

Investigating Effective Factors on Iran's Saffron Exportation

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Abstract

Saffron is known as a unique product to any Iranian, and it is used in foodstuffs, drugs and industry. Iran produces 80 percent of the world saffron; and therefore it is the greatest producer and exporter of this product. According to the advantage of Iran saffron over others, it can import a high amount of foreign currency to our country; however, unfortunately despite having an appropriate situation in saffron production, we still haven't been able to be a prominent producer of this product and we do not play a significant role in determining its price, due to different barriers in production, advertising, packaging, and export of it. Therefore, in this paper, we firstly discuss its benefits and its trade. The next step in this sequence would be mentioning the trade barriers and offering relevant suggestions for them. In terms of objective, the current paper is an applied one. And in order to test the hypotheses, we used a survey-descriptive method for data gathering. After questionnaire designing and testing validity and reliability of it, findings of the research was analyzed by the SPSS software. The population includes 80 persons, among saffron producers and exporters. The results showed that the followings are effective in increasing the export of saffron: advertising, suitable packaging, customization, caring about needs, wants and tastes (preferences) of global markets, appropriate price determining strategies, general and specialized training, notifying and informing the benefits and properties of saffron, and acquainting exporters with foreign markets.

Key Words: *Saffron, Competitiveness, Export.*

Introduction

The subsequences of single-production economy and high reliance on oil earnings, has made Iran vulnerable to external factors, such as oil price fluctuations. Thus, increasing non-oil exports has become more important in recent years. Whenever non-oil export is discussed, export of agricultural products occurs to the mind (Goharian,2000). Saffron, as the most expensive agricultural and medicinal product of the world, has a special place in Iran's industrial and exporting goods. Iran is known as the world's greatest producer of this product, in terms of quantity and quality due to the vast lands of Iran with a cultivation are of 41325 hectares, and annual production of 150 to 170 tons of saffron. On the other hand, according to the special climate of Iran, in which water is a limiter factor in agricultural development, saffron is a suitable herb to be cultivated in arid and semi-arid regions, like North Khorasan, Fars, Kerman and Yazd provinces. Approximately 100 thousand families are involved in planting, preserving and harvesting of saffron; and a population of 500,000 persons are subsisting on this herb, especially in the arid and semi-arid regions of

these provinces. Of the whole 230 tons produced saffron of the world, around 170 tons is harvested in Iran, and the left is mainly produced in Afghanistan, India, Morocco, Greece and Spain (AmiriAghdaie et al,2012).

Saffron special situation is due to its export promotion capability in global markets, which leads to an increase in foreign currency income. However, apart from different difficulties and problems of saffron production and processing methods done by farmers, which is mainly due to the lack of revision in the traditional structure of its production, there are numerous problems in the export of this valuable herb. These barriers are due to lack of attention to international standards, structure of distribution system, and lack of a coherent organization which can monitor and cover all the steps of production, advertising, and export of this product.

Currently, a handful of countries distribute this product to global markets. These countries purchase Iranian saffron cheaply and gain a high value added on it by rather a cheap processing; and export it to global markets by their own brand names. This has led to Iran's failure in becoming a dominant firm in the global markets, and also becoming a price determiner.

One of the most important factors that prevent Iran from gaining the real benefit of saffron (and on contrast, helps other countries to do so), is inappropriate packaging and bulk export of this product to the global markets.

Countries such as Spain and United Arab Emirates, purchase Iran's saffron in bulk scales, repack it and distribute it to the global markets by their own brand name, enjoying a higher added value. For instance, Spain, benefits 4 times more than Iran from Iranian saffron, by a minimum of investment. Trade promotion organization of Iran, declared that unfortunately, production and export of saffron has faced various challenges in recent years. Its export has been descending and the most influencing factors on this problem in Iran, are: lack of a professional dynamic trade organization for saffron, lack of attention to satisfaction of end consumers' needs of the global markets, indirect supporting of the saffron industry, appearance of new rivals like Afghanistan by the supports of European countries, substitution of unnatural colors instead of saffron due to its illogical price increase and lack of specified price determining strategies and price fluctuations, lack of appropriate advertising, trafficking in corm of saffron, lack of an accredited brand, and packaging problems.

