



## The Effect of Ethical Marketing in Auditing on Auditors' Job Performance

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### ABSTRACT

Changes in the business environment for professional services as well as intense competition in this industry have pushed auditors towards marketing. This study aims at investigating the effect of ethical marketing on auditors' job performance. Accordingly, an applied approach is taken to conduct the research while in terms of the research implementation method, the study is descriptive of the correlation type, and the tool for measuring and collecting data is a standard questionnaire. The statistical population includes 228 experts who are members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, who were selected using a random sampling method. Smart-PLS software was used to analyze the research hypotheses. The results of the hypothesis test showed that ethical marketing has a positive and significant effect on auditors' performance. Therefore, in addition to observing professional behavior and maintaining independence, auditors must follow the principles and ethical values in marketing in the field of auditing, in order to improve their performance and increase the quality of services.

### Keywords:

Audit Marketing, Ethical Marketing, Auditors' Performance, Structural Equations

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the auditing profession has undergone rapid and noteworthy changes. Following the court decision in America in 1997 to allow auditors to work in marketing, and the court decision in Sweden in 2010, as well as the decision of the European Commission in 2001 to reduce regulations in the job market for auditors, allowed audit institutions, most of the goals follow the economy and search for their own income and reduce costs in audit work (Hay & Knechel, 2010). In Iran, with the formation of the Institute of Certified Accountants in 2001 with a focus on privatization of organizations, this subject received further attention, because a large number of auditing institutions emerged, which led to the failure of the monopoly of the auditing organization and increased competition in the auditing market (Safarzadeh et al., 2019). As a result, the concept of marketing in the audit profession and gaining more market share was brought up more than before. Therefore, in order to maintain their clients and remain in the competitive market, the people working as auditors are forced to use marketing techniques (Maranjori, 2020). Marketing in auditing is an attempt to provide different services from other competitors, which is demonstrated by the intervention of companies and auditors' activities in acquiring and retaining customers through marketing and advertising tools on various platforms (Broberg et al., 2013). Marketing is an important strategy for business development, and auditors, as a group of professional service providers, try to promote the company's services (Luders et al., 2020). Therefore, institutions, owners, partners, as well as auditors who look at marketing as an important part of work may balance marketing and the inherent duties of the auditing profession (Mahdavi et al., 2017). However, it should be noted that as the aforementioned groups carry out marketing activities, they must also follow the professional and behavioral guidelines and other standards established by legal organizations (Maranjori et al., 2018). On the one hand, the auditing profession deals with its traditional duties, ethical guidelines, and code of professional conduct, and on the other hand, it faces with marketing activities, which auditors should be more informed about in order to survive in a competitive environment (Joseph and Pinar, 2019).

Today, professional services are changing, and these developments are due to the competitiveness of the profession and also to improve the relationship with employers. Nevertheless, according to these changes, auditors must be able to manage things such as compliance with ethics and professional standards as well as changes in customer expectations (Moser et al., 2015). Employers are looking for an auditor who provides different services than that of other ones. This issue creates competition among auditors and increases their willingness in marketing (Clow et al., 2009). From an individual aspect, auditors are committed to business owners and can attract more business owners through auditing services. In other words, auditors actively seek to acquire and maintain relationships with business owners, and this indicates their desire for marketing (Broberg et al., 2018). Services such as auditing are complex and auditors must have knowledge, expertise, and optimal performance to create trust and confidence. Therefore, they are expected to provide their best services and improve their performance. This, in turn, puts pressure on business people to increase the amount of work and profit (Hanafi, 2010). As auditors perform marketing activities to improve their performance, they must also comply with professional ethics and other standards set by legislative institutions (Shoja' et al., 2018). Auditors must carefully manage the time required for marketing activities and inherent audit duties so as not to harm the reputation of a profession. Auditors believe that marketing is an important part of their work, and it is likely that a combination of auditors' primary duties and performing marketing activities will constitute the auditing profession (Broberg, 2018). Despite the fact that in recent decades, ethical issues in marketing have been entered into the marketing literature to a large extent, due to the major problems that exist in the interactions between companies and institutions with customers and users of services and products, many topics and issues related to this area are in an aura of uncertainty. Although some of the problems in this field have been solved by proposing ethical marketing theories, the basic problems still remain. When people talk about ethical marketing, they typically refer to the principles, values, and ideas that marketers and marketing organizations expect to adhere to. In fact, ethical marketing is a kind of criticism of traditional marketing methods. Referring to factors such as excessive distribution costs,

