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Integration of Organizational, Economic, and Customer-related Attributes to Prioritize Marketing Strategies

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**Integration of Organizational, Economic, and Customer-related Attributes to
Prioritize Marketing Strategies**

Purpose

A well-designed marketing strategy is critical for the survival of any company in today's competitive market. To be formulated and implemented effectively, a marketing strategy must be phased and aligned to levels in the organization. This study aims to advance a three-tier hierarchical framework of marketing strategies, including corporate, business, and functional levels. We employ the proposed framework to select the most appropriate marketing strategy based on the factors relevant to a factory that produces sporting goods.

Design/methodology/approach

We conduct a literature review to identify marketing strategies at corporate, business, and functional levels. To appraise strategies at the corporate and business levels, we use market share as a key criterion. When evaluating functional strategies, we employ criteria categorized into organizational, economic, and customer dimensions. Additionally, we conduct interviews to assess strategies at the first level and utilize the Best Worst Method (BWM) for appraising strategies at the other two levels.

Findings

We employ the suggested structure for a company producing sports goods in Iran. According to the results, offensive approach and customer orientation are the most appropriate strategies at corporate and business levels. Additionally, offensive advertising and managerial capabilities are identified as the best portfolio of strategies and the most important criterion at functional level, respectively.

Originality/value

So far, a specific category of marketing strategies has not been implemented at corporate, business, and functional levels. Accordingly, there is not a framework of criteria to evaluate the strategies at each level. The approach is implemented in the case of a sportswear manufacturer in a developing country, where quantitative analysis has been lacking until now.

Keywords: Marketing, Strategy selection, Sports goods, Multi criteria decision making (MCDM)

1. Introduction

Marketing strategy is crucial for firms at different levels as it helps them to achieve their goals and objectives. It helps companies attract new customers, retain existing ones, overcome their crises and stay competitive (Morgan et al., 2019; Mukonza & Swarts, 2020). Studies have shown that well-thought-out marketing strategies can help boost profitability. Many companies attribute their failure to poor marketing strategy (Wyshynski, 2011), such as Ford Edsel, Microsoft Zune, and Barnes &

Noble Nook. Studies acknowledge that to choose a marketing strategy, one must follow a three-tier hierarchical structure of strategies. This structure includes corporate, business, and functional levels. A strategy hierarchy is a term used to align goals from the top (the corporate level) to the bottom (the functional level), and orient the direction of the company (Pholphirul et al., 2022; Varadarajan, 2010; Webster, 1992). The foundation of this concept lies in understanding that each department has specific vital functions that can impact other areas (Tadepalli & Avila, 1999).

More specifically, in evaluating the marketing strategy, we deal with a structured hierarchy of strategies where each level is a prerequisite for the next. Corporate strategy is defined as an instruction to think through, define the company's overall direction, and articulate how goals are to be pursued and achieved. Business strategy is the next level in the hierarchical structure. It charts the path for providing value to customers and developing a competitive advantage (Wang, Li, & Su, 2019). Finally, functional-level marketing strategy aims to support the overall business-level marketing strategy by implementing tactics that align with the company's goals and objectives (Varadarajan & Clark, 1994; Webster, 1992). Regardless of the approach taken, literature believes that the company should consider this hierarchy to adopt an appropriate strategy (Al-Dawalibi et al., 2020; Varadarajan & Clark, 1994). Skipping each level of the hierarchy structure leads to a heterogeneous evaluation of marketing strategies at the functional level. Some studies have focused on strategic consensus within an organization - defined as agreement on strategic priorities by decision-making groups at top, middle, and operational levels within an organization (Kellermanns et al., 2005; Walter et al., 2013). Other studies have emphasized strategic alignment for successful implementation (Chari et al., 2017; Varadarajan, 2010).

However, these studies suffer from several problems. First, their knowledge and understanding of the concept of the hierarchical strategy and the criteria that go into the evaluation process are superficial

1
2
3 and incoherent at best. It has been neglected that how the choice of strategy at each level affects the
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5 choice of strategy at other levels. Second, they have not considered the order in which these three
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7 levels should come in the strategy selection process; skipping each level of the hierarchy structure
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9 leads to a heterogeneous evaluation of marketing strategies at the functional level. Moreover, they
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11 have not defined the strategies of each level separately. Last but not least, they have not classified the
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13 strategy selection criteria individually for each level. This study uses insight from the strategy
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15 classification literature and tries to provide a dynamic framework for choosing a marketing strategy.
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17 Since the strategy selection criteria at each level must be identified and ranked, it uses a multi-criteria
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19 approach. Against this backdrop, given the definition of corporate, business, and functional levels
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21 and the existing literature, we have proposed a structured framework of marketing strategies that
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23 offsets the weaknesses of the existing structure to a large extent. In order to select the best marketing
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25 strategy, we need to include criteria with an appropriate weight as objectives. For this purpose, at the
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27 first level, considering the literature, we set the market share as the touchstone for choosing a
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29 defensive or offensive approach. At the second level, to increase or maintain the market share, we
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31 evaluate three categories of strategies: customer orientation, competition orientation, and innovation
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33 orientation. Finally, at the third level, we consider the selected strategy from level 2. The important
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35 dimensions at this level include organizational, customer-related, and economic evaluations, helping
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37 us choose the best functional marketing strategy.
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46 Knowing that marketing is an important and necessary strategic activity for sports organizations
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48 (Ratten, 2016), we use the proposed structured framework of marketing strategies to select the best
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50 strategy for a sporting goods manufacturer in Iran. Due to individual preferences and identification
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52 associated with sports, marketing can create a more intense e impact in the sports context. There are
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54 countless features of sports that can be particularly interesting if a tinge of marketing is added to them
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because sports can engage consumers economically, politically, aesthetically, socially, and collectively (Mullin, Hardy, & Sutton, 2014).

In order for a marketing strategy to be formulated and implemented effectively, it must be phased and aligned to levels in the organization. From a theoretical perspective, we provide a dynamic framework for selecting an appropriate strategy considering a three-tier hierarchical structure. From a practical perspective, we do it for a company that works in the field of sports products.

Briefly, the five main objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To provide a structured hierarchical framework of marketing strategies. This goal introduces a systematic approach to guide strategy implementation through a three-tier structure.
- To identify and categorize the factors contributing to strategy selection at the functional level. This goal provides insights into often overlooked operational-level decision-making and adds clarity to strategy selection.
- To determine the importance of the factors by applying the BWM. This goal provides a method to effectively prioritize criteria in strategy selection with a low level of cognitive burden.
- To select the most appropriate marketing strategy based on the factors relevant in the context of sports goods manufacturing.

The rest of the study is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 presents the research steps and methodology used in this study and data collection process. Next, Section 4 presents the results of the methodology used for a case study of sports equipment manufacturing. Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusions.

2. Research background

2.1 Preliminaries

Organizational strategy operates within a hierarchical framework, progressing from corporate vision to functional execution. Each level intricately informs the next, forming the bedrock of organizational success. Tadepalli and Avila (1999).stress the importance of crafting marketing strategies within this framework, transitioning seamlessly from conception to implementation. The significance of this hierarchical alignment is rooted in the understanding that each department wields specific functions impacting other areas (Tadepalli & Avila, 1999). Scholarly discourse underscores cross-level involvement in strategy selection, echoing Mintzberg's (2004) classification of strategy. Scholars also emphasize strategic consensus and alignment, crucial for successful implementation (Chari et al., 2017; Varadarajan, 2010). Failure to achieve alignment, as seen in studies by Balogun and Johnson (2005) and Labianca et al., (2000)., can hinder implementation. Scholars like Varadarajan & Clark (1994) have explored strategy stratification based on organizational levels, including corporate, business, and functional domains. Thus, organizational success hinges on meticulous execution and alignment of strategies across all levels.

In this section, we delve into the concept of these strategies and, in tandem, provide insights into the associated factors, elucidating the evaluation process at each level of the structured framework. By adopting this approach, we not only enable researchers to conduct comparative analyses but also empower them to assess the relative effectiveness and implications of strategies within each category. Importantly, this method enhances the practical applicability of our insights for practitioners, offering a structured framework that facilitates the understanding and implementation of diverse strategies across organizational, economic, and customer contexts.

Corporate-level strategy

Corporate-level strategies serve as the guiding beacon atop the planning pyramid, orchestrating the entirety of a firm's strategic endeavors. Crafted by the highest echelons of management, these strategies are forged with a keen eye on the overarching growth trajectory and direction of the company, as aptly noted by Langerak et al. (1999).

In their quest for market dominance, companies embark on a strategic odyssey marked by the deployment of offensive and defensive marketing strategies, each wielding unique competitive arsenals and customer orientations (Feng et al., 2023). However, the strategic landscape is not without its complexities, as firms grapple with the delicate balance between offensive prowess and defensive fortification (Martín-Herrán et al., 2012).