In this paper we try to find the effective factors on Iran's saffron exportation, in order to increase the competitive capability, sales and also global market share.

Saffron

Saffron or rather the "red gold" is a native plant of Iran Plateau and was first planted in the age of medians. Saffron is entered in food chain from its corm to the leaves(McGee, 2004). Saffron, known as the health flower, the king of spices, and the red gold, is the most expensive plant on the whole earth; and it is the only plant that is sold on small scales of gram and ounce, rather than ton and kilogram.

Saffron is largely harvested in arid areas of Iran, in which winters are really cold and on the contrary summers are very hot. In fact, it is originate in the hillsides of Alvand Mountain (Hamedan). The first saffron farms were located around Hamedan and Kermanshah provinces and were taken to other parts of Iran such as Khorasan. Mass and high quality production of saffron has been continued in Ghehestan and Ghayenat (Islamic Republic of Iran's Center of Export Expansion, 2001).

Saffron is obtained from the stigma of saffron flower, in fact approximately, 10 grams of saffron is gained from 1000 flowers(Hill, 2004). Saffron is used in different foodstuffs, like rice, meat, cookies, ice cream, tea and pharmaceutical Industry, due to its unique benefits in taste, smell, color and medicinal benefits.

Saffron, commonly known as “saffron crocus”, is a genus in the family Iridaceae, grows to a height of 10-30 cm, and lasts for a few years. It is stemless, with compact corms that can be measured as large as 3-5 cm in diameter. It has fragrant flowers, each carpal bears up to 4 flowers which has 3 corollas, 3 similar purple petals and 3 stamens. Saffron has 5 to 11 true leaves that expand after the flowers have opened or do so simultaneously with their blooming, which are green with 1.5-3 cm in diameter. The red stigma is the edible and commercial portion of saffron(Ghorbani,2008). One of saffron main features, is that its flower buds before any vegetative organ. Despite the abundancy of completely grown flowers, production of fertile seed in the first steps is impossible. Moreover, saffron flowers should be harvested very early in the morning, before the weather gets hot. The harvest includes picking flowers and separating stigmas from other parts, and eventually, drying them (the stigmas).

The flowers last for 3 to 4 days. Each 2170 saffron flowers, weigh about 1 kilogram; and 1 kilo of saffron batches (stigma along with style) is gained from about 78 kilos of flowers. In order to gain 1 kilo of all red saffron, about 105 kilo of flower is required, and about 103 kilo of saffron flower is needed to gain 1 kilo of excellent saffron thread (the maximum left style length, which is connected to the stigma is less than 3 millimeters(AmiriAghdaie et al,2012).

After the flowers are harvested and the stigmas are cut out, the most important section is drying method of the stigmas; which should be done in a clean environment and in a short period of time(around 2 to 3 hours); and the temperature should be between 50 to 60 centigrade . Spanish drying method (Alekhitri) is the next step; and after that, microwave drying is the last step in this sequence. Currently, the whole steps of harvesting, cutting out the stigmas and saffron processing is done by hands(Iran’s Ministry of Agriculture, 2006).

Saffron Uses

Main saffron consumptions are in foodstuffs, medicines and chemical industry.

Food Consumptions

According to the FDA (United States food and drug administration) law, saffron is a legal natural color server, and the consumption amount as a natural flavor has no restrictions. It is used in making sausage and margarine-butter, cheese and dairy products- cakes and jelly and soda- chocolate and drinks- soup and rice and chicken.