relatively high advertising costs and excessive profits, Cutler and Armstrong (2012) put marketing criticism as the basis of their theories. And they believe that among the critical theories of marketing, ethical marketing is of special importance in the sense that it criticizes marketing within the framework of ethical principles. Although ethical marketing is a relatively new topic in marketing science, because it looks at marketing from a customer-oriented perspective, it is subject to more attention among other theories. Also, what makes ethical marketing different from other marketing techniques is putting emphasis on ethics and interests of stakeholders. Therefore, the need for ethical marketing in the field of auditing is felt more than ever, because both ethics and professional behavior and marketing as well as job performance are very important for auditors. Since many of the studies conducted in this field are conducted abroad, the studied cases also belong to the social and cultural environment of the same countries. According to what we said, the use of ethical marketing and predicting its consequences seems necessary in auditing and especially the performance of auditors, because one of the most important things that attract customers' trust to marketing activities in auditing is their confidence in the ethical nature of such activities. On the other hand, as marketing and trading are among the basic organs of the economy, it is necessary to focus on marketing with the aim of attracting new customers by relying on ethical principles that are appropriate for societies. Review of the literature reveals that there is a lack of sufficient research on the concept of ethical marketing and its strategies for auditors and also, intense competition in the market, satisfaction and improvement of job performance, increase of the quality of auditing services, and considering the increasing growth of marketing types in the society and the movement of businesses from the traditional to the digital route and the increase of lies, opportunism, and hypocrisy in marketing without complying with the ethical standards of society and profession, conducting the present study in the field of auditing is vital and important. Finally, the results of this study can expand the theoretical foundations of research in ethics as well as marketing research in auditing and can be useful for policy makers in the area of auditing. Therefore, this research seeks to answer this basic question: Does ethical marketing have an effect on auditors' performance?

## **2- An Overview on the Research Theoretical Framework and Literature**

### **2-1- Marketing in Auditing**

Marketing is one of the main elements of the activities of any company or institution. Making a product or providing service is one aspect of activities in a business unit, and selling the same is another aspect. Sales is the most important part of any business unit, because the services provided or the products manufactured will have value when they can be sold (Mousavi Shiri and Pahlavan, 2015). Today, because of the complexity of new business environments and the variety of services and products offered by credit institutions, obtaining financial well-being requires a proper understanding of financial topics and problems. This has been taken into account for a long time in most modern societies and has been raised since the early years of the 90s in an ascending state of importance so that the concept of marketing has been raised in countries such as the United States and United Kingdom. Today's competitive environment not only forces professional service companies to consider marketing trends to achieve competitive advantages but also obliges them to constantly adjust the relationship with the customer and other shareholders (Mohammadian and Soleimani Amiri, 2017). The multiple marketing framework adopted by most professional service companies includes both transactional agreements and close managed relationships with customers. Relationships, both within professional service companies and with external customers, are necessary to achieve competitive advantages and customer welfare. Therefore, marketing is necessary to strengthen the relationships with customers in order to create the impression that the services of one institution are different from that of other ones (Maranjori, 2020).

As marketing is important in business, the auditing profession needs marketing either and is not exempt from it (Achuaa & Alabar, 2017). The beginning of changing the attitude of auditors towards marketing activities goes back to the decision of the Supreme Court in the United States. In 1977, the US Supreme Court (in the state of Arizona) ruled in a case that professional organizations could not prohibit their members from marketing and advertising. After this ruling, the attitude in auditing turned towards

marketing activities and grew during these years (Maranjori et al., 2018). But in Iran, in Article 250 of the regulations approved in 2018 by the Iranian Institute of Certified Accountants, the term “marketing of professional services” is used and implicitly recognized as permissible, and it is stated that if a working certified accountant doubts the appropriateness of the form and content of his advertising or marketing, he should ask for the opinion of the Institute of the Certified Accountants. In this article of the regulations, it is stated that a certified accountant should not exaggerate the services he provides, his professional qualifications and experiences, make other people's work look less valuable, and make unrealistic, misleading, and unjustified expectations of his work, or create and present unreal, misleading or deceptive content and praise himself without having a verifiable background. Accordingly, it seems that in Iran, the obstacles to advertising and marketing have been removed for official accountants (Taghipour and Azizi, 2022). The results of Broberg's studies in Sweden in 2013 showed that auditors in Sweden adapt to the new market conditions and have a positive attitude towards marketing activities and understand the importance of marketing as part of professional responsibility and to a large extent, they are able to establish a balance between the time spent on auditing and marketing activities (Shaja' et al., 2018). By applying marketing strategies, auditors, managers and business owners can share their ideas with customers and stakeholders for making profit (Broberg et al., 2013). Also, audit institutions need to pay attention to marketing activities to survive in the competitive conditions that are associated with the increase of audit institutions (Lourdes, 2020). Broberg et al. (2013) in a research entitled “time balance between audit and marketing activities in Sweden” investigated the relationship between auditors' attitude towards audit and marketing activities. The results of their study showed that according to the traditional view about the distance and difference between professional auditing and marketing partnerships, changes have been made in the auditors' business environment, which shows that professional interests and benefits have created space for other activities such as marketing. Auditing companies gain a competitive advantage over irresponsible companies through marketing. There are many examples of companies trying to be more

environmentally responsible in order to better satisfy the needs of consumers. Another important goal of marketing is to create a competitive state in the market. Companies that observe ethical issues in the marketing and production processes create a competitive situation for themselves compared to their competitors. Therefore, observing the principles of marketing in accounting and auditing makes the audience have a better perception of the related company (Collin et al., 2020). Companies need marketing strategies to achieve profitability. Using the concept of marketing is a useful strategy for ensuring the availability of resources during the implementation of marketing activities for auditors. By applying marketing strategies, accountants, managers, and business owners can share their ideas with customers and stakeholders to get more benefits.