During times of existential turbulence, managers often resort to offensive strategies as a bastion against decline, leveraging these maneuvers to bolster performance, safeguard market share, and augment profitability (Yannopoulos et al., 2012). The allure of offensive strategies lies in their capacity to entice new customers, catalyze brand evolution, and secure a foothold in untapped market segments (Fornell & Wenerfelt, 1987; Schweitzer et al., 2018). Boyd (1996) eloquently underscores the efficacy of such strategies, wherein the influx of new patrons outstrips that of competitors, cementing the company's ascendancy in the market fray.

In stark contrast, defensive strategies pivot on the imperative of customer retention and resilience in the face of encroaching rivals (Fornell & Wenerfelt, 1987; Schweitzer et al., 2018). As posited by Shugan et al., (1983), these strategies are often deployed in response to the incursion of new competitors into the market, aiming to fortify the company's market position and thwart adversarial onslaughts. Yannopoulos et al., (2012) further attest to the strategic import of defensive maneuvers,

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3 elucidating how firms leverage these strategies to dissuade rivals, painting the industry as unattractive
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5 and beset by low returns on investment.
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8 A rich tapestry of research by Martín-Herrán et al., (2012), Jørgensen and Sigué (2015), and Jarrar
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10 et al., (2004) underscores the pivotal role of offensive and defensive strategies in sculpting market
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12 share dynamics. This multifaceted discourse forms the bedrock of our evaluation framework, where
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14 we delineate between these two strategic paradigms and assess their efficacy vis-à-vis market share
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16 acquisition and retention.
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20 As we explore the intricate realm of corporate strategy, we recognize that the interplay between
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22 offensive and defensive maneuvers extends beyond tactical skill, evolving into a symphony of
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24 strategic innovation. Delving into this complex terrain reveals the delicate balance between market
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26 dynamics and managerial decisions, influencing the destiny of firms amidst the competitive crucible.
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30 ***Business-level strategy***
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33 After setting the overarching corporate-level strategy, the focus shifts to the business-level strategy,
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35 a meticulously crafted framework of responsibilities and actions designed to steer the company's
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37 business units toward their unique missions with precision and effectiveness (Getele et al., 2022).
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39 These strategies serve as the linchpin of the company's industry positioning, dictating which
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41 customers to prioritize, the competitive approaches to undertake, and the avenues for value creation.
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45 Traditionally, marketing strategies have been categorized into customer orientation and competition
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47 orientation, as elucidated by Narver and Slater (1990). However, scholars such as Noble et al., (2002)
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49 advocate for a broader perspective, introducing innovation orientation as a crucial strategic
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51 dimension. In times of crisis, innovation capability emerges as a potent driver of survival strategies,
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empowering firms to propose novel ideas that redefine customer value propositions (Rahman et al., 2022).

Innovation-driven firms, as highlighted by Siguaw et al., (2006), prioritize innovation activities aimed at delivering unique value propositions to customers, thereby enhancing performance and sustaining competitiveness. Concurrently, customer orientation remains paramount, as underscored by Narver and Slater (1990) and Deshpandé et al., (1993), forming the bedrock of firm performance by aligning offerings with customer needs and preferences.

Frambach et al., (2016) further emphasize the significance of customer orientation in identifying and satisfying customer needs, thereby fostering long-term customer loyalty and market success. However, achieving the firm's overarching goal of sustaining or increasing market share requires a multifaceted approach, encapsulated in three strategic orientations: competition orientation, customer orientation, and innovation orientation.

These strategic orientations serve as guiding beacons, informing decision-making and resource allocation at the business level. It's imperative to note that the evaluation of each category is predicated on the strategic approach adopted at the corporate level, ensuring alignment and synergy across organizational hierarchies.

Functional-level strategy

The functional-level strategy serves as the bedrock of organizational efficiency and competitiveness, meticulously designed to optimize productivity and secure a distinct competitive advantage for each department (Utami & Wandebori, 2023). These short-term plans play a pivotal role in translating corporate and business-level strategies into actionable initiatives, guiding managers across diverse functional areas such as operations, finance, human resources, and marketing. In delineating these

strategies, we have identified a spectrum of potential approaches, ranging from offensive to defensive, spanning six overarching groups and comprising 17 sub-strategies (Table 1). However, crafting a robust functional-level strategy necessitates a comprehensive evaluation framework, one that considers an array of contributing factors derived from extensive literature review.

Table 1
A structured hierarchy of strategies in three organizational levels

Corporate level	Business level	Functional level
Offensive approach	Customer orientation	1. Identifying the latent needs of customers, anticipating the evolution of their needs, and finding latent solutions to customers' needs (Brege & Kindström, 2020).
		2. Offensive advertising (Jørgensen & Sigué, 2015; Machowska & Nowakowski, 2019).
		3. Customer attraction programs (Fornell & Wenerfelt, 1987; Rocca, Caruana, & Snehota, 2012).
		4. Delivering added value through offering complimentary items (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Weinstein, 2002).
	Innovation orientation	1. Developing radical innovations to create entirely new offerings, with knowledge generation extending beyond the product/market domain (Brege & Kindström, 2020).
		2. Exploring new market opportunities and creating future opportunities through (i) product innovation and (ii) market segmentation (Miles et al., 1978).
Defensive approach	Competition orientation	1. Understanding and countering/eroding competitors' strategies and their fundamental competencies (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Day & Wensley, 1988).
		2. Generating information about potential competitors far outside the current product/market domain (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Narver & Slater, 1990)
	Customer orientation	1. Customer retention strategy (Atuahene-Gima, Slater, & Olson, 2005; Hamilton, Rust, & Dev, 2017; Morgan & Hunt, 1994).
		2. Identifying the expressed needs of customers (Brege & Kindström, 2020).
		3. Delivering superior value by adapting existing solutions to customers' circumstances (Atuahene-Gima, Slater, & Olson, 2005; Brege & Kindström, 2020).
		4. Adapting market offerings to changing market and customer needs (Byukusenge, Shukla, & Irechukwu, 2018).
	Innovation orientation	1. Refining current market offerings through incremental innovation, usually within the boundaries of the current product-market domain (Atuahene-Gima, Slater, & Olson, 2005; Brege & Kindström, 2020), by (i) creating and controlling key information and (ii) lobbying and co-opting influential elements of the institutional environment (Miles et al., 1978).

Table 1

A structured hierarchy of strategies in three organizational levels

Corporate level	Business level	Functional level
	Competition orientation	2. Exploiting existing market opportunities that have already been discovered (Atuahene-Gima, Slater, & Olson, 2005; Byukusenge, Shukla, & Irechukwu, 2018). 1. Assessing and countering/exploiting short-term strengths and weaknesses of competitors (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Narver & Slater, 1990) 2. Generating information about competitors within the current product/market domain (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Narver & Slater, 1990) 3. Maintaining the market position (Brege & Kindström, 2020; Porter, 1985)

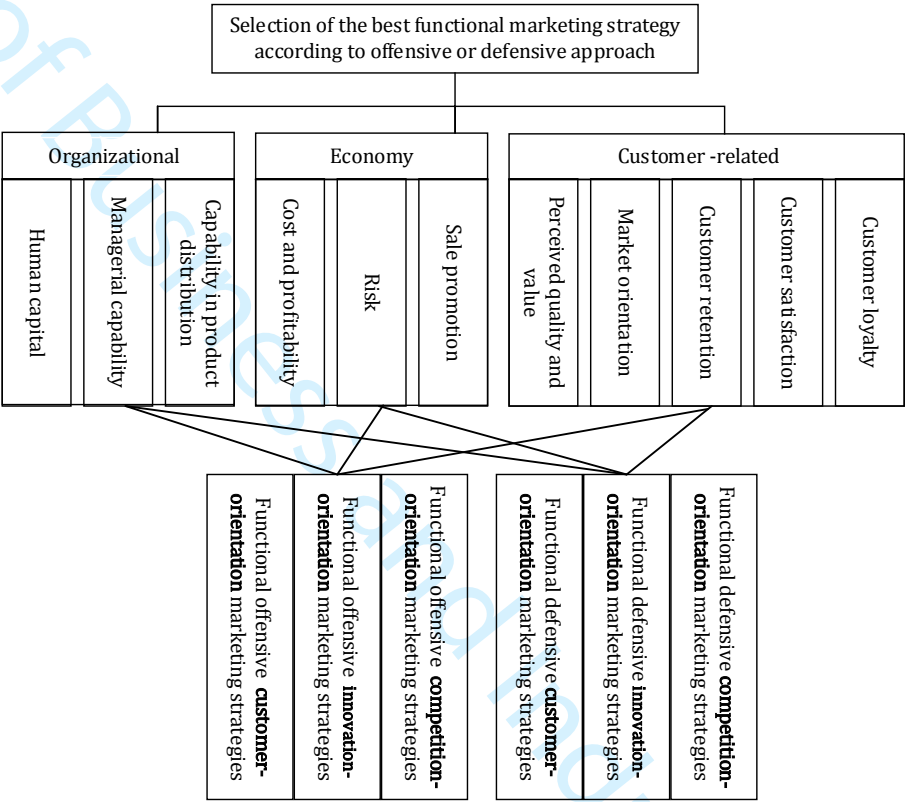
These criteria, classified into three distinct aspects - organizational, customer, and economic - serve as the cornerstone of strategic decision-making at the functional level. Organizational criteria ensure alignment with overarching company objectives and harnessing internal capabilities (Kandemir et al., 2006), while economic factors shed light on financial considerations and market dynamics (Mohammadzadeh et al., 2013). Concurrently, customer factors underscore the external influences shaping product offerings and customer satisfaction (Varadarajan, 2020).