Therapeutic Consumptions

Saffron eases digestion of food, due to its bitter components. Recent researches show that the existing components of saffron, can decrease the tissue tumors and is an anti-cancer product. Also it decreases blood serum fat and prevents blood serum from the hypolipemic status; it is Hematopoietic and eases blood circulation; moreover, it can significantly prevent Alzheimer and Parkinson from happening. The most important benefit of saffron is the treatment of depression. It is also used in the treatment of a large amount of illnesses physical disorders, such as head cold, flatulence, indigestion, jaundice, hepatitis, diabetes, spasms and... . And also is used as an appetizer, a stomach stimulator and a bracing material (Amiri Aghdaie & Davari, 2010).

Industrial Uses

Saffron is used to color silk, cotton and etc. Saffron is known as a luxurious product in Iran. Rareness of saffron in some months, due to challenges like drought, helps increase its price. However, primary producers are not beneficiary of this price increase. Contrary to expectations, they economically are really vulnerable and weak.

Iran's failure in introducing its saffron to global markets and its failure in achieving a good situation in saffron market, is due to Lack of attention to appropriate design and packaging. Other countries have used this opportunity and after purchasing the cheap saffron of Iran in bulk scales and packaging it in their own country, distribute it to other parts of the world with different brand names, as their own production more expensively. Unfortunately, only 15 percent of Iran's saffron is exported by a suitable packaging, and the left 85 percent is exported in large bulk scales. In a 5 year period, 70 percent of saffron world export is conducted by Iran, and respectively, Spain, United Arab Emirates, France and Sweden are chasing us. Therefore, not only we are losing a significant part of the added value and the income gained from this product, but also our role and share as the most important and influencing factor in the global market is fading (Amiri Aghdaie & Davari, 2010).

Competitiveness

Competitiveness is a fundamental issue and there are different scales to assess it. Competitiveness can help policy makers evaluate foreign trade situation of their country. Currently, according to our concerns about joining the WTO (world trade organization), competitiveness helps us achieve a suitable situation and stabilizing our country in global market. In a market-based economy, firms, compete in order to attract more customers; and thus, monitor each other and use various strategies to prosper. So competitiveness leads to the best performance of firms, and also leads to the production of goods and services with the least costs and prices. Competitive atmosphere, encourages development of entrepreneurial activities and entrance to new markets, by encouraging efficient and productive firm and penalizing un-efficient and non-productive firms (Traill, & Pitts 1998). In market ideal situation, firms react to changing market demand and continuous entrance of rivals with needed pace and flexibility. New firms entrance, establishes the required motivations to balance the market; although the firms adaption's power and pace, are considered to be the scales to specifically determine their effectiveness, and generally measure their competitiveness. Therefore, competition is the main motivating factor of competitiveness. Thus, generally speaking, competitiveness is firm's ability to face a persistent competitive situation (Amiri Aghdaie et al, 2012).

In the broad sense, competition means "the competent survival" and in another point of view, "competition, eliminates competition"; namely, market handlers, when facing the increasing competition and in order to achieve more profit, may get out of the track of healthy competition and eliminate it, to gain more power. As a matter of fact, there are numerous barriers in markets that prevent them from remaining real markets. For instance, there are firms that disrupt the mechanism of markets and prevent newcomers to enter. Such obstacles may occur because of non-symmetric data relating to markets, technology, regulations, and economy of scale, between opponent firms. Or may happen due to some anti-competitive actions of existing firms, in order to develop their control over the market and prevent newcomers from entering (Haghighat Talab, 2007). Wave of globalization and trade liberalization process, which has been eased and accelerated by fast progresses in technology, has created new dynamism and mobility in competition; and as a result competitiveness determining factors get more complicated.

Along with globalization and trade liberalization, the international and domestic market border has been faded; and as a result, traditional distinctions between national and international competitiveness is seemed to be useless. Ambiguity between these borders, causes trouble especially for small and medium firms that have been away from international competition due to national borders limitations. Ex-Competitive Firms (firms that were competing before liberalization) find it difficult to remain as before due to lack of financial resources and technological capabilities.

The important property of competition essence change, is the fundamental transformation in firms' structure. And, also transformation in production, advertising, national and international distribution channel of goods and services structure. In order to adapt to this situation and remain competitive, firms enjoy other firm's advantages and knowledge by inter-firm cooperation.

