



## **NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF IRANIAN AND ARAB TRADERS OF THE PERSIAN GULF REGION IN TRADE BETWEEN THEM WITH A THEMATIC ANALYSIS APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders of the Persian Gulf region through a thematic analysis approach. This study is applied research. It is also applied research with a descriptive-exploratory approach. The intellectual paradigm is qualitative interpretation in terms of probing depth and terms of the nature of the data. The statistical population is Iranian and Arab businessmen of the Persian Gulf region with at least 5 years of business experience. The sample size of the research is 13 people according to the theorem of theoretical saturation because no new concept or material was added in the interview with the people. The sampling method in qualitative research was Snowball sampling. Therefore, the people who were interviewed mentioned the following people. Interviews were used to collect information. In this regard, the usage the thematic analysis approach has been used. The research model was drawn by MAXQAD 2022. In total, 7 main co with 38 sub-themes were extracted from the results. The main themes are cultural commonalities and differences, political laws and conditions, strategic positions, and obstacles. This research is descriptive-exploratory based on the method of data collection. Also, this research is considered applied research. Weakness, strengths and opportunities, threats, and global and international equations were extracted.

**Keywords:** Lived experience, Export, International trade, Theme analysis

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## **Introduction**

The 1980s and 1990s saw a significant increase in trade along with an unprecedented wave of trade liberalization and trade development concerning GDP, which was called exports as the engine of economic growth. There is a close relationship between economic growth and exports of each country (Quaye et al., 2017). The sustainable development of exports in the economic field is one of the most important national goals of Iran. Non-oil exports are a key and effective element in the economic development of our country. Because if we only depend on oil exports as a source of foreign currency income, it has disadvantages that hurt the country's economy as a result of the oil demand or global price fluctuations. For this reason, it is necessary to develop non-oil exports. According to the Iran Petroleum Ministry, the proven natural gas reserves of Iran are about 33 trillion cubic meters (17% of total global proven gas reserves). Similarly, it has more than 138 billion gas condensates and barrels of unsophisticated oil, 11% of the total volume of crude oil globally. Therefore, major sources of hydrocarbons, which are the main feedstock for the petrochemical industry, provide an economic advantage for the export of these products (Heydari et al., 2021).

In addition, like other societies, Iran has its own culture that has different values. These values, which are at the heart of the culture of Iranian society, have a profound impact on all the social behaviors of Iranian people and determine their tendency (Teymori et al., 2020). The growing economic market of this country has also increased the interest of other countries to trade with it (Bin Sawad, 2021). On the other hand, trade with a country is not easy and should be considered as a style of collaborative negotiations with that country. The variables considered in the negotiation style with countries are Cultural problems, Business attitude, Language proficiency, Politics, country history, Negotiation strategy, Advertising, and Procurement. These factors can lead to success in a successful business relationship (Martin and Larsen, 1999). For this reason, many countries fail in their international projects due to the limited knowledge of negotiators. Therefore, they should have a proper understanding of the negotiation style, culture, and behavior in each country (Rhode, 2010). Culture is an important variable that affects international business negotiations. Cultural values and norms can influence the

success or failure of negotiations (Teymori et al., 2020). Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain are Iran's neighbors in the Persian Gulf region, which are also known as members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council. The geopolitical position and special features of Iran in the region and the need to achieve the goals of the 20-year Vision Document are among the reasons that reveal the need to examine the commercial importance of these councils for Iran. According to this document, Iran should become the first economic, scientific, and technological power in the region by 2023. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the level of relations with the Arab states of the Persian Gulf (Niakoui et al., 2015).

According to the geographical conditions, regional developments, the new position of Iran in the post-sanction era, and the special view of the countries of the world on the economic capacities of the countries of the Persian Gulf (and the Middle East), the need to analyze Iran's trade relations with these countries make it necessary to review how to strengthen the export of Iranian goods and services to this region, especially the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar (Zolfaqari, 2007). Since ancient times, the various countries of the Persian Gulf (United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait) were considered natural trading partners of Iran and a suitable market for the export of Iranian goods. However, in recent decades and after the establishment of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, the United Arab Emirates alone has played this important role and received about 20% of Iran's total imports. Factors such as the conditions of the global economy and international trade, as well as the commercial policies adopted by Iran and the United Arab Emirates benefiting from the opportunities, have placed this country in this position (Shafiei et al., 2014). The Persian Gulf countries have strong trading ties with Iran and are a suitable market for increasing Iran's non-oil exports, while this trade is also beneficial for the other side.