Therefore, marketing in auditing includes all the basic and long-term activities in the field of marketing, which use the analysis of the initial position of a company's strategy and the formulation, evaluation, and selection of market-oriented strategies (Mohammadian and Soleimani Amiri, 2017). Marketing essentially creates or increases demand, and without demand, there are no customers. Therefore, creating market strategies that transfer added value results to the organization certainly makes auditors successful in the future (Achuaa & Alabar, 2014).

Companies with professional services look for the most sophisticated principles of marketing (Hodges & Young, 2009) and marketing activities are not only carried out by those assigned to the marketing department; but rather a task that is integrated with the operational activities of the organization (Ashill et al., 2003). Research in auditing as a professional service and its relationship with marketing has emerged during the last decade that has been probably a response to the changes in the business environment. Research on the relationship between these two factors usually leads to two paths. One track has examined changes in auditors' attitudes toward marketing (Clow et al., 2009; Tang et al., 2002) while the other track focuses on marketing activities by auditors (Heischmidt et al., 2002). Both approaches show that competition is increasing due to the growth of a large number of audit companies in the market. These competitions change the attitude and performance of auditors towards marketing and also ultimately change the nature of self-auditing (Broberg et al., 2013). As a result, some

studies such as Hay and Nachel (2010) investigated that customers' dependences, getting customers, maintaining the customer's relationships, and customers' retention constitute the functional areas of audit in marketing.

Auditors give advice to business owners and try to add values through audit services. However, what has been mentioned is relatively a result of the marketing function of the profession; in other words, it is an attempt to provide services different from that of other competitors, which is more evident with the intervention of auditors' activity in acquiring and retaining customers through marketing and advertising tools (Mohammadian and Soleimani Amiri, 2016). On the other hand, employers look for an auditor who provides services different from that of other ones. This has created competition among auditors and increased their desire for marketing, and gradually, made them to follow complex marketing principles, that following these principles by the auditors is to attract the employers and as a result, such factors increase the demand to hire auditors (Clow et al., 2009).

In recent years, researchers have investigated the entry of marketing into the audit profession, marketing and customer-oriented strategies in the audit profession, including service quality strategies (Svanström & Sundgren, 2010 and Broberg et al., 2018), price reduction (Dopuch & King, 2015) and advertising (Kraus et al., 2015). According to Baldacchino (2017), due to the Enron scandal in 2000, the attitude towards marketing and business activities in auditing has become increasingly negative. On the other hand, there have been changes in laws that have increased the need of audit companies to trade and market trends (Broberg et al., 2018). Carrington et al. (2013) argue that auditors' professional logics and business logics are not always in conflict with each other. Therefore, auditors may have different levels of both trends at the same time. On the one hand, accepting professional values and ideals without considering a commercial aspect may cause companies to neglect the necessary financial benefits and lose their customers. On the other hand, if only attention is paid to the prospects and commercial benefits and marketing activities, the auditing profession and the auditor's independence are harmed. Therefore, it is argued that professional and marketing trends in auditing form the auditing method. Lourdes et al.

(2020) believe that advertising can be a suitable channel for audit institutions to promote transparency and citizen participation; However, the use of advertising tools by audit companies is still in its infancy. According to Ohman et al. (2012), marketing in auditing includes all the basic and long-term activities that use the analysis of the primary situation of a company's strategy as well as the formulation, evaluation and selection of market-oriented strategies (Busca & Bertrandias, 2020). In Iran's auditing market, double standards have caused different working conditions for different institutions such as government auditing institutions (the Auditing Organization), private auditing institutions, and even the ones within the community of official accountants (Maranjori, 2020). According to Moser et al. (2015), observing the principles of marketing leads to a better attitude of the audience towards a company. Broberg et al. (2018) showed that auditors with positive attitudes toward marketing are largely able to balance the time spent on audit intrinsic tasks and marketing activities. Auditing companies gain a competitive advantage over other companies through marketing (Maranjori, 2020).

## **2.2. Ethical Marketing**

In recent years, unprofessional behavior has led to financial scandals and important commercial failures, and for this reason, many people blame the auditors of the financial statements of such institutions for failing to discover or report mistakes or frauds. It has been criticized and blamed, and the credibility of auditing institutions or the auditing profession has been damaged (Oghbana, 2010). Although all audit failures are not related to the unethical behavior of auditors, many of them are related to the unethical or at least unprofessional behavior of some auditors (Salehi, 2015). Professional ethics and behavior represent a set of moral rules and virtues, and these moral rules are necessary for the existence and continuation of the profession. Therefore, due to the importance of ethics and professional behavior, for people to do their work completely honestly, flawlessly and correctly, the organizers of an auditing profession established rules, regulations and principles of professional behavior, because ethical behavior is necessary for this profession and ethical behavior is a basic need to gain the trust of service users (Moradi and Zakizadeh, 2015). The basic principles of professional behavior

include: truth, honesty, objectivity, efficiency, professional care, confidentiality of information, professional behavior, and independence (Hasani and Sepasi, 2017). Also, the researchers stated the six principles that an auditor should have, which include: accountability, public welfare, objectivity, independence, honesty, professional care, and development of the nature of services (Salehi, 2016).