Export

Literally, export means the transition of goods or transferring products from one place to another; whether inside the borders of a country, or from inside to the outside of borders. In customs, export is the exit of goods from a country's customs territory and working and communicating with professional markets and professionals of markets beyond borders. Export is the commencement of communicating with others and develops country's economy, by the means of selling goods or services to other countries in order to earn foreign currency income; also contributes to the balance of trade and creating economic equilibrium. Mastery of communication skills with people and external groups, goal oriented working, competing, and persistency are the primary principles of exporting. Export needs turning professional, because export is totally a hunting ground in which there opportunity to hunt is rare. In global markets, opportunities are scarce, and get away quickly (Hosseini & Parmeh, 2009). Actually, Export is international marketing, entering countries with different culture, economy, policy, society and climate. Thus, we should treat depending on the differences. Marketing principles are similar all around the world; however, environmental and cultural situations differ (Joshi, R. M. 2005). Therefore our study shows that the following factors should be taken into consideration in exports:

1. Attempting to differentiate goods and services.
2. Flexible production instead of mass production
3. High speed, innovative, more and better servings.
4. Paying attention to the needs and wants of market and being market oriented.
5. Attempting to create more added value in comparison to rivals.
6. Paying attention to integration and making groups in market.
7. Close and continuous relationship with customers and distributors.
8. Paying attention to different market research methods.
9. Targeted attendance in exhibitions and to targeted advertising.
10. Paying attention to comprehensive serving (before purchase, while purchasing and after purchase services)
11. Studying productivity, quality management, and international standards.
12. Acquainting and using modern methods of selling, like E-Commerce.
13. Using the power of communication skills to communicate with officials and decision makers and power cores.
14. Paying sufficient attention to environmental and external factors.
15. Strong managing and immediate reaction to rivals' actions.

Saffron total export in 1392		
total	Weight(kilograms)	Value(dollar)
	136606	200271833

Reference: Iran's saffron exporters union

Saffron total export in 1393		
total	Weight(kilograms)	Value(dollar)
	10250	150700648

Reference: Iran's saffron exporters union

Research Background

Sherzeie and ghanbari (1379) investigated influencing factors on saffron export by evaluating supply and demand functions of pistachio. Results of the demand function evaluation showed an export price elasticity of export supply. Also production and domestic price factors, had a positive significant effect on the export supply of Iran's pistachio.

Kazemzade and Abunuri (1384), studied the effective factors on Iran's date export promotion; by evaluating the supply and demand functions of date. Results indicated that factors, like relative price of date export, actual exchange rate and date export volume, had a significant positive impact on the export demand of Iran's date. On the contrary, variable of date production of foreign countries and dummy variable of Iran-Iraq war, had negative effects on it.

Seyyed komeyl tayebi and Abdollah ghanbari (1384), investigated the effect of joining WTO on Iran's saffron export market (by focusing on Khorasan provinces); in order to investigate the export behavior of this product in export market, in both demand and supply points of view. In fact, if the effective factors on saffron export demand and supply, and the amount of these effects on export development is identified, then optimizing possibility of export market becomes available. Thus, by using econometric methods and needed time series date in a period, simultaneous equation of demand and supply of the products is calculated, by using dummy variables (WTO, unification and adjustment) as the indicators of Iran joining to WTO. The results showed a significant and positive effect of WTO variable (that indicates the organization establishment in 1995), on Iran's saffron export market. Fatemeh Pasban, claimed that the results of assessing saffron export supply function, shows that saffron production and actual exchange rate has had a positive and saffron export price and the War has had a negative effect on saffron export. By the way, statistical investigations show that saffron export earnings has been unstable in the investigation period, because of export demand, not the export supply. By taking the results into consideration, it seems that we should help promotion of saffron in global markets by paying enough attention to processing and marketing, and setting stable and effective foreign currency and trade policies.