Iran needs to reform the pattern of its economic relations with neighboring countries to strengthen its influence and make maximum use of its power on the regional scale. At present, this potential has not been used sufficiently and this has led to the few economic and social relationships between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries. This restriction on the economic structure of Iran is a special situation of its relationship with the western world. The complexity of the structural situation and the process of Iran's economy comes

from the fact that, on the one hand, the country is exposed to serious damage due to geographical distance from global markets. On the other hand, a policy with the global economic system is facing a big challenge caused by the structural conflict to enter these markets (Mokhtari et al., 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the weakness and strengths and evaluate the economic condition of the country to formulate an effective international economic plan and strategy in the conditions of sanctions and Post-sanctions. For this reason, the main question of the research is: How is the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders in the Persian Gulf region from online business?

### **International trade**

International trade is a trading system that occurs between different countries and plays an important role in the economy (Sukania et al., 2019). Research shows that commercial and international links open new ideas and understanding between two countries (Hedayat and Musari, 2022). Another researcher analyzed the impact of international trade on the economic growth and development of the country. It also provides various types of financing products to investors that small and medium-sized enterprises need (Hajdukiewicz et al., 2020). The banker will have an opportunity to secure financial resources due to business transactions (Nam et al., 2021). Now, international trade allows more effective trade and product availability for consumer needs (Alam et al., 2020).

The economic growth effect of trade has been the subject of much debate among academic researchers and practitioners, especially in developing countries. The economic growth effect of trade has been debated among academic researchers and practitioners, especially in developing countries. It is generally believed that trade openness creates a favorable environment that leads to quality products that contribute to economic development (Aradhyula et al., 2007). Therefore, international trade is considered an important source of economic growth in the world (Panassenko et al., 2021). While international trade flows are often unstable and prone to frequent trade barriers, many countries continue to pursue international trade, because they have favorable and large external effects associated with trade. The business position as

a cause of economic growth is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, foreign trade in these resources is necessary to supplement local conversion and complementary industries to promote economic growth (Asiedu, 2013).

Mitsek (2015) modeled the relationship between trade inflation and economic growth using Russian data for the next 2–3 years after 2015. The findings of the model showed the negative effect of the economic growth of foreign trade on the Russian economy. The equations show that a percentage increase in the import and export rate leads to a 1.5% decrease in the economic growth rate in Russia. Gokmenoglu et al. (2015) proved that trade and well-functioning capital markets lead to economic development in Pakistan. The findings also established the long-term relationship between trade, financial sector development, and growth. In this way, Shahbaz et al. (2013) used the ARDL model to analyze the relationship between financial sector development, energy use, economic growth, and trade in China. The authors also identified positive economic growth effects of energy use, financial development, and trade.

### **Exports**

Exporting will lead to product and market development and as a result increase profits for companies. Identifying the factors affecting exports to increase export performance is more important than in the past. Export and international communication have always had a special place for countries due to their importance. However, achieving a high level of performance in export is a major challenge due to the physical path, cultural differences between independent business partners, and different competitive conditions (Aghazadeh et al., 2020).

Determining and identifying import market structure is one of the most important indicators for evaluating export competitiveness in target markets. The import market structure shows the dependence of a country's market in importing a product on the global exporters of that product. In other words, this structure of a product indicates from which countries this product is imported. Accordingly, import market competitiveness in importing countries has reduced the dependence on the exporting countries, which ultimately has a controlling role in reducing the fluctuations in the quantity and price of imported products. Therefore, countries with a competitive import market structure can react to an increase in product prices from one or more countries. They

protect the market from price fluctuations by substituting products from other countries, while it is impossible in more exclusive markets and the price shock of exporters is transferred to import markets (Aminizadeh et al., 2021). Finally, it can be argued that more competitive markets are beneficial for the importing country and less attractive for exporters (especially exporters with a high market dominance). Of course, it is necessary to mention more (Kotler et al., 2006).

The export performance resulting from organizational operations includes the company's internal and external achievements and goals. Here, export performance is defined as the achievement of organizational goals, and product development and market development are considered, which will lead to company profitability. The successful exporting of a company can be evaluated by its export performance. There are three different criteria, financial, non-financial, and composite, to measure export performance. Criteria such as sales, profit, and growth are among the financial criteria, and variables such as success, satisfaction, and achieving goals are among the non-financial criteria (Kim & Hemmert, 2015).