Ethical marketing is one of the relatively new fields of marketing topics. Since the philosophy of utilitarianism has caused serious problems in different societies, providing ethical marketing has become a very serious debate, and this issue has led to the formation of a branch called ethical marketing (Eskandarpour et al., 2021). In this regard, some experts such as Hunt and Vitell (2006) and Cutler and Armstrong (2011) have presented models and theories. Ling Li (2012) stated that the industrial, professional, and organizational environment affect the ethical conditions of businessmen and professionals. In today's marketing era, a company that does not adhere to the ethical principles of marketing or even its sellers do not follow ethical sales behavior, may lose the customers' trust and subsequently this will affect the customer loyalty. (Jandaghi et al., 2017). There is no universal definition or standard for marketing ethics based on which people can be classified in terms of ethical or unethical behaviors. Ethical marketing pursues honest and true supply of a product within cultural and social values desired by a consumer (Jandaghi et al., 2017). Ethical marketing falls under the area of applying ethics, which is closely related to the spiritual principles behind marketing legislation. It is the honest and true presentation of a product within context of cultural and social values desired by the consumer, which has increased the value of that product's customers. In a commercial company, marketing has the most relationship with ethical abuses (Iravani, 2011). Since the philosophy of utilitarianism has caused serious problems in different societies, making an ethical marketing has become a very serious discussion, and this has led to the formation of a branch called ethical marketing. This branch of marketing, which was formed with the aim of making ethical marketing activities, tries to minimize the harm caused to the people and consequently to the society by considering the benefits of the customers and also by applying principles and methods. In fact, marketing needs certain ethical

principles to remain healthy and sustainable, and since the main goal of business and commerce is human excellence in addition to making profit, it is necessary to observe ethical considerations in marketing (Fayazi and Modaresnia, 2017). Although marketing has been formed with the aim of helping the economy and meeting the needs of consumers, due to the neglect of many countries from the social and moral aspects of marketing, sometimes they embark on lying, cheating, violating people's privacy, promoting consumerism, and neglecting the weak and low-income class of the society, that is itself facing severe criticism. Neglecting the social and ethical dimensions of marketing, which has caused major violations and deviation from marketing ideals to increase profitability, has caused many people to doubt the positive nature of this business flow (Dubisi et al., 2014). In contrary to traditional views, the duty of companies and organizations is not only to earn profit, but also they have responsibilities towards their environment and business area, which are referred to as moral and social responsibilities. While in the old definition of marketing, the main emphasis is on the process of planning and managing the market including: production, pricing, promotion, distribution of goods, ideas, and services in order to provide and exchange individual and organizational satisfactions, its modern definition say that marketing is the process of creating, informing and presenting value to customers and customer relationship management so that it makes benefits for the customers and other stakeholders of an organization (Cutler and Armstrong, 2012). Marketing is an important part of the economy, and while it causes economic growth and increases public welfare, in some cases, due to neglecting the consumer rights, it also causes disorders. This has caused critics' theories to be raised in this regard, especially from the 80s and 90s onwards, the most important of which is the theory of ethical marketing. Although concepts such as ethical marketing have gained special status in marketing literature in recent decades, marketing still faces serious problems in regulating the interactions between companies and customers and creating a fair relationship between the two (Eskandarpour et al., 2020). In every country, in addition to providing different products and services, companies are expected to pay more attention to ethical values. When a company follows ethical procedures, customers also

have a more favorable opinion about the services of that company, and when the company deviates from the accepted standards of society, its marketing process loses its efficiency and sometimes even faces serious problems. Failure to adhere to ethical principles and procedures will result in nothing but an increase in dissatisfied customers, notoriety, mistrust, and ultimately a decrease in market share (Singh, 2011). Ethical issues are actually the most important subjects in marketing, because they actually represent the conflict between economic and social operations (Gavo et al., 2010). From an organizational point of view, ethical marketing refers to activities based on transparency, valuation, justice, and accountability (Shahinmehr and Hasani, 2016). Organizations that have a code of ethics face less ethical problems, because in these organizations there are specific behavioral standards for employees who are committed to observe these standards (Singh, 2011). On the other hand, the code of ethics increases credibility and improves the organizational image of a company. Also, codes of ethics guarantee the organization's commitment to behavioral standards and strengthen behavioral standards that increase the probability of repeating ethical behavior in organizations (Somers, 2001). Ethical marketing is a philosophy that affects all levels and aspects of marketing. Based on this method, honesty and correct ethics are promoted in business and as a result, there will be some rules that make an ethics-based marketing. Ethical marketing does not refer to a written plan, but provides tools to evaluate the strategies used by marketing in the past, present, and future. Among the most important marketing environments in which compliance with ethical principles is of particular importance are service-related institutions (Cutler and Armstrong, 2012). The most important ethical principles accepted in businesses are:

**Honesty:** Honesty and integrity are noble human qualities that are necessary to be observed in all stages of trading. Honesty is one of the most important ethical characteristics that is necessary for every business activity. Concealing the truth or providing false information about the characteristics of the product or deceiving a customer is an unseemly act and harms the continuity of business activities (Irvani, 2011).

**Fairness (Justice):** This characteristic, which is considered one of the great moral perfections for traders and merchants, and also can be counted as one of the effects of justice, is highly emphasized. The reflection of this feature in the business environment is that the parties to the transaction are satisfied with their rights and do not cause injustice and oppression to each other (Zarei, 2016).

**Responsibility:** in fact, responsibility is acceptance the consequences of marketing decisions and strategies. Based on the principle of responsibility, business operators must provide all information related to goods or services that can be provided or points that somehow affect the conduct of a business transaction for the other future party. The principle of responsibility or accountability has a close relationship with the principle of honesty (Cutler and Armstrong, 2012).

**Adherence to commitments:** job commitment is a category that has been emphasized since its beginning in the society. All people always encourage others to make commitments for themselves and honor their personal and social commitments by adhering to them. Commitment means that a person adheres to the promises he makes. The extent of a marketer's commitment is shown by his ability to implement what he is bound to or has bound himself to (Taghavi, 2014).

**Keeping trade secrets (confidentiality):** A process or a set of information that is not generally available and based on which one can benefit from economic advantages over competitors or customers is called trade secrets. Trade secret refers to information that the owner of the information does not want competitors to know about (Zarei, 2016).

According to Jamnik (2011), ethical trend, reference groups, and personal goals of marketers have influenced their adherence to ethical principles in the marketing process of companies. He also believes that technology, global competition, competitive strategies, and political and cultural environment are effective on marketing ethics.

Ng (2015) investigated the effect of ethical selling behavior on customer loyalty in Vietnam and stated that there is a direct relationship between ethical selling behavior and customer loyalty, through the mediating variables of customer commitment and trust. Kumar et al. (2016) studied the ethical marketing methods from the consumers' perspective. The results

showed that the dimensions of fairness in the product and fairness in the price have a positive relationship with the buyers' attitude and behavioral control of their analysis, and also they affect their goals to pay attention to the company's ethical principles while predicting the purchase. Dubisi (2014) showed that the use of value and ethical models in private companies has helped to better understand the demands of consumers and it has led to meeting the needs of customers, so that by influencing the buying behavior of consumers, it has encouraged them to buy the products of these companies and increased the profitability. According to Chernev (2018), one of the current realities of the financial markets is that there is a very considerable competition, and successful companies must design and offer their marketing offers in a more consistent way with the company's target markets; this requires the application of marketing in the ethical field. As a result, instead of focusing only on the production and sale of products and in addition to providing services, companies consider themselves a part of the process of providing value to customers. In this regard, considering competition, loyalty, and market understanding of the behavior of the customers is the key to success in using the ethical marketing (Zarei, 2016).

### **2.3. Auditors' Performance and Ethical Marketing**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines performance as operating, applying, utilizing and doing any regular or undertaken task. In addition to being related to outputs and outcomes, this definition shows that performance is closely related to work and its results (Hanafi, 2010). Therefore, performance can be considered as behavior. Campbell et al. (1998) believe that there is behavior in performance and it should be distinguished from results, because some system factors can destroy the results (Busi, 2006). All professions, regardless of their field of activity, have rules, principles, standards, and guidelines that must be followed in order to perform that particular job. Many experts, including accountants and auditors, are subject to strict technical, ethical and behavioral standards, regulations and codes, within a framework in which they use their knowledge, competence, skills, and experience, in other words, their professional judgment, to perform their duties as best as possible.