By embracing this holistic approach to strategy formulation, companies can develop a well-rounded functional-level strategy that not only enhances operational efficiency but also fosters agility and responsiveness to evolving market demands (Figure 1). However, navigating the intricacies of functional-level strategy implementation is not without its challenges. From resource constraints to organizational culture, companies must contend with a myriad of factors to ensure alignment with broader strategic goals and sustained competitive advantage.

Yet, amidst these challenges lie opportunities for innovation and growth. Emerging trends in functional-level strategy, such as digital transformation and talent management practices, offer new avenues for enhancing organizational performance and driving sustained success. By drawing insights

from experts and best practices, companies can navigate the ever-changing landscape of functional-level strategy with confidence, paving the way for enduring success and market leadership.

Figure 1 A hierarchical structure of functional marketing strategies and factors



2.2 Selecting a Marketing Strategy

To refine the criteria outlined in the hierarchical structure of functional marketing strategies (Figure 1) and identify methodological research gaps, we conduct an in-depth review of relevant literature in this section. It is important to note that, given the nature of our research falling under the category of multi-criteria decision making (MCDM), we exclusively examine studies employing this approach for addressing marketing selection problems, as detailed below:

Tang et al., (1999) used the fuzzy MCDM to evaluate how electronic commerce impacts international marketing strategies in the context of the information services industry. They found that the maximum

benefit to the investor is the most important factor. Marketing research is the best strategy for this industry. In another study, Chen and Yang (2019) used the AHP and DEMATEL-based technique to integrate the various experts' professionalism and to reveal the importance weights and sequence of Green Marketing Audit (GMA) Criteria. They showed a structure decision hierarchy was formed with three levels, effectiveness of GMA criteria (level 1), six main dimension (level 2) and sub- dimensions (level 3). They classified the contributing factors into six main dimensions: Goals; Green Marketing Strategies; Customer Satisfaction; Global Green Competition; Stakeholders' Requirements; and Green Marketing Activities. Lin and Wu (2008) used the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to select marketing strategies in private hotels in Taiwan. They identified five factors for their study: customer linking capability, market innovation capability, managerial capability, reputation capability, and human resource capability. They identified customer loyalty capability as the most important criterion and differentiation as the best strategy for this industry.

Al-Dawalibi et al., (2020) used AHP to select the best marketing strategy. They considered cost, coverage, interaction, and return of investment as the major factors contributing to the selection of the best strategy. According to the results, return of investment was found to be the most important factor and social networks were identified as the best strategy among radio ads, TV ads, and packaging.

Similarly, Zolfani et al., (2012) used FAHP and TOPSIS to evaluate the factors that influence the selection of advertising strategy in the food industry in Iran. They introduced five factors: audience fit, content, impression rate, monthly cost, and look and feel. According to the results, monthly cost was identified as the most important criterion and newspaper was the best strategy among TV, radio, internet, texting, and environmental advertising. Kou et al., (2023) also constructed a new hybrid fuzzy decision-making model for choosing the most appropriate effective omnichannel strategy for businesses to provide effective financial services. The TOPSIS methodology was used to rank the

alternatives, they developed methods to help companies determine appropriate marketing strategies without incurring exorbitant costs. Based on their findings, online financial services were identified as the most critical strategy for omnichannel improvement.

Tohidi et al., (2020) used the analytical network process (ANP) approach to prioritize the business strategy of a saffron company in Iran. They identified five factors: customer relationship capability, market innovation capability, managerial capability, company reputational assets, and human resources. According to the results, managerial capability was the most important factor in choosing the business strategy. They also identified the differentiation strategy as the most suitable strategy for the company. Similarly, Lee and Ross (2012) designed an AHP hierarchy construction to select the decision making factors of sport sponsorship by considering three criteria level factors: sport team factors ,country factors and environment factors, and a total of 13 sub-criteria. According to the results sport team factors is the most important decision-making factor. AHP global weights showed that media exposure opportunity was the most influential factor followed by sponsorship fit, team image and other factors.

Beheshtinia, Sayadinia and Fathi (2023) conducted a study aiming to identify and prioritize marketing strategies for building energy management systems (BEMSs). Utilizing a novel fuzzy multi-criteria decision-making technique, VIKOR-TOPSIS, they examined 18 marketing strategies. Their findings revealed a hierarchical influence of six criteria on the BEMS market, arranged in order of significance: effectiveness, cost, attainability, complexity, timing, and popularity. The results indicated that internet advertising strategies, discounts to consumers, and online sales are the most appropriate marketing strategies for BEMSs. In another study, Badi et al., (2023) employed a combined MCDM approach, using the AHP and CoCoSo methods, to identify barriers and effective strategies in overcoming challenges in the renewable energy development industry in Libya. They

introduced eight obstacles and proposed seven strategies, with the encouragement of private sector investment identified as the most crucial strategy.

Khajiyan et al., (2022) conducted a study evaluating marketing strategies for tourism-pilgrimage hotels during the pandemic, utilizing FMCDM techniques. This study focused on hotels in Mashhad, the world's second-largest religious metropolis, during the COVID-19 pandemic. They introduced a strategy with an emphasis on focused differentiation as the most appropriate marketing strategy. In the next step, applying the FVIKOR method, three strategies, including those emphasizing focused differentiation and emphasizing differentiation, were selected as the best strategies. In the work of Wang and Tzeng (2012) evaluated brand marketing strategies for three electronics manufacturers in Taiwan using the DEMATEL, ANP, and VIKOR methods. The results showed that pricing was the most important criterion in creating brand value. Improved price strategy and communication strategy were each identified as the most important strategy. Against this background and even though several works have investigated the determination of appropriate strategies for companies, we have identified the following as research gaps.

- None of the research has shed light on how the marketing strategy set at the apex of the marketing pyramid becomes a guiding objective for the lower tiers. As we've discussed, traversing down the levels signifies the transition from strategic formulation to practical execution. Hence, it's imperative to emphasize the alignment of goals when appraising marketing strategies at the lower echelons. Furthermore, the absence of any discernible framework underscores the challenge of seamlessly integrating these levels to optimize strategy selection and implementation within the organization.
- Previous studies have overlooked the use of a structured hierarchy for strategy selection and evaluation, as seen in Tables 1 and 2. This study fills this gap by dividing the organization into

three distinct levels and identifying the most suitable strategy for each. Additionally, for the first time, it categorizes the factors influencing strategy selection into three groups (organization, customer, and economy) at the functional level.

- As illustrated in Table 2, AHP was employed to determine the weight of criteria in the most relevant study, whereas BWM demonstrated better performance than AHP from several perspectives. BWM provides reliable and relevant results for ideal decision-making. BWM is a structured-based method which provides enough data for a consistent pairwise comparison over comparison-based methods (e.g. AHP). BWM is easy to understand and easy to revise by the respondents (Rezaei, 2015). BWM offers a structured approach, blending qualitative and quantitative factors to establish measurable criteria, even in traditionally hard-to-quantify areas. It also provides fewer comparisons and, accordingly, reports a better compatibility rate (Rezaei, 2015, 2016). Because BWM considers both the best and worst-case criteria in pairwise comparisons, it alleviates anchoring bias during the weighting process. This stands out as one of its primary advantages over other pairwise comparison methods, implying a high consistency rate in the pairwise comparisons provided by the respondent (Rezaei, 2015).