### **Lived experience**

Lived experience is a depiction of a person's experiences and decisions, as well as the knowledge gained from these experiences and choices. It is also used when describing a type of qualitative study that includes studies on culture and society, as well as, linguistics and communication (Given, 2008). In phenomenological research, lived experiences are the main object of study, but the goal of such research is not to understand individuals lived experiences as facts, but to determine the understandable meaning of such experiences. In addition, lived experience is not about reflecting on an experience while living through it but is recollective, with a given experience being reflected on after it has passed or been lived through (Lindseth, 2000).

### **Methodology**

This research is Applied research. It is also Exploratory research and interpretative in terms of intellectual paradigm, and in-depth and qualitative in terms of the nature of data. The statistical population is Iranian and Arab businessmen of the Persian Gulf region with at

least 5 years of business experience. The sample size of the research is according to the theorem of theoretical saturation. The number of samples was determined after interviewing experts and receiving data from them. The sample size of the research is 13 according to the theorem of theoretical saturation because, in the interview with the people, no new concept or material was added to the interviews. The sampling method in qualitative research was Snowball sampling. Therefore, the people who were interviewed mentioned the following people. Interviews were used to collect information to identify the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders in the Persian Gulf region. The researcher prepared and raised the questions in the interview. Each interview lasted between 40 and 60 minutes after getting permission and obtaining the consent of the people. The interviews continued until the themes reached theoretical saturation.

Interview questions including the lived experience of Iranian and Persian Gulf Arab traders were distributed among selected credit experts to measure validity and their opinion was used about the relevant factors. The supervisor was consulted and his/her expert opinion was taken into account in order to modify the interview questions in order to satisfy content validity. Validity checks and reliability in qualitative research include four criteria of transferability, reliability, validity, and verification according to Guba and Lincoln (2000). The findings have been studied and reviewed by professors to check validity and points for correction or change. In the present study, all the interviews were recorded by the researcher and a colleague interviewer. The interviewer's and the interviewee's voice was also recorded by the recorder with the permission of the interviewee. Then a written version of the recorded interviews was prepared. MAXQDA is a world-leading software package for qualitative and mixed-methods research.

### **Findings**

In the present study, data were collected through face-to-face interviews with experts, and in-depth interview was also used as the main tool of data collection. A total of 13 people were interviewed. The data collection continued until the theoretical saturation of the categories until it was not possible to obtain new data. In total, 100 percent of the respondents were male. In total, 39%, 46%, and 15% of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a doctorate degree,



respectively. In total, 15.40%, 31%, 46%, and 8% of the participants have 5-10 years, 10-15 years, 16-20 years, and more than 20 years of work experience respectively. In total, 31% (30-40 years old), 46% (41-45 years old), 15% (46-50 years old), and finally 8% of the participants (over 50 years old).

The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis as

described by Braun and Clarke have been used in this research. In total, 13 interviews were done completely and accurately. In this step, 54 Screening codes were obtained by the researcher. At this stage, the researchers removed incomplete or unrelated codes as well as duplicate codes to obtain this number of screening codes. The following table shows the codes.

**Table 1: Screening codes**

<b>Extracted codes</b>	<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Extracted codes</b>	<b>Frequenc y</b>	<b>Extracted codes</b>	<b>Frequenc y</b>
Export segmentation	2	Gas energy sources	6	cultural common	9
Education and knowledge sharing	3	Oil resources	4	Cultural conditions and differences	8
Marketing and marketing expertise	3	Transportation	8	Political stability	4
Increase market share	3	international relations	5	Relations and political interference	18
Abundant natural resources	4	International sanctions	6	Globalization	8
Freshwater	3	Rent and corruption	3	World powers Influences	6
The opportunity to develop conversion industries	4	Clarification	4	Sanction	6
Complicated cumbersome legal procedures	3	Economic and commercial rent	5	Quality of goods and services	8
Golden signatures	2	Terms of financial transactions	4	Tax	3
Temporary contracts	3	Up-to-date technology	8	Banking and financial problems	3
Mediation and broker	5	Bureaucracy	4	Economic stability	9
Prosperity	3	International cooperation	3	Security	8

Foreign investors	5	Wealth and high income	4	Maritime boundary	11
Lack of political independence	3	International trust	3	Ports and free zones	12
Unique and special products	5	International involvement	4	Rules and standards	4
Port development	4	Regional wars	3	Abundant mineral products	3
Lack of macro strategies	3	The solidarity of neighboring countries	2	Reform in the banking system	3
Political and economic rent	4	Clearing	3	Export Market Segmentation	4

In the second step, the validity of the organizing themes was considered in relation to the data

set. At this stage, the researcher found 39 organizing themes.