In auditing, professional judgment is the application of learnings, experiences, and knowledge gained about auditing and accounting standards and professional code of conduct requirements, for making appropriate decisions according to the audit work conditions. The increasing growth and complexities of the society justify the need for related economic information, information systems, as well as information generating processes. In the meantime, the need for auditing as a part of the reporting and information process increases. The benefit of different sections of the society from auditing services will be maximized by the conditions that the role of auditing in the society will be clearly defined with the all-round efforts of financial activists while the services provided by them have the required quality. Therefore, the high quality of audit services requires high job performance of auditors, which has been proposed as a very important structure in industrial and organizational psychology (Marvian Hosseini and Laridasht Bayaz, 2015). Also, in auditing, a person's job performance is very important due to the effect it has on the quality of the audit, and the delay in submitting the audit report directly affects the efficiency and performance of the audit (Kalbers et al., 2018). Therefore, neglecting or compromising with poor job performance may reduce audit quality and expose audit institutions to legal liability and loss of credibility. As human resources, auditors are considered the most valuable resource in any auditing institution and they are undoubtedly one of the main foundations of development in these institutions or companies; therefore, the effective performance of the said resource has always been the concern of the partners and managers of these institutions. Collecting performance information of auditors is done in different ways and it requires acquiring skills and updating appropriate approaches. A manager or supervisor should judge the status of the auditor using the results obtained from the evaluation and consideration of the goals and expectations, and also identify the weak and strong points and take the improvement of the activities into account while providing appropriate recommendations and feedback in the process of payment and promotion. (Kazemi and Esmaeilpour Zanjani, 2015). The auditor's qualified performance is an obstacle to breaking the law and violation of the accepted principles of accounting in financial reporting (Salehi et al., 2018). Auditors can undermine their professional commitment by violating



ethical principles. Scandals and frauds in this profession happen because of the audit services provided by auditors. Auditors easily and purposefully make unqualified comments; he easily overstates the company's net income and everything else, even though he hasn't done a proper audit. These actions can happen because there is pressure or a potential salary that makes the auditor unable to perform properly, as a result, the auditor provides low-level performance. It is clear that these actions will violate the ethical principles such as: responsibility, public interest, honesty, objectivity, independence, and perseverance in the field and nature of professional accounting (Moradi and Afshar Imani, 2017).

In today's era, due to fierce competition in the field of marketing and trade, commercial institutions and organizations are trying to get ahead of their competitors by using the most efficient methods of attracting customers, and ethical marketing is one of these methods that can increase the customers' trust, and encourage them to choose services. Along with these changes, research on auditing as a professional service and its relationship with marketing are published for the first time in the world's accounting and auditing journals. The said research can be divided into two categories; The first category is research that has examined the change in auditors' attitude towards marketing (e.g. Clow et al., 2009; Ellingson et al., 2002; Tang et al., 2002). And the second category is the research that is focused on auditors' marketing practices (e.g. Heishmito et al., 2002, Borberg et al., 2013; Maranjouri, 2020). Both groups of these types of research show that the increase in competition due to the entry of a large number of new audit companies into the market causes intense competition in the industry (Taghipour and Azizi, 2022). Auditors seek to attract business owners and take over the market through various factors such as marketing and performing services that are different from that of other auditors. In fact, professional services are changing, and these developments are due to the competitiveness of this profession and also because of amending the relationship with employers. Nevertheless, according to these changes, auditors must be able to manage things such as compliance with ethics, professional standards, and changes in customer expectations (Moser et al., 2015). In the conditions where auditors are highly motivated to get a favorable evaluation of their performance and ensure

professional promotion in the hierarchical levels of audit institutions, it is thought that they are inclined to gain reputation and maintain it, and therefore they try to align their judgments with the motivations of the evaluators of their activities in higher ranks. As a result, it is expected that the awareness of the attitude of the evaluators by the auditors in the audit process will lead to inciting them to engage in deceptive activities and unethical behavior (Kiptoo, 2018). Increasing competitive pressures can lead to unethical behaviors (Khosrowabadi and Banimahd, 2015). Maranjuri et al. (2017) have shown that the competition in the auditing profession in Iran leads to an increase in unethical practices in the private sector and ultimately leads to a decrease in audit quality. Previous research also confirms that competitive pressure leads auditors to violate the code of professional conduct. For example, the research findings of Soroushyar et al. (2014) show that the increase in competition in the audit market leads to a decrease in the auditor's independence as well as a decrease in the quality of profit. Therefore, if competitive pressure causes violation of professional code of conduct, it is expected that this will cause violation of advertising and marketing standards, which is one of the components of this professional code of conduct (Taghipour and Azizi, 2022). According to the code of professional conduct in the United States, accountants have been able to advertise their services to the public for about 35 years. Although at one point in time, there was a feeling that advertising was inappropriate and somewhat unethical, but passage of time has made many accountants and other professional service providers to seriously change their view of the benefits of advertising. For example, Clow et al. (2009) show that the attitude of accountants regarding advertisements has changed significantly and become positive during the 11 years of their study. In general, large companies are positive about the benefits of advertising, because they have found that advertising increases public awareness, the number of customers, the amount of services provided, and the segments that provide services in a market (Griffin, 1999).

## **2.4. Review of the Literature**

Taghipour and Azizi (2022) in a research entitled ethical, legal and professional issues affecting advertising and attracting clients in the auditing

profession” dealt with the historical course of drafting the code of professional conduct in Iran, and also changes in the attitude towards advertising and marketing in the auditing profession in ten countries of the world and Iran. In the second stage of their study, they analyzed the effect of ethical ideologies of auditors, members of the Iranian Institute of Certified Accountants, on their attitudes regarding unethical marketing methods using a questionnaire. The results showed that the dimensions of unethical methods such as relativism and opportunism have a positive effect on auditors' attitude to use unethical methods in marketing.

