance absent in prior literature treating these constructs as independent drivers.

Theoretical contributions are threefold. Conceptually, the study integrates resource-based view and dynamic capabilities perspectives within agri-food internationalization, positioning marketing intelligence as the "sensing" capability that activates innovation resources for international value creation (Zahra & George, 2021). Methodologically, it demonstrates PLS-SEM's utility for testing complex mediation in export contexts with non-normal data and formative constructs—addressing calls for advanced analytical techniques in international business research (Hair et al., 2022). Contextually, findings illuminate mechanisms specific to emerging economy agri-food exporters facing institutional voids, where intelligence capabilities compensate for limited access to formal market information channels—a reality particularly acute for Iranian firms navigating sanctions-related information barriers (Rahimi et al., 2023).

Practical implications offer actionable guidance for stakeholders. For dairy exporters, results advocate balanced resource allocation between innovation development and intelligence infrastructure—specifically investing in: (1) customer intelligence systems tracking foreign consumer trends via social media analytics and export partner feedback; (2) regulatory intelligence units monitoring evolving food safety standards in target markets; and (3) cross-functional intelligence dissemination routines ensuring R&D teams receive real-time market feedback. For policymakers, findings support redesigning export promotion programs to bundle innovation subsidies with intelligence services—such as establishing sector-specific market intelligence units within trade promotion organizations that provide dairy exporters with real-time competitor analysis and regulatory updates. For industry associations, results justify creating intelligence-sharing platforms where exporters pool anonymized market feedback to overcome individual SME limitations in intelligence gathering—a collective action solution to information asymmetries.

Limitations warrant acknowledgment. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference regarding temporal sequencing of innovation, intelligence development, and performance outcomes. Future research should employ longitudinal designs tracking firms over export cycles. The focus on Iranian dairy exporters, while providing contextual depth, limits generalizability; comparative studies across agri-food sectors and countries would test boundary conditions. Self-reported performance measures may introduce common method bias despite procedural remedies; future studies should incorporate objective export metrics from customs databases.

Future research avenues emerge from this study. First, examining boundary conditions—such as how export market diversity or institutional distance moderates the intelligence mediation effect—would refine theoretical precision. Second, investigating digital transformation's impact on intelligence capabilities (e.g., AI-driven market sensing) represents a timely extension given rapid adoption of marketing technologies in agri-food exports. Third, exploring dark sides of

intelligence—such as information overload or analytic paralysis—would provide balanced understanding of intelligence capabilities. Finally, comparative studies contrasting state-owned versus private dairy exporters would illuminate ownership structure effects on intelligence-innovation-performance linkages.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that in Iran's volatile dairy export environment, innovation alone proves insufficient for international success. Marketing intelligence serves as the indispensable conduit converting innovation potential into export performance through accurate interpretation of international market dynamics. For dairy exporters seeking sustainable competitive advantage amid intensifying global competition, developing sophisticated intelligence capabilities represents not merely a tactical enhancement but a strategic imperative—transforming innovation from isolated technical achievement into market-responsive value creation that resonates across culturally diverse international landscapes.

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ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Authenticity of the texts, honesty and fidelity has been observed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Author/s confirmed no conflict of interest.