Table 2
Summary of the related works and their differences with this study

Paper	marketing strategy at organizational level			Technique(s) used
	Corporate level	Business level	Functional level	
Tang et al.,(1999)	×	×	×	Fuzzy MCDM
Chen and Yang (2019)	✓	×	×	AHP and DEMATEL
Lin and Wu (2008)	×	×	×	AHP
Al-Dawalibi et al., (2020)	×	×	✓	AHP
Zolfani et al. (2012)	×	×	✓	FAHP, TOPSIS
Kou et al. (2023)	×	×	×	TOPSIS
Tohidi et al. (2020)	×	✓	×	ANP
Lee and Ross (2012)	×	×	×	AHP
Beheshtinia et al., (2023)	×	×	×	VICOR, TOPSIS
Badi et al., (2023)	×	×	×	AHP
Khagyan and Hemati (2022)	×	×	×	FVICOR, FTOPSIS

Table 2

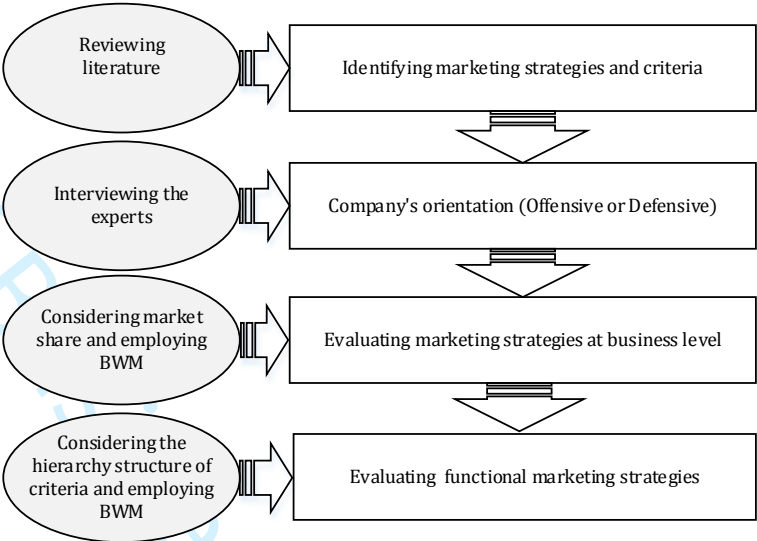
Summary of the related works and their differences with this study

Paper	marketing strategy at organizational level			Technique(s) used
	Corporate level	Business level	Functional level	
Wang and Tzeng (2012)	×	×	×	DEMATEL, ANP, VIKOR
This work	✓	✓	✓	BWM

3. Research framework

This study consists of four steps, as illustrated in Figure 2. First, we review relevant literature to identify the key elements in marketing strategies and criteria for evaluation. In the second step, through expert interviews, we assess the company's orientation, whether offensive or defensive, based on market share. Moving on to the third step, we ask experts to evaluate three categories of business marketing strategies (customer orientation, innovation orientation, and competition orientation) using the Best-Worst Method (BWM), with market share as the objective. In the final step (Figure 2), we consider the selected strategies from the previous step and apply the BWM to assess functional marketing strategies across criteria such as organizational, economic, and customer-related dimensions. Notably, we use a questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale to determine the scores for functional marketing strategies in this step. The numbers demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the proposed strategies at the functional level.

Figure 2 Steps of this study



3.1 Best worst method

To calculate the score of marketing strategies in the business level as well as the weight of criteria in the functional level of Figure 2, we used the BWM as methodology in this research. BWM based on the pairwise comparison has been successfully employed in several studies into management information system (Kheybari et al., 2020), sustainability (Kheybari & Rezaie, 2020), technology evaluation (Pascoe, Wright, & Winzar, 2017) among other. To employ the BWM, we follow the five steps described below (Rezaei, 2015, 2016):

1. A set of strategies $\{S_1, S_2, ..., S_n\}$ /criteria $\{C_1, C_2, ..., C_n\}$ is defined by reviewing relevant literatures.
2. The best (*B*) and worst (*W*) strategy/criterion is identified by the experts from the list of Step 1.
3. The preference of the best strategy / criterion over other strategies/criteria is determined by the experts using a number from 1 to 9 where 1 is equally important and 9 is extremely more

important. The output of this step is best-to-others i.e., $A_B = (a_{B1}, a_{B2}, ..., a_{Bj}, ..., a_{Bn})$ where a_{Bj} shows the preference of B over strategy / criterion j .

4. The preference of all strategies /criteria over the worst strategy/criterion is determined in this step using a number from 1 to 9. The result of this step is called the vector $A_W = (a_{1W}, a_{2W}, ..., a_{jW}, ..., a_{nW})$, where a_{jW} shows the preference of the strategy / criterion j over the W .
5. The optimal score/weights $(w_1^*, w_2^*, ..., w_n^*)$ are computed using optimization Model 1.

$$\begin{aligned} & \min_{\substack{j \\ \text{s.t.}}} \max \{ |w_B - a_{Bj}w_j|, |w_j - a_{jW}w_W| \} \\ & \sum_{j=1}^n w_j = 1 \\ & w_j \geq 0, \text{ for all } j \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

Model (1) is converted into:

$$\begin{aligned} & \min \xi \\ & \text{s.t.} \\ & |w_B - a_{Bj}w_j| \leq \xi, \text{ for all } j \\ & |w_j - a_{jW}w_W| \leq \xi, \text{ for all } j \\ & \sum_{j=1}^n w_j = 1 \\ & w_j \geq 0, \text{ for all } j \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

Consistency rate of pairwise comparison (ξ^*) and the optimal score/weight of strategies/criteria $(w_1^*, w_2^*, ..., w_n^*)$ are the results of Model 2. Considering the amount of ξ^* and the thresholds listed in Liang, Brunelli and Rezaei (2020), we decide if the pairwise comparisons are acceptable. There are two strategies for addressing inconsistency in pairwise comparisons: either request each inconsistent respondent to revise the questionnaire or remove the results of the pairwise comparison from the calculation process. We encountered no inconsistency issues regarding the questionnaires collected from respondents. Note that the results of Model 2 for each level of criteria in functional

level of Figure 1 is called local weight. Hence, the BWM linear model in Excel Solver, available at <https://bestworstmethod.com/>, was utilized for its simplicity. It was employed once to determine dimension weights and thrice to ascertain the weights of criteria within each dimension (Rezaei, 2016). Considering Equation 3, we compute the overall score of strategies at functional level.

$$V_i = \sum_{j=1}^n w_j^g u_{ij} \quad \text{for all } i \tag{3}$$

Where u_{ij} indicates the value of functional marketing strategy i in criterion j . w_j^g is the global weight of criteria in level 3 of Figure 1. To calculate the global weight of criteria, we multiply the local weight of criteria that belongs to the same branch in the hierarchical tree. Note that Model 2 is run to calculate the score/weight of strategies/criteria based on the opinion of each expert. To aggregate the experts' opinion, we use arithmetic mean.

3.2 Data collection

To gather data, we selected a medium-sized sports company established in October 2016. The decision to focus on a single company in this research is driven by several key considerations. This focused approach offers a detailed analysis of a single company's market dynamics, internal capabilities, and competitive landscape. By concentrating on one entity, researchers gain precise insights into its products, target customers, and marketing strategies. This precision allows for tailored recommendations that align closely with the company's objectives. Conversely, studying multiple companies introduces complexities in data collection and analysis. In summary, this focused approach enhances recommendation precision and contributes to a broader hierarchical framework applicable across different companies.

The company started only with sportswear to diversify into bodybuilding accessories in 2018. This manufacturer has one hundred employees on the payroll. It continues to expand and will start

exporting worldwide by 2022. Customers can buy the products from both brick-and-mortar and online stores. Ten experts involved in the research have sufficient professional experience and academic educational background.

We collected the data for this study in three phases. First, we conducted structured interviews with the CEOs and owner of the company as outlined in Table 2. During these interviews, we elucidated the concepts of offensive and defensive marketing strategies. Explaining that the selection between these strategies hinges on factors such as market share and the company's mission, we engaged in a dialogue with the executives to understand their company's approach. Then we used an online questionnaire developed based on the BWM to identify the main strategy orientations among customers, competition, and innovation. We also asked the experts to evaluate the criteria that affect the strategies. In the next phase, to identify the most appropriate strategy at the functional level (last level in Figure 1), we used an online questionnaire designed based on a 7-point Likert score. During both stages of data collection, we received responses from 10 experts affiliated with a sports company. Information pertaining to the respondents' expertise, work experience, and educational background is meticulously detailed in Table 3. The questionnaires utilized have been included in Appendix A. we used an online questionnaire developed based on the BWM to identify the main strategy orientations among customers, competition, and innovation.

Table 3
Experts' contribution.