Research Methodology

This research is an applied one in terms of goal, and a descriptive-survey style is used for data gathering in order to evaluate hypotheses. After questionnaire designing and testing the reliability and validity, the findings were analyzed by the SPSS software. The population is 80 persons among saffron producers and exporters. After studying the subject literature of the research, a questionnaire was designed and handed out to the sample. 75 out of 80 questionnaires filled by the producers and exporters, and they were analyzed after they had been handed in.

Sampling Method

Measurement and Data Gathering Tools

- **Data record fish:** written texts, including books, specialized articles about marketing, export, banding and also saffron industry, were used in order to study theoretical arguments about the research subject and also to study the subject literature.
- **Questionnaire:** the questionnaire used in this research consists of 8 sections; each section includes a few questions, designed using Likert spectrum.
- **Questionnaire reliability:** the questionnaires was given to 4 specialized marketers and also to 3 exporters, in order to determine the face reliability of the questionnaire. After applying their ideas and required reforming, the partial defects were eliminated.
- **Questionnaire validity:** if a questionnaire is valid, then there is a significant correlation between the actual and the observed scores; namely, if a similar research is conducted in another period, the results remain as before. In this research the validity was evaluated by Cronbach alpha as below:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k s_i^2}{\sigma^2} \right)$$

$$\alpha_h = 0.981$$

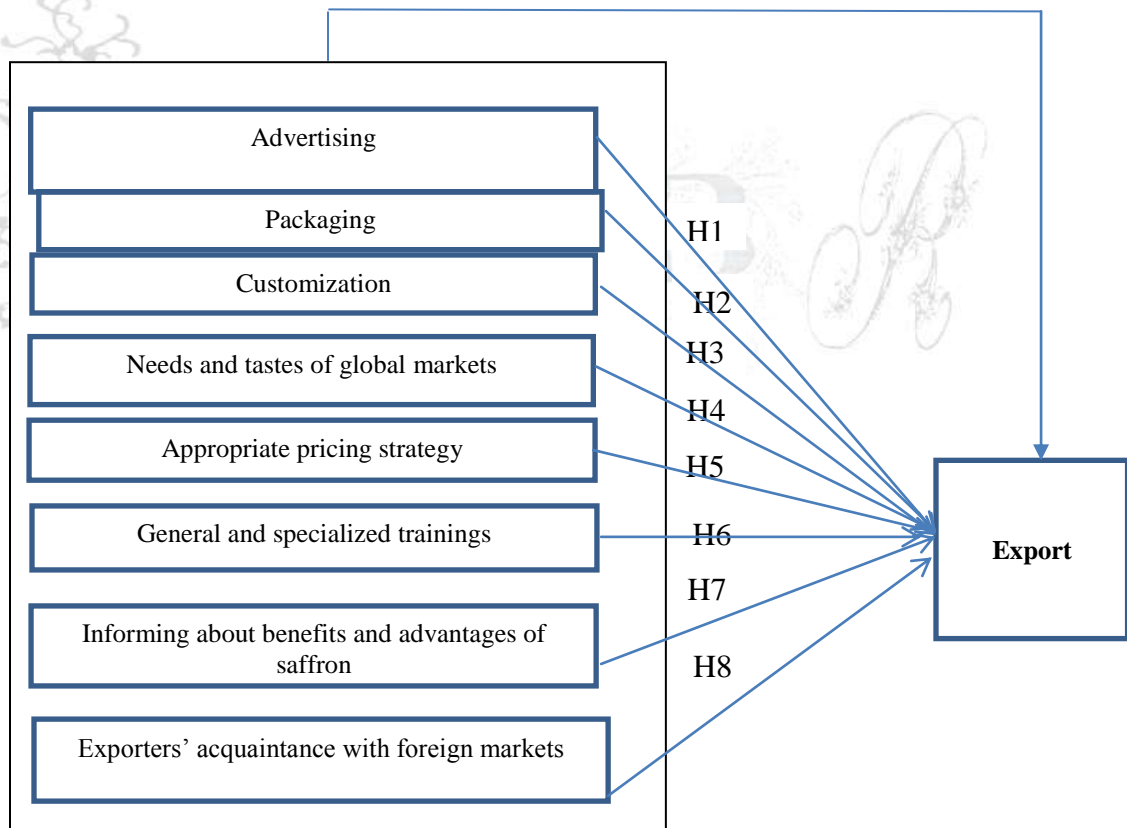
Is total score variance, s_i is the variance of each question and k is the number of questions. As you can see, α_h is greater than 0.7 and therefore the questionnaire is valid.