Shoja et al. (2018), in a descriptive research, examined the views of 193 auditors working in auditing organizations and private auditing firms about audit activities and marketing activities using a questionnaire. The results of the research showed that auditors' inclination towards marketing activity is influenced by their views on the importance of marketing activity, the importance of audit activity, acceptance of audit activity, and the job rating of auditors.

Maranjuri (2018) tested the behavior of auditors in establishing a balance between traditional audit duties and marketing activities using a statistical sample of 289 working auditors who are members of the Iranian Institute of Certified Accountants using a questionnaire. The results showed that the attitude, level of importance, deceptive behavior and professional levels have an effect on the balance between the intrinsic tasks of auditing and marketing activities, but the youth of the auditors does not affect the balance between the intrinsic tasks of auditing and marketing activities.

Mohammadian and Soleimani Amiri (2017) investigated the effect of changing the working environment of auditors on the relationship between the two professions of auditing and marketing. The results showed that auditors who have a positive attitude towards marketing spend more time on marketing activities compared to auditors who have a less positive attitude. In addition, auditors who value marketing activities spend a significant amount of time on marketing activities. Also, they showed that there is no theoretical gap between the auditing profession and the marketing profession as in the past.

Mahdavi et al. (2017) evaluated the attitude of Iranian auditors to the balance between auditing and

marketing with regard to two important components of the auditing process, including the audit business environment and company management. The analysis was based on survey data from 257 respondents. The results of this study showed that auditors who have a positive attitude towards marketing and those who consider it significant can balance the time spent on audit tasks and intrinsic marketing activities to a great extent.

Mousavi Shiri and Pahlavan (2015) discussed the role of audit fees, audit quality, loss of audit independence, difficulty of recruiting audit work in marketing by auditors using a questionnaire among 175 certified accountants. The results of the research indicated that auditors do marketing according to payment reduction and reduction of audit independence, and in situations where it is difficult to attract audit work, they use procedures for marketing audit work.

Mahdavi and Daryaei (2015) investigated auditors' point of views towards marketing activities and how to create a balance between the time spent on marketing and auditing activities using a questionnaire. The results of the research showed that there was no significant difference between entrepreneur auditors and others regarding the attitude concerning the time balance between auditing and marketing activities.

Habibi and Shahbazi (2014) conducted a research with the aim of investigating the effect of ethical compliance in improving business performance. In this regard, 100 questionnaires were distributed among managers, employees, and supervisors of garment manufacturing companies in Tehran. The results showed that there was a positive relationship between compliance with ethics and improvement of business performance.

Lindstedt & Veerman (2021) examined the relationship between auditors' characteristics and their commercial and professional tendency and its effect on audit performance. The results showed that the auditors' professional tendency has no relationship with their knowledge, awareness, marketing skills, creativity, and innovation.

Collin et al. (2020), in a research entitled “strategic goals of advertising” that audit companies pay more attention to the necessity of marketing and proving the value of their services to customers.

De Pelsmacker et al. (2019) investigated digital marketing strategies in Belgian banks. The results

showed that digital marketing and its strategy and tactics have an effect on the quantity and quality of the provided services.

Broberg et al. (2018) conducted a research titled professional and organizational characteristics of auditors and commercialization in audit institutions. They concluded that auditors' organizational identity has a positive relationship with three market-based, customer-based, and process-based aspects.

Meshal & Mahfooz (2017) studied the effect of accountants' advertisements on the perceived value of accounting service recipients. The results showed that the attitude towards accountants' advertisements has a significant effect on the perceived value of the recipients of accounting services. The findings showed that professions such as accounting should pay attention to advertising and marketing.

Achova and Elabar (2017) showed that marketing and sales of audit services is the best procedure for assessing management risk. Also, they believe that the development of the internal audit market in today's competitive world is possible through marketing activities. They argue that providing and creating new internal audit procedures and marketing them are methods to improve and create company value.

Mu (2015) deals with the relationship between marketing, organizational compliance, and product development. His findings indicated that a company with marketing capabilities has more financial performance than companies that only focus on operational capabilities. And marketing capability, organizational conformity, and new product development performance showed a positive relationship between marketability and new service development performance.

Popescu et al. (2015) in a research entitled "Marketing communication: a path for the sustainable development of small businesses in Romania" showed that the sustainable development of businesses is highly dependent on the quality of their long-term relationships and marketing communication plays an essential role in this process. The results of this study showed that the most used tools are not necessarily the most suitable tools for customers; therefore, in order to promote sustainable business development, small and medium-sized organizations should learn to choose the most appropriate marketing communication methods and ensure strong relationships with customers and also gain a competitive advantage.

DeFond & Zhang (2014) recognize competition in the audit market as a factor for audit quality. According to them, large audit institutions have more competitive power with a larger share of the audit market compared to smaller institutions; as a result, their audit quality is higher. They believe that the audit quality in these institutions should be improved through more supervision of small auditing institutions.