Expert	Expertise	Experience (year)	Educational background
Expert 1	Network marketing and after-sales service manager	10	Bachelor's degree
Expert 2	General manager	10	Master's degree
Expert 3	Production and control manager	3	Master's degree
Expert 4	Procurement manager	8	Bachelor's degree
Expert 5	Marketing manager	4	Bachelor's degree
Expert 6	Advertising and content creation manager	3	Bachelor's degree
Expert 7	Supply chain manager	2	Bachelor's degree
Expert 8	Marketing manager	5	Bachelor's degree
Expert 9	Customer relationship manager	4	Bachelor's degree
Expert 10	Customer relationship manager	1	Bachelor's degree

4. Result and discussion

In this section, we calculate the weights of the factors and then the scores of the strategies at each level of Figure 1. In the first level, the experts' survey identifies the company's approach. After identifying the general approach in the second level, the firm's orientation is selected by applying the BWM. Finally, at the third level, after weighing the factors by the BWM and evaluating the strategies using the 7-point Likert scale, the best strategy for this case study is determined.

4.1 Marketing strategy at corporate level

At the corporate level (i.e., level 1 in Figure 1), offensive strategies are the most suitable strategies for the sportswear manufacturer. The experts contend that the company targets additional customer segments, and the development of the company's market share directly depends on the offensive strategies. This result confirms that the offensive approach directly impacts the achievement of growth objectives (Yannopoulos, Auh, & Menguc, 2012), such as attracting new customers and expanding market share (Erickson, 1995; Jarrar, Martín-Herrán, & Zaccour, 2004).

4.2 Marketing strategy at business level

At the business level (i.e., level 2 of Figure 1), customer orientation is identified as the most appropriate strategy orientation (Table 4). Generally speaking, satisfying customer needs is the focus of firm activities in order to gain more market share in domestic and international markets. The reason is that firms that allocate their resources in this way have a better understanding of their customer needs and satisfied customers can return much value to the company (Hortinha, Lages, & Lages, 2011).

Innovation orientation is ranked as the second most important strategy orientation (Table 4). Note that, we outlined the experts' opinions regarding all the best and worst criteria in the pairwise comparison process in Table A in Appendix B. According to the experts, innovation is important in satisfying customer needs by designing unique products and developing newer products. This is consistent with the results of (Hauser, Tellis, & Griffin, 2006). At this level, competition orientation is the least important strategy orientation (Table 4). According to the experts, there is no serious competitor in the sporting goods industry in Iran. This brings us back to the fact that sanctions have reduced the global share of the Iranian market because of the reduction in the import of sportswear and goods mainly due to the US-imposed economic sanctions. By Iranian standards, this situation has raised the price of foreign sporting goods to quite stratospheric levels, making high-end goods of Iranian brands more attractive and popular.

Table 4

The score of the strategies at the business level.

Offensive approach strategies	Weight	Rank
Customer orientation	0.427	1
Innovation orientation	0.416	2
Competition orientation	0.155	3

4.3 Marketing strategy at functional level

At the functional level (i.e., level 3 of Figure 1), we first evaluate the weight of the factors contributing to the selection of the most appropriate strategy, based on the three perspectives of organizational, customer-related, and economy. Then, based on the global weight, the factors contributing to the selection of the most appropriate strategy are ranked in this study. Based on the expert opinion, the organizational factors are the most influential in the selection of the best strategies for this level (Table 5). This result confirms that the role of internal resources such as *managerial capability*, *human capital*, and *distribution infrastructures* in determining strategies is undeniable (Barbero, Casillas, &

Feldman, 2011). At this level, the customer-related dimension is the least important factor for sporting goods manufacturers (Table 5 for this result).

Table 5
Weight of perspectives at the functional level.

Perspective	Weight	Rank
Organization	0.438	1
Economy	0.285	2
Customer-related	0.275	3

4.3.1 Local weight of the criteria at the functional level

From the organizational perspective, among the factors influencing the selection of an appropriate strategy, *managerial capability* is the most influential, followed by *capability in product distribution* and *human capital* (Table 6). This is because managers are experienced in bodybuilding, which is directed related to the nature of the company’s products. This finding is confirmed by the studies conducted by Tohidi et al (2020). This study shows that *cost and profitability* are the most important criteria regarding the economy perspective (Table 6). The experts consider profitability as the reason for the success of their performance and the organization. This is consistent with the results of (Al-Dawalibi et al., 2020). *Sales promotion* and *risk* rank second and third, respectively, in this category.

As shown in Table 6, *perceived quality and value ranks* is first from the customer-related’ s perspective. According to the decision-makers, the *perceived quality and value* index helps customers understand the difference between a certain product and other similar products in the market. This factor was also identified by Snoj et al., (2004) as the most important factor in strategy selection. *Customer retention, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and market orientation* are the other important factors in this category.

Table 6

Local weight of the criteria at the functional level.

Perspective	criteria	Weight	Rank
Organizational	Managerial capability	0.513	1
	Capability in product distribution	0.245	2
	Human capital	0.241	3
Economy	Cost and profitability	0.430	1
	Sale promotion	0.357	2
	Risk	0.211	3
Customer-related	Perceived quality and value	0.302	1
	Customer retention	0.247	2
	Customer satisfaction	0.183	3
	Customer loyalty	0.161	4
	Market orientation	0.104	5

4.3.2 Global weight of the criteria at the functional level

As indicated in Table 7, *managerial capability*, *cost and profitability*, *product distribution capability*, and *human capital* add up to 55.5% of the total weight. Thus, they have the greatest influence on strategy selection at the functional level. This means that if decisions are to be made fast, taking these factors into account can facilitate or speed up the work. According to the present results, *managerial capability* has the highest priority with 22% of influence in the sportswear manufacturer. The reason discussed in the previous section also applies here. Among the 11 factors listed in Table 7, *market orientation* is the factor with the lowest influence on selecting a strategy.

Table 7

Global weight of criteria at the functional level.

Criteria	Global weight	Rank
Managerial capability	0.225	1
Cost and profitability	0.118	2
capability in product distribution	0.107	3
Human capital	0.105	4
Sale promotion	0.098	5
Perceived quality and value	0.086	6
Customer retention	0.070	7
Risk	0.058	8
Customer satisfaction	0.052	9
Customer loyalty	0.046	10
Market orientation	0.029	11

4.3.3 The score of strategies at the functional level

The final priority of each of the strategic options is presented in Table 8. The analysis of the strategies at the functional level shows that offensive advertising is the most important strategy with the final weighting of 78 out of 100 (Table 8). As shown in Table 8, offensive advertising also proves to be the most important strategy from customer and economy perspectives. This can be justified by the fact that not only does advertising attract many potential customers but also, thanks to the wide popularity of bodybuilding in Iran, especially with the youth, this company can potentially carve a firm foothold across the country.

Despite this fact, offensive advertising is ranked fourth as the least important strategy in the organizational perspective (Table 8 for this result). This can be attributed to the fact that the ability of organizations to produce and display offensive advertisements is probably insufficient. The lack of specialized staff, organizational resistance, blocking of social media, and the high cost of advertising on other platforms such as national media can be cited as other reasons given by experts for this result.

As presented in Table 8, the customer attraction program strategy holds the top rank in the organizational perspective and secures the second position in both economic and customer relationship perspectives. *This underscores the substantial importance of the customer attraction program within the functional strategies of a sports production organization.* The organization implements a variety of programs, such as maintaining a website to attract online customers, registering the location on the map, offering discount programs for in-person customers, providing special offers, engaging with the audience, participating in fitness events, and creating educational

and practical content on Instagram to attract customers. The findings of other studies, including those by (Varadarajan, 2020; Youssef et al., 2018), also support the significance of the customer acquisition program as a key strategy

Table 8

The score of strategies at the functional level.

Customer orientation strategies	Perspective							
	Organizational		Customer-related		Economy		Overall value	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
Offensive advertising	318.4	4	240.5	1	221.6	1	78.1	1
Customer attraction programs	339.2	1	222.1	2	202.1	2	76.3	2
Identification of customers' latent needs	335.4	2	214.8	3	188.2	3	73.8	3
Delivery of superior value	324.6	3	192.1	4	168.6	4	68.5	4

5. Conclusion

The findings of this paper can significantly contribute to the understanding of various scholarly inquiries. Primarily, the study enhances the existing literature on marketing strategy selection. While much of the marketing strategies literature focuses on a single level, we introduce a hierarchical structure encompassing three organizational levels: corporate, business, and functional. This allows managers to comprehend the impact of criteria at each level on the determination of marketing strategy, enabling a systematic approach to strategy selection. The proposed structured framework encompasses a broad spectrum of senior and middle managers' perspectives, along with technical and financial dimensions of the organization, and considers customer needs in the marketing strategy selection process. Moreover, this structured framework facilitates the evaluation of performance across various internal and external sections of a company. It is adaptable and can be customized for use in multiple production and service organizations based on expert opinions.