Independent variables include marketing, packaging, customer taste, price, general and specialized trainings, notifying the benefits and advantages of saffron, exporters acquaintance with foreign markets, and customization. Dependent variable of this research is saffron export volume.

Research Hypotheses are as Follows:

1. Appropriate branding approached advertising, affects saffron export increase (advertising)
2. Appropriate packaging, affects saffron export increase (product).
3. Tendency to customization, affects saffron export increase (customization).
4. Exporters’ attention to needs, wants, and tastes of global markets, affects saffron export increase (customers taste).
5. Appropriate pricing strategy, affects saffron export increase (price).
6. General and specialized trainings about production and quality development, affects saffron export increase.
7. Getting the target market acquainted with benefits and advantages of saffron, affects saffron export increase.
8. Getting the exporter acquainted with foreign suitable markets, affects saffron export increase

Conceptual Model



Each hypothesis includes a few questions of questionnaire. In order to score the hypotheses, average of questions were used to calculate response ratio. Comparing equality ratio of proponent p1 and opponent ratio p2 of each hypothesis is enough to reject or confirm the hypothesis. If the opponent and proponent ratios were not equal, then the hypothesis is confirmed or rejected, according to the calculated ratio.

$$\begin{cases} H_0: p_1 = p_2 \\ H_1: p_1 \neq p_2 \end{cases}$$

$$p_1 + p_2 = 1$$

$$p_1 = \frac{\text{proponent ratio}}{\text{total}}$$

Test measures are summarized in the following table:

P amount	Ratio	Hypothesis 1
Calculated probability level	p_2	opponent
	p_1	proponent

If the amount or level of probability of the mentioned hypothesis is lower than $\alpha = 0.05$, then zero hypothesis in the significance level of 0.05 will be rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference between opponent and proponent of the hypothesis and therefore it will be confirmed.

Hypotheses 1.

Studies show that 33/6 percent of respondents, appropriate branding approached advertising, highly affects the export of saffron (table1).

Table1. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 1

Very high	High	moderate	Low	Very low	option
%27/3	%33/6	%20/61	%10/31	%8/06	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 2.

35.1 percent of respondents believed that, suitable packaging very highly affects the export of saffron (table 2).

Table 2. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 2

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	option
%35/1	%31/5	%18/02	%7/21	%8/08	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 3.

26.75 percent of respondents agreed that customization tendency affects saffron export on a medium scale(table3).

Table 3. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 3

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	option
%24/85	%26/32	%26/75	%6/95	%5/87	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 4.

34.03 percent of respondents believed that exporters' attention to needs, wants and tastes of the global markets highly affects the export of saffron (table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 4

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	option
%27/22	%34/03	%24/45	%7/54	%5/8	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 5.

30.03 percent of respondents believed that a proper pricing strategy highly affects the export of saffron (table5).

Table 5. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 5

Very high	High	moderate	Low	Very low	option
%25/02	%30/03	%22/45	%12/8	%8/6	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 6.

32.07 percent of respondents believed that specialized and general trainings surrounding production and quality increase moderately affects the export of saffron(table,6).

Table 6. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 6

Very high	High	moderate	Low	Very low	option
%25/62	%28/5	%32/07	%9/23	%4/6	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 7.

32.2 percent of respondents believed that getting target market acquainted with the benefits and advantages of saffron highly affect the export of saffron (table, 7).

Table 7. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 7

Very high	High	moderate	Low	Very low	option
%29/8	%32/2	%26/05	%6/35	%5/1	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Hypothesis 8.