**Table 2: Formation of organizing themes**

No	Basic themes	Organizing themes
1	Religious Similarities	Common religion, Cultural and religious context,
2	Cultural common	Cultural-political, Religious similarities, Arab identity
3	Political interactions	Relations and political interference, separation of business from politics, political interference
4	Security and stability	Maritime insecurity, lack of security, economic stability, stability and security, political stability
5	Internal Rules & Regulations	Lack of standard rules, complex and complicated rules, contradictory internal standards, rules, and regulations
6	Government interactions	Interaction with government organizations, relations with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, activation of business associations
7	Political Promises	Active embassies, signing memorandums of understanding, political commitments to traders
8	Special geography	The low population of the Gulf countries, international transportation route, special climate, Water scarcity, soil, and land
9	Regional effects	The impact of regional organizations, Development of Turkish exports, the impact of Iraq and Syria interactions Geopolitical location, world gas source, world oil source
10	The World Energy Centre	The geographical location (Geopolitics), Global gas source, and Global oil source
11	National authority	Strengthening the national industry, strengthening embassy duties, trade security, national authority,

12	Wide Maritime borders	Maritime border, several maritime borders,
13	Sanction	Prevent international sanctions, sanction some goods, individual embargo
14	Government support	Trading legal support, Tax on goods, Customary tax guidelines, Tax incentives, Preferential tariffs, Focus on trade support.
15	Marketing	Export Segmentation, Training, and sharing of marketing knowledge, Marketing expertise, Maintaining market share
16	Political and economic rent	Rent and corruption, clarification, economic and commercial rent
17	Broking	Mediation and Brokerage
18	Bank System	Banking interactions, Financial characteristics, Financial and banking problems, Financial exchange conditions, Banking system reform
19	Bureaucracy	Golden signatures, Temporary directives, administrative bureaucracy, cumbersome instructions, Administrative corruption
20	Transit and transportation network	Transit and transportation, transportation route, transportation network, connecting ring between the countries of the region, Silk road
21	Unique products	Special products, climatic effects on production, premium products, carpet, pistachio, saffron
22	High profit and income	Income, secure profit, currency appreciation, cost reduction
23		Interconnection of neighboring countries focuses on the real needs of neighbors
24	Establishment multinational companies	International exhibitions, International experience, International cooperation, Work experience of large companies
25	Abundant natural resources	Abundant natural resources, fresh water, suitable soil, the opportunity to develop transformation industries, abundant mineral products
26	Attracting foreign investors	Attracting foreign investors, the difference between investors and traders
27	Abundant prosperity and wealth	Wealth, high income, oil income, high level of well-being The importance of Free economic zones, the opportunity to develop port cities,
28	Ports and free zones	Banking infrastructure for business, updating transportation equipment, creating infrastructure, high cost of infrastructure
29	Dilapidated infrastructure	Banking infrastructure for business, Upgrading transportation equipment, Developing infrastructure, high cost of infrastructure
30	Lack of up-to-date technology	Failure to update production equipment, old technology, Lack of modern equipment in production
31	Product Quality	Quality training, production quality, packaging quality, the importance of quality
32	Domestic investors exit	Currency withdrawal, Escape of domestic investors, strict investing standards, long process of permits
33	Lack of regional	Regional wars, ISIS, Terrorist groups, pirates, Israeli threats

	security	
34	International competitors	International exhibition, international competition, international competitors
35	Lack of planning and grand strategy	Cross-sectional planning, lack of macro policies, micro and cross-sectional strategies, uninformed decision makers of planning
36	International sanctions	International sanctions, global sanctions, lack of access to a free economy, bypassing sanctions, comprehensive sanctions
37	International trade laws	International trust, teaching and learning international business rules, improving international relations, global standards
38	Globalization	Globalization, the development of global laws, forcing globalization
39	The influence of world powers	lack of political independence, political interference of Western countries, international laws and interference,

Table 3 shows the organizing themes from which the comprehensive themes were extracted.