The presented structured framework was employed to determine an appropriate marketing strategy for a company producing sports equipment in Iran. According to the results, offensive approach,

customer-orientation, and offensive advertising are the outputs of evaluation for the three levels of the proposed framework. Moreover, based on the opinion of experts, the managerial capability is evaluated as the main factor to evaluate functional marketing strategies. Considering the proposed structured framework, researchers can measure the barriers of the design, production, and introduction of a new product and provide solutions to overcome them.

5.1 Managerial implication

This research holds significant relevance for sports production companies operating within Iran's competitive bodybuilding product markets, particularly amidst challenges posed by foreign competitors and unplanned imports. Our study offers invaluable insights into crafting strategic marketing criteria. Iranian sports production companies grappling with competition from abroad are advised to prioritize strategies aimed at effectively meeting customer needs. At the functional level, our study underscores the vital role of organizational factors in shaping successful strategies. This emphasizes the importance of managerial capability, human capital, and distribution infrastructure in formulating functional-level marketing strategies. Effective utilization of internal resources is crucial for strategic decision-making within sports production companies.

Moreover, to bolster economic performance, sports production firms should concentrate on cost management, profitability, and the implementation of robust sales promotion strategies. Furthermore, our proposed model offers flexibility in adapting to evolving market conditions. Should a new strategy or criterion emerge due to changes in competition, customer behavior, or industry trends, the model can seamlessly incorporate these developments. This allows for the evaluation of new alternatives alongside existing strategies, aiding managers in decision-making. Similarly, our method enables the re-weighting and re-evaluation of criteria, ensuring continued relevance and adaptability as market dynamics evolve.

5.2 Limitation and future research

While the foundational pillars of B2B marketing theory often contribute to a more heterogeneous landscape in terms of customer size and performance needs (Lilien, 2016; Mora Cortez & Johnston, 2017), how B2B companies respond to the identified strategies remains an unanswered question that should be addressed in future research. Furthermore, since this study is based on a single case study, we recommend applying the proposed framework to other industries as a subject for future work. Besides, since some concepts, especially from a customer perspective, such as customer satisfaction, can be measured much better in the fuzzy format, we suggest applying the presented multi-criteria structure with a fuzzy approach as a subject.

This work is limited in that, although we have attempted to cover more marketing criteria, it may not be the most comprehensive. Future research should explore additional factors such as competitor analysis, and brand positioning to enhance the understanding and optimization of marketing strategies. In future research, a nuanced exploration of the tradeoff between profit maximization and market share maximization as corporate strategic goals could be conducted, considering the complexities and variables involved in decision-making. Additionally, an in-depth analysis could be undertaken to uncover the factors influencing companies in choosing between these goals, shedding light on the dynamic nature of corporate-level strategic choices.

While we operated under the assumption that the criteria in the weighting process of marketing strategy selection are independent, exploring the potential interaction effects among these criteria could be a promising avenue for future research. The study acknowledges a potential limitation in its exploration of criteria, particularly in the context of corporate strategic goals. While the research examines the trade-off between market share maximization and profit maximization, it recognizes the possibility of additional criteria that could influence strategic decision-making at the corporate level.

The identification and exploration of such criteria could be an avenue for future research to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted considerations in strategic goal setting.

Appendix A

Explanation about how to fill out a BWM questionnaire

Suppose you wish to select a car based on the following criteria, following the BWM :

- A) Price B) Quality C) Safety D) Style

- First, we identify the **Most** and the **Least** important criterion among these criteria.
- Second, we **compare the most important criterion to the other 3 criteria**.
- Last, we compare **the 3 criteria to the least important one**.

In both the second and last step, we use a 9-point scale system for comparison, where:

1 = Equal 3 = Moderate 5 = Strong 7 = Very strong 9 = Extreme 2, 4, 6, 8 are intermediate values

For example, you select **Price** as your most important criterion. First, we compare **Price to the other criteria** and identify that:

	Price	Quality	Safety	Style
Most important attribute (e.g., A=Price) to:	1	4	5	9

- 4 means that you Moderately to strongly prefer **Price over Quality**
- 9 means that you Extremely prefer **Price over Style**
- etc.

Note that since there is no difference between the importance of **Price** and itself, the comparison score is 1.

Since **Price over Style** is scored highest (9), **Style** is your least important criterion. Second, the comparison of **other attributes to style** is identified as:

	Least important criterion (e.g., D= Style)
Price to: _____	9
Quality to: _____	2
Safety to: _____	7
Style to: _____	1

- 2 means that you Equally to Moderately prefer **Quality over Style**
- 7 means that you Very strongly prefer **Safety over Style**

Again, since there is no difference between the importance of Style and itself, the comparison score is 1.

We have considered Offensive approach strategies into three clusters, including **Customer orientation**, **Innovation orientation**, and **Competition orientation**. Please select the most important cluster and then compare its relative importance with the other cluster on a scale 1-9:

Most important cluster	Customer orientation	Innovation orientation	Competition orientation
..... to:			

Please select the least important cluster and compare the other cluster to it on a scale 1-9:

	Least important cluster (.....)
Customer orientation to:	
Innovation orientation to:	
Competition orientation to:	

We have considered marketing strategy at functional level into three dimensions, including **Organization, Economy, and Customer-related**. Please select the most important dimension and then compare its relative importance with the other dimension on a scale 1-9:

Most important dimension	Organization	Economy	Customer-related
..... to:			

Please select the least important dimension and compare the other dimension to it on a scale 1-9:

	Least important dimension (.....)
Organization to	
Economy to	
Customer-related to	

The organizational dimension is affected by **Managerial capability, Capability in product distribution, and Human capital**. Please select the most important criterion and then compare its relative importance with the other criteria on a scale 1-9:

Most important criterion	Managerial capability	Capability in product distribution	Human capital
..... to:			

Please select the least important criterion and compare the other criteria to it on a scale 1-9:

	Least important criterion (.....)
Managerial capability to	
Capability in product distribution to	
Human capital to	

The economy dimension is affected by **Cost and profitability, Sale promotion, and Risk**. Please select the most important criterion and then compare its relative importance with the other criteria on a scale 1-9:

Most important criterion	Cost and profitability	Sale promotion	Risk
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..... to:			
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Please select the least important criterion and compare the other criteria to it on a scale 1-9:

	Least important criterion (.....)
Cost and profitability to	
Sale promotion to	
Risk to	

The customer-related dimension is affected by **Perceived quality and value**, **Customer retention**, **Customer satisfaction**, **Customer loyalty** and **Market orientation**. Please select the most important criterion and then compare its relative importance with the other criteria on a scale 1-9:

Most important criterion	Perceived quality and value	Customer retention	Customer satisfaction	Customer loyalty	Market orientation
..... to:					

Please select the least important criterion and compare the other criteria to it on a scale 1-9:

	Least important criterion (.....)
Perceived quality and value to	
Customer retention to	
Customer satisfaction to	
Customer loyalty to	
Market orientation to	

Please express your preference for the functional-level strategies based on Organizational, Economic, and Customer-related criteria using numbers 1 to 7, where 1 indicates low-level preference and 7 indicates high-level preference.

	functional-level strategies			
Criteria	Offensive advertising	Customer attraction programs	Identification of customers' latent needs	Delivery of superior value
Managerial capability				
Capability in product distribution				
Human capital				
Cost and profitability				
Sale promotion				

	functional-level strategies			
Criteria	Offensive advertising	Customer attraction programs	Identification of customers' latent needs	Delivery of superior value
Risk				
Perceived quality and value				
Customer retention				
Customer satisfaction				
Customer loyalty				
Market orientation				

Appendix B

Table A
Experts' Evaluation of "Best" and "Worst" main and sub-criteria in the pairwise comparison process.

Criteria	"Best" criterion pointed out by expert	"Worst" criterion pointed out by expert
Customer orientation	1,3,4,8,10	6
Competition orientation		1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10
Innovation orientation	2,5,6,7,9	7
Organization	1,3,6,8,9	10
Economy	7	1,2,3,4,5
Customer-related	4,5,10	6,7,8,9
Managerial capability,	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,10	
Capability in product	9	1,3,5,6,7
distribution		
Human capital	7	2,4,8,9,10
Cost and profitability	4,5,7,8,9,10	1,6
Sale promotion	2,3	
Risk	1,6	2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10
Perceived quality and	1,2,4,5,6,7,8	
value		
Customer retention	9	1
Customer satisfaction	3,10	
Customer loyalty	-	2,7,9
Market orientation	-	3,4,5,6,8,10

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**Integration of Organizational, Economic, and Customer-related Attributes to Prioritize
Marketing Strategies**

JBIM-06-2023-0356.R1

Dear Editor,

We appreciate your thoughtful critique of our paper as well as your comments and suggestions. Hopefully, we have addressed all the concerns raised by the reviewer. As a result of the reviewers' comments and concerns, revisions were made throughout the manuscript. These changes are included in the revised paper sent with this response. Colored text (blue highlights) shows most of the major additions in the manuscript. Calibri font is used throughout this document to show the concerns of the reviewers and comments copied from your response. They are followed by the authors' responses, which are in blue Times-Roman font. Once again, I would like to thank you for your guidance and suggestions, which greatly improved the manuscript.