28.6 percent of respondents believed that getting exporters acquainted with foreign suitable markets moderately affect the export of saffron (table, 8).

Table 8. Respondents' opinion about hypothesis 8

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low	option
%23/04	%26/33	%28/6	%13/5	%9/12	Response percent

Reference: research findings

Opponent ratio of p2 and proponent ratio of p1 equality of one hypothesis is compared by using ratio test, in order to test hypotheses.

P amount	Proponent ration	opponent ratio	hypothesis
0/00	0/768	0/232	Hypothesis 1
0/00	0/825	0/175	Hypothesis 2
0/00	0/813	0/187	Hypothesis 3
0/00	0/823	0/177	Hypothesis 4
0/00	0/734	0/266	Hypothesis 5
0/00	0/845	0/155	Hypothesis 6
0/00	0/863	0/137	Hypothesis 7
0/00	0/787	0/213	Hypothesis 8

Reference: research findings

In all hypotheses, the P amount is lower than 0.05 which indicates that zero hypothesis in the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ is rejected. The proponent ratio is far higher than the opponent in each hypothesis, so we can conclude that the eight hypotheses are confirmed.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Previous conducted researches (discussed in the research background) and the research findings, show that the mentioned researches were done surrounding case studies of date and pistachio; and also, saffron has been investigated mainly in terms of price and demand. However, in the current research problems and barriers of export and the relevant solutions and strategies were studied; and the data analysis results will be presented as suggestions. Iran economy has been relying on the country's oil resources and due to the fluctuations in the oil market, generally, non-oil export potentials, and specifically, agricultural exports have been taken into consideration. If a country is rich of factors, like cheap producing factors and special climate, the possibility of competition with in the production of exporting products increases; in comparison to countries which are deprived of the mentioned factors.

Some products, like saffron and pistachio should be taken into consideration; since Iran has a high market share of the two products, in terms of export volume. Saffron advantages like low water requirements, no coincidence of its watering season with most products, high capability in job creation, foreign currency income and high price, justifies its high economic potential.

As mentioned before, 70 percent of saffron export is in the hands of Iran and a vast and developing market is in front of it. However correct use of this golden and unique opportunity requires exact planning and setting specified strategies.

In order to pass current situation and export barriers of saffron, we need to review the distribution system in different aspects, especially in the section of agriculture (continuous development of agriculture section), processing, changing and packaging industry, quality improvement and product hygiene, advertising and introducing the product to the world, suitable branding for this unique product. And eventually, effective and efficient marketing in global markets and conducting required actions to solve problems and eliminate defects and improving the system of marketing and exporting the saffron.

Training farmers, in order to acquaint them with modern farming principles. Traditional methods of saffron harvest, drying, separating, preserving, packaging, and export, should be replaced with Modern, systematic methods. Implementing product correct cycle, and direct relationship between exporter and farmers, transition of data and wants and needs of target market to farmers, producing and packaging the saffron as how customers want. And helping to enhance farmers' knowledge.

Paying attention to researches and using other parts of saffron plant in order to use them in paint, food and hygiene industry; which finally leads to use more of saffron. Increasing the use of saffron results in an increase in demand, job creation and more income for saffron farmers.

Saffron uses and Iran saffron are not known in many countries. Therefore international advertising through saffron introduction seminars beyond Iran's borders, newspapers, attendance in specialized and foodstuff exhibitions in other countries, and media can be effective in introducing and establishing a good situation for Iran saffron and creating loyalty in end users.

According to the research findings, we suggest the followings:

- Having suitable packaging, on the basis of the consumers of importer countries.
- Acquaint other countries with Iran product.
- Creating marketing groups while producers are present.

- Training utilizers for better distribution.
- Increasing competitiveness in contractors market.
- Training producers and exporters about trade laws.
- Coordinating the processes of production and export.
- Studying the image and imagination about Iranian saffron brands in target markets.
- Studying strategies and globalization steps of an Iranian brand in saffron industry

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