**Table 3: Comprehensive themes of the organizer resulting from the analysis of the interviews**

No	Comprehensive theme	Organizing theme
1	Cultural similarities and differences	religious similarities
		Cultural similarities
2	Political rules and conditions	Political interactions
		Security and stability
		Internal rules and standards
		Government communications and interactions
		Political promises
3	Strategic situation	Special geography
		Regional effects
		The World Energy Centre
		National authority
		Wide maritime borders
4	Obstacles and limitations	Sanction
		Marketing
		Political and economic rent
		Broking
		Bank System
		Bureaucracy
5	Strengths and opportunities	Transit and transportation network
		Unique products
		High profit and income
		Many neighbors
		Establishment of multinational companies
		Abundant natural resources



		Attracting foreign investors
		Abundant prosperity and wealth
		Ports and free zones
6	Weaknesses and strengths	Deprecated infrastructure
		Lack of up-to-date technology
		Product Quality
		The exit of domestic investors
		Lack of regional security
		International competitors
		Lack of planning and grand strategy
7	International sanctions	International sanctions
		International trade laws
		Globalization
		The influence of superpowers

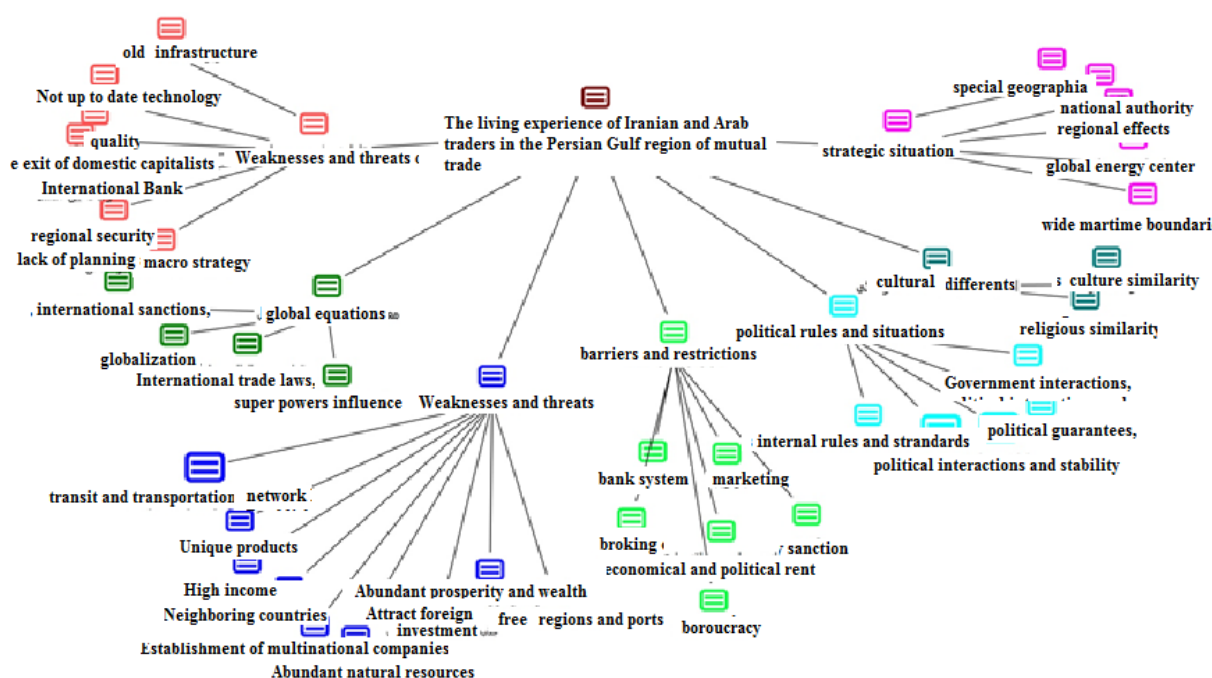
The conceptual model of the research was developed and the theme network was drawn in figure 1 based on the comprehensive and

organized themes of the analysis.