Sincerely,

The Authors.

Reviewer 2#

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for your detailed comments on our manuscript. Your insightful feedback has been highly effective in improving the quality of the paper. We truly appreciate your ability to identify various aspects of the article and provide valuable comments. Thank you so much for your time and effort in reviewing our work.

Introduction:

1. The introduction begins with a broad statement about the importance of marketing strategy but lacks specificity regarding the novel contributions of this paper. It is crucial to clearly articulate how this study's framework differs from existing models in the first few paragraphs to capture the reader's interest.

Response:

Thank you for your comment. We have revised the text in the introduction. The revised version highlights the following contributions of our research:

We have proposed a structured framework of marketing strategies that offsets the weaknesses of the existing structure to a large extent. In order to select the best marketing strategy, we need to include criteria with an appropriate weight as objectives. For this purpose, at the first level, considering the literature, we set the market share as the touchstone for choosing a defensive or offensive approach. At the second level, to increase or maintain the market share, we evaluate three categories of strategies: customer orientation, competition orientation, and innovation

orientation. Finally, at the third level, we consider the selected strategy from level 2. The important dimensions at this level include organizational, customer-related, and economic evaluations, helping us choose the best functional marketing strategy.

2. While the introduction mentions the importance of a three-tier hierarchical structure, it fails to adequately justify why this study is necessary. What gaps in the current literature does it address? Mention specific shortcomings in existing frameworks that your study aims to overcome.

Response:

We have identified following problems in the current research (please see introduction) :

First, their knowledge and understanding of the concept of the hierarchical strategy and the criteria that go into the evaluation process are superficial and incoherent at best. It has been neglected that how the choice of strategy at each level affects the choice of strategy at other levels. Second, they have not considered the order in which these three levels should come in the strategy selection process; skipping each level of the hierarchy structure leads to a heterogeneous evaluation of marketing strategies at the functional level. Moreover, they have not defined the strategies of each level separately. Last but not least, they have not classified the strategy selection criteria individually for each level. This study uses insight from the strategy classification literature and tries to provide a dynamic framework for choosing a marketing strategy. Since the strategy selection criteria at each level must be identified and ranked, it uses a multi-criteria approach.

Given the existing literature, we can argue that our research addresses the following gaps (please see literature section):

- As presented in Table 1 and 2, a structured hierarchy for strategy selection and evaluation has not been considered in previous studies. This study divided the organization into three specific levels and found the most appropriate strategy for each level separately. Moreover, for the first time, the factors contributing to the selection of strategies have been categorized into three groups (organization, customer, and economy) for the functional level. Considering the presented structure, in addition to economic dimensions and organizational capabilities, as well as customer attitude, it is used in the evaluation of marketing strategies.
- As illustrated in Table 2, AHP was employed to determine the weight of criteria in the most relevant study, whereas BWM demonstrated better performance than AHP from several perspectives. BWM provides reliable and relevant results for ideal decision-making. BWM is a structured-based method which provides enough data for a consistent pairwise comparison over comparison-based methods (e.g. AHP). BWM is easy to understand and easy to revise by the respondents (Rezaei, 2015). It also provides fewer comparisons and, accordingly, reports a better compatibility rate (Rezaei, 2015, Rezaei, 2016). Because BWM considers both the best and worst-case criteria in pairwise comparisons, it alleviates anchoring bias during the weighting process. This stands out as one of its primary advantages over other pairwise comparison methods, implying a high consistency rate in the pairwise comparisons provided by the respondent (Rezaei, 2015).

3. The introduction overgeneralizes the efficacy of marketing strategies without providing concrete examples or citing specific studies that demonstrate these outcomes. It is important to provide evidence or case studies that highlight the critical role of structured marketing strategies in improving company performance.

Response:

The following reference has been added to the introduction which hilight the critical role of structured marketing:

Al-Dawalibi, A., Al-Dali, I. H., & Alkhayyal, B. A. (2020). Best marketing strategy selection using fractional factorial design with analytic hierarchy process. *MethodsX*, 7, 100927.

Chari, S., Balabanis, G., Robson, M. J., & Slater, S. (2017). Alignments and misalignments of realized marketing strategies with administrative systems: Performance implications. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 63, 129-144. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.11.002>

Kellermanns, F., Walter, J., Lechner, C., & Floyd, S. (2005). The Lack of Consensus About Strategic Consensus: Advancing Theory and Research. *Journal of Management - J MANAGE*, 31, 719-737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279114>

Tadepalli, R., & Avila, R. A. (1999). Market Orientation and the Marketing Strategy Process. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 7(2), 69-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.1999.11501830>

Varadarajan, P. R., & Clark, T. (1994). Delineating the scope of corporate, business, and marketing strategy. *Journal of Business Research*, 31(2-3), 93-105.

Varadarajan, R. (2010). Strategic marketing and marketing strategy: domain, definition, fundamental issues and foundational premises. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(2), 119-140. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0176-7>

Walter, J., Kellermanns, F. W., Floyd, S. W., Veiga, J. F., & Matherne, C. (2013). Strategic alignment: A missing link in the relationship between strategic consensus and organizational performance. *Strategic Organization*, 11(3), 304-328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476127013481155>

4. The objectives of the paper are listed in a somewhat disjointed manner. It would be beneficial to clearly articulate how each objective contributes to addressing the research gap identified earlier in the introduction. Additionally, ensuring that each objective is directly linked to the study's novel contribution will enhance the cohesiveness of the introduction.

Response:

Thank you. The goals have been updated in line with the research contributions.

- To provide a structured hierarchical framework of marketing strategies. This goal introduces a systematic approach to guide strategy implementation through a three-tier structure.
- To identify and categorize the factors contributing to strategy selection at the functional level. This goal provides insights into often overlooked operational-level decision-making and adds clarity to strategy selection.
- To determine the importance of the factors by applying the BWM. This goal provides a method to effectively prioritize criteria in strategy selection with a low level of cognitive burden.
- To select the most appropriate marketing strategy based on the factors relevant in the context of sports goods manufacturing.

5. Authors need to justify the contribution along with the gap. I do not find here.

Response:

Thank you for the careful reading. We have justified our consideration with the following argument (Please see research gaps)

- None of the research has shed light on how the marketing strategy set at the apex of the marketing pyramid becomes a guiding objective for the lower tiers. As we've discussed, traversing down the levels signifies the transition from strategic formulation to practical execution. Hence, it's imperative to emphasize the alignment of goals when appraising marketing strategies at the lower echelons. Furthermore, the absence of any discernible framework underscores the challenge of seamlessly integrating these levels to optimize strategy selection and implementation within the organization.

Literature section:

1. The literature review falls short in integrating the discussed studies into the development of the study's theoretical framework. It should explicitly link how each piece of reviewed literature informs, supports, or contrasts with the proposed research, thereby establishing a stronger justification for the study.

Response:

Thank you for your comment. We changed the structure based on your comment. Please see Section Literature.

2. The evaluation criteria is not enough justified of the three dimensions: org, customer, and economy

Response:

Thank you for your comment. While we have endeavored to encompass as many relevant criteria as possible, it's acknowledged that the justification for the evaluation criteria across the three dimensions - organization, customer, and economy - may not be exhaustive. This limitation is presents a potential area for future investigation, as outlined in the Limitations and Future Research section.

3. The section appears to touch on relevant theories and models only superficially.

Response:

Thank you for your careful reading. We have revised the section based on your comment.

4. The review does not sufficiently address the methodological limitations or challenges encountered in past studies, missing an opportunity to underscore the significance and potential contributions of the proposed research methodology.

Response:

From a methodological perspective, the following research gap has been pointed out.

- As illustrated in Table 2, AHP was employed to determine the weight of criteria in the most relevant study, whereas BWM demonstrated better performance than AHP from several perspectives. BWM provides reliable and relevant results for ideal decision-making. BWM is a structured-based method which provides enough data for a consistent pairwise comparison over comparison-based methods (e.g. AHP). BWM is easy to understand and easy to revise by the respondents (Rezaei, 2015). It also provides fewer comparisons and, accordingly, reports a better compatibility rate (Rezaei, 2015, Rezaei, 2016). Because BWM considers both the best and worst-case criteria in pairwise comparisons, it alleviates anchoring bias during the weighting process. This stands out as one of its primary advantages over other pairwise comparison methods, implying a high consistency rate in the pairwise comparisons provided by the respondent (Rezaei, 2015).