**Figure 1: The conceptual model of the research and the network of themes from the interviews using MAXQAD 2022.**

The final codes and their sub-themes were drawn



**Figure 2: The output of the MAXQAD about the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders about mutual trade in the Persian Gulf region.**

## Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders of the Persian Gulf region through a thematic analysis approach. In total, 7 main co with 38 sub-themes were extracted from the results as follows:

**Cultural similarities and differences:** The concept of trading varies in different cultures. Cultural differences lead to different approaches of people in business. These differences are especially highlighted and influential in international trade. Lack of adequate recognition of cultural differences is the source of many challenges and misunderstandings in communication and cultural trade in international trade. It means dealing with different cultures when a company or organization operates globally. It should be noted that culture is a unique phenomenon and is specific to its own country and society. A lack of proper understanding of a culture can lead to a loss of activity in the international field since every society has its own unique culture. In this research, factors from cultural similarities and differences include two sub-themes of religious and cultural similarities.

**Political rules and conditions:** The study of political systems is a vast and complex process. The political system is basically the system of politics and government in a country. It manages a whole set of rules, regulations,

institutions, and attitudes. The main difference between political systems is the philosophy of each system regarding individual and group rights and the role of the government.

The philosophy of any political system affects the policies that govern the local economy and business environment. In this research, the factors obtained from political laws and conditions include five sub-components of political interactions, security and stability, internal laws and standards, and political commitments.

**Strategic situation:** Strategic situation is the situation of the business in relation to the market and competitors. The analysis of the themes of strategic situations in this research includes five sub-themes of a specific geography, regional influences, world energy center, national authority, and wide maritime borders.

**Obstacles and limitations:** It includes seven sub-themes of sanctions, marketing, political and economic rent, broking, banking system, and bureaucracy.

**Strengths and opportunities:** They include nine sub-themes of the transit and transportation network, unique products, high profit and income, various neighbors, establish multinational companies, abundant natural resources, attracting foreign investors, abundant prosperity and wealth, and free zones and ports.

**Weaknesses and threats:** It includes seven sub-themes of depreciated infrastructure, lack of up-to-date technology, quality of goods, the exit of

domestic investors, lack of regional security, international competitors, and lack of planning and macro strategies.

#### **Global and international equations:**

Globalization is a term used to describe the general tendency of national economies to become more integrated. This is due to advanced communication technologies, logistics technologies, increased capital flows, and reduction of trade barriers by national governments. Globalization is a general trend that has increased international trade in the last three or four decades (James, 2014). In the present research, factors extracted from global and international equations include four sub-components of international sanctions, international trade laws, globalization, and the influence of superpowers. Heydari et al. (2021), investigated the factors affecting the development of exports in the petrochemical industries of the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries with an approach based on the logistics system. The results showed that the export market, international marketing, export potentials, export challenges, market competition, organizational factors, macro factors, export sales, export logistics, and export product characteristics affect the improvement of logistics performance and export development in the Persian Gulf petrochemical industries. Ghasemi et al. (2020) investigated Iran's trade with the countries of the Persian Gulf. They analyze various indicators such as export value, export unit value, product mix, product diversity, and durability of Iran's exports in the target markets. Etemedian et al. (2020) analyzed the phenomenological experiences of strategic management in the Iran Customs Administration. The results were classified into 5 basic concepts including organizational culture and values, control, networks and communication, performance, and organizational structure. Yang et al. (2021), investigated the factors affecting the mutual trade relations of Asian countries with China: the results of China's Belt & Road Initiative. Teymori et al. (2020), identified and classified success and failure factors in international business negotiations with Iranian traders. The findings showed the importance of good personal relationships as well as the need of Iranians for products, the knowledge of businessmen about Iranians and business practices among the 39 success factors, and finally the lack of budget, the reluctance to

demand good financial and communication failure among the 31. The failure factors are the most important factors identified in the success or failure of negotiations with Iranians.

It is recommended that traders and businessmen benefit by investigating and understanding better and more cultural similarities (i.e. religious, ethnic) and focusing on them to improve mutual trading and traders improve mutual political conditions through more consultation and interaction with related government and political institutions. They should take advantage of these capacities according to the specific geography of the country and the climate diversity, land, and maritime borders.

This research was performed on the lived experience of Iranian and Arab traders in the Persian Gulf region and it cannot be generalized to other countries (for example, European countries). Therefore, it is recommended to investigate the literature in other European and Asian countries for future research. The limitation of the research is related to the field of qualitative research. The interview was difficult for the interviewees considering the new topic of this research. Many people were invited to the interview, but few agreed to participate in the research.

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