5. The rationale behind the selection of specific studies for review is not clearly articulated.

Response:

Following explanation were added.

To refine the criteria outlined in the hierarchical structure of functional marketing strategies (Figure 1) and identify methodological research gaps, we conduct an in-depth review of relevant literature in this section. It is important to note that, given the nature of our research falling under the category of multi-criteria decision making (MCDM), we exclusively examine studies employing this approach for addressing marketing selection problems.

6. The section would benefit from a discussion on contradictory findings or unresolved debates within the literature. Highlighting these aspects could further justify the study's contribution to the field by addressing these discrepancies or by providing a new perspective.

Response:

Thank you, following research ga has been added:

- None of the research has shed light on how the marketing strategy set at the apex of the marketing pyramid becomes a guiding objective for the lower tiers. As we've discussed, traversing down the levels signifies the transition from strategic formulation to practical execution. Hence, it's imperative to emphasize the alignment of goals when appraising marketing strategies at the lower echelons. Furthermore, the absence of any discernible framework underscores the challenge of seamlessly integrating these levels to optimize strategy selection and implementation within the organization.

Methodology:

1. The methodology section does not provide sufficient detail on the data collection process, particularly regarding how the expert interviews were conducted (e.g., interview format, questions asked, and duration). Including this information would increase the transparency and reproducibility of the research.

Response:

Thank you for your careful attention. We have now clarified the data collection step as follows (please see Section Data collection):

We collected the data for this study in three phases. First, we conducted structured interviews with the CEOs and owner of the company as outlined in Table 2. During these interviews, we elucidated the concepts of offensive and defensive marketing strategies. Explaining that the selection between these strategies hinges on factors such as market share and the company's mission, we engaged in a dialogue with the executives to understand their company's approach. By delving into their market position and organizational objectives, we aimed to provide insights into selecting the most suitable strategy for their company's growth and sustainability. Then we used an online questionnaire developed based on the BWM to identify the main strategy orientations among customers, competition, and innovation. We also asked the experts to evaluate the criteria that affect the strategies. In the next phase, to identify the most appropriate strategy at the functional level (last level in Figure 2), we used an online questionnaire designed based on a 7-point Likert score. During both stages of data collection, we received responses from 10 experts affiliated with a sports company. Information pertaining to the respondents' expertise, work experience, and educational background is meticulously detailed in Table 3. The questionnaires utilized have been included in Appendix.

Table 3
Experts' contribution.

Expert	Expertise	Experience (year)	Educational background
Expert 1	Network marketing and after-sales service manager	10	Bachelor's degree
Expert 2	General manager	10	Master's degree
Expert 3	Production and control manager	3	Master's degree
Expert 4	Procurement manager	8	Bachelor's degree
Expert 5	Marketing manager	4	Bachelor's degree
Expert 6	Advertising and content creation manager	3	Bachelor's degree
Expert 7	Supply chain manager	2	Bachelor's degree
Expert 8	Marketing manager	5	Bachelor's degree
Expert 9	Customer relationship manager	4	Bachelor's degree
Expert 10	Customer relationship manager	1	Bachelor's degree

2. While the paper mentions using the Best-Worst Method (BWM) for evaluating strategies, it lacks a comprehensive explanation of how this method was applied in practice. Details such as the criteria used for comparisons, the process of determining "best" and "worst" criteria, and how inconsistencies were addressed are crucial for understanding the methodology's application.

Response:

Thank you. We have now outlined the experts' opinions regarding all the best and worst criteria in the pairwise comparison process (please see Table A in Appendix B). There are two strategies for addressing inconsistency in pairwise comparisons: either request each inconsistent respondent to

revise the questionnaire or remove the results of the pairwise comparison from the calculation process (please see section BWM).

Table A
Experts' Evaluation of "Best" and "Worst" main and sub-criteria in the pairwise comparison process.

Criteria	"Best" criterion pointed out by expert	"Worst" criterion pointed out by expert
Customer orientation	1,3,4,8,10	6
Competition orientation		1,2,3,4,5,8,9,10
Innovation orientation	2,5,6,7,9	7
Organization	1,3,6,8,9	10
Economy	7	1,2,3,4,5
Customer-related	4,5,10	6,7,8,9
Managerial capability,	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,10	
Capability in product	9	1,3,5,6,7
distribution		
Human capital	7	2,4,8,9,10
Cost and profitability	4,5,7,8,9,10	1,6
Sale promotion	2,3	
Risk	1,6	2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10
Perceived quality and	1,2,4,5,6,7,8	
value		
Customer retention	9	1
Customer satisfaction	3,10	
Customer loyalty	-	2,7,9
Market orientation	-	3,4,5,6,8,10

3. There is no discussion of the potential limitations associated with the chosen methodology and how these limitations might impact the study's findings.

Response:

We have included the following limitation concerning the methodology, which could serve as a potential area for future research (please see Limitation and future research)

While we operated under the assumption that the criteria in the weighting process of marketing strategy selection are independent, exploring the potential interaction effects among these criteria could be a promising avenue for future research.

4. The methodology section would benefit from a more detailed explanation of the analytical techniques used to process and analyze the data collected through BWM and expert interviews. This should include any statistical software or tools used, as well as the rationale behind these choices.

Response:

We revised the text as follows:

Hence, the BWM linear model in Excel Solver, available at <https://bestworstmethod.com/>, was utilized for its simplicity. It was employed once to determine dimension weights and thrice to ascertain the weights of criteria within each dimension (Rezaei, 2016).

Result and discussion:

1. Critically assess whether the paper provides a thorough market analysis to justify the proposed corporate-level strategies. It's crucial that strategic recommendations are supported by a detailed understanding of market conditions, including competition, customer behavior, and industry trends.

Response:

Thank you for your interest. As presented in the managerial insight, this study doesn't aim to comprehensively cover all strategy selection criteria for various situations. However, should a new strategy be introduced or a new criterion for evaluating strategies emerge due to evolving market conditions such as competition, customer behavior, or industry trends, our proposed model offers flexibility. If new alternatives arise, the model can evaluate them alongside existing strategies, aiding managers in decision-making. Similarly, if new criteria are introduced, our method allows for re-weighting and re-evaluation of criteria, ensuring continued relevance and adaptability.

2. The feasibility of implementing the proposed strategies is another critical area. The paper should discuss potential barriers to implementation and suggest ways to overcome them. Without this, the strategies may appear impractical.

Response:

As presented in Research framework, we use a questionnaire with a 7-point Likert scale to determine the scores for functional marketing strategies in step four (Please see Table 8). The numbers demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the proposed strategies at the functional level.

Table 8

The score of strategies at the functional level.

The score of strategies in the financial level									
Customer orientation strategies					Perspective				
Strategy	Organizational		Customer-related		Economy		Overall value		
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	

Table 8
The score of strategies at the functional level.

Offensive advertising	318.4	4	240.5	1	221.6	1	78.1	1
Customer attraction programs	339.2	1	222.1	2	202.1	2	76.3	2
Identification of customers' latent needs	335.4	2	214.8	3	188.2	3	73.8	3
Delivery of superior value	324.6	3	192.1	4	168.6	4	68.5	4

3. The lack of clear performance metrics can render the strategic recommendations less actionable and harder to evaluate.

Response:

While it's true that qualitative criteria often suffer from a lack of clear performance metrics, employing methodologies like BWM can effectively address this issue. BWM provides a structured approach to decision-making that allows for the integration of both qualitative and quantitative factors, enabling us to establish measurable criteria even in areas traditionally deemed difficult to quantify. By leveraging BWM, strategic recommendations can become more actionable and easier to evaluate, bridging the gap between qualitative aspects and measurable outcomes (please see research gaps).

Implications:

1. Managerial implications should be based on the findings. Please align this. For this you can include the strategy from- Rahman, M.S., AbdelFattah, F.A., Bag, S. and Gani, M.O. (2022), "Survival strategies of SMEs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic: application of SEM and fsQCA", Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, Vol. 37 No. 10, pp. 1990-2009. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-12-2020-0564>

Response:

Thank you for your comment. Given the variance in methodology between our study and that of Sabbir Rahman et al., the managerial insights in our work exhibit a different structure. However, we have endeavored to align our study as closely as possible with the findings presented in the reference (please see Managerial implications).

Associate Editor #

Comments to the Author:

In addition to preparing the article for submission to JBIM, please address the comments from reviewer 2. Enhance the rigor in the methodology section and further develop the final sections. Ensure to compare the findings with papers published in JBIM.

Response:

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3 Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise the paper. We truly appreciate this chance and
4 thank the reviewer for their valuable comments. We have made efforts to address the comments
5 and enhance the quality of our study to be closer to the paper published in JBIM. We have added
6 a table and explanation to clarify the methodology used in this research.
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