In a study on auditors in Sweden, Broberg et al. (2013) showed that auditors show a positive attitude towards marketing activities and spend more time on marketing activities. They showed that, from the point of view of auditors, there is no significant difference between audit activity and marketing activity. According to them, a balance should be created between marketing and auditing activities so that the auditing profession is not harmed by auditors' desire for marketing activities. They think that auditors paying more attention to marketing activities can reduce the audit activity and consequently audit quality.

### **3- Research Hypotheses**

Main hypothesis: Ethical marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.

Sub-hypotheses:

- 1) Honesty in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.
- 2) Observing fairness in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.
- 3) Accountability in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.
- 4) Commitment in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.
- 5) Confidentiality in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance.

### **4- Research Methodology**

Regarding the purpose, the present study is an applied research; in terms of its nature, it is a correlation type and descriptive-survey method; in terms of the time dimension, its data are cross-sectional. Library studies were used to examine the theoretical frameworks and literature of the research, and field methods and standard questionnaire tools were used to test hypotheses and draw conclusions. The statistical population in this research includes experts and

specialists who are members of the Iranian Institute of Certified Accountants. The independent variable is ethical marketing and it is measured by the standard ethical marketing questionnaire of Safari et al. (2017) which includes 16 questions. This questionnaire has 5 subscales including honesty, fairness, responsibility, confidentiality and adherence to commitments. The dependent variable is auditors' job performance. To measure auditors' job performance, the standard questionnaire of Ambrose Jones et al. (2012) was used and its validity and reliability were confirmed for the Iranian environment by Marvian Hosseini and Lari (2015). This questionnaire contains 14 questions and has 4 dimensions of knowledge, skill, competency, and experience. Also, both questionnaires are measured with a five-choice Likert scale. It should be noted that before sending the questionnaires to the experts, 20 questionnaires were distributed and collected among the statistical population to check validity and reliability, and each component and the entire questionnaire were evaluated. After collecting the questionnaires, the validity and reliability of the questionnaires were confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis. According to the coefficients obtained for the two standard questionnaires (they are greater than 0.7), it can be said that the questionnaires have acceptable reliability. The statistical population of this research includes all auditors who are members of the Iranian Institute of Certified Accountants, numbering 2857 people in 2022. Cochran's formula was used to calculate the sample size as follows:

$$n = \frac{\frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{N} \left( \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2} - 1 \right)}$$

$$= \frac{\frac{(1,96)^2 \times 0,5 \times 0,5}{(,05)^2}}{1 + \frac{1}{2857} \left( \frac{(1,96)^2 \times 0,5 \times 0,5}{(,05)^2} - 1 \right)} = 238$$

In the above formula, the value of  $z$  is equal to 1.96 for 95% confidence. The value for  $p$  and  $q$  is 0.5 and  $d$  is the percentage of error, which is 5% in this study. Also,  $n$  is the sample size and  $N$  is the size of the statistical population. According to the calculation of the above formula for the target population, out of 238 questionnaires, 228 questionnaires were returned completely and undamaged and were selected as samples for analysis. In this research, partial least

squares analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Partial least squares analysis is a multivariate technique that estimates unobservable latent variables through various indicators and examining the path between these latent variables. Analysis based on partial least squares does not require the assumption of normality of data distribution and large sample size (Tenenhaus et al., 2004). The validity of the internal and external research model has been investigated. To test the conceptual model of the research, structural equation modeling method has been used. This method is a complex mathematical and statistical combination of factor analysis and multivariate regression that is gathered in one system so that different phenomena can be analyzed. Through these techniques, researchers can reject hypothetical structures (models) or confirm their compatibility with the data. The software used in this research is Smart-PLS software. This software uses the partial least squares method to present structural equation models and has the ability to test both formative and reflective models. It is also compatible with conditions such as collinearity of independent variables, non-normality of data, and small sample size. Analysis based on partial least squares is a non-parametric method and does not require the assumption of normality of data and large sample size (Davari and Rezazadeh, 2014). Also, in cases where constructs are measured by formative indices, partial least square is a more suitable method for data analysis. In this research, to evaluate the research model, regular indicators were used for the test, which include  $R^2$ , average extracted variance, factor loadings, path coefficients, and critical coefficients. In the following, more details of the research findings are mentioned (Davari and Rezazadeh, 2014). The first model of the study is the external model or the measurement model, which examines the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, and for this purpose, three important indicators of mean variance, composite reliability (CR), and factor load are extracted. Also, the second model, which is an internal model or a structural model, indicates the relationship between the variables of the research. It was determined using path coefficients. Now, using the internal model, it is possible to investigate the hypotheses of the research.

## 5. Research Findings

### 5.1. Descriptive Statistics

According to the information of the first part of the questionnaire, that is, the general and demographic information section, in order to know the studied population, the distribution of the statistical sample including the frequency and percentage of the demographic characteristics of the society such as gender, education level, age group, and work experience of the subjects (respondents) were investigated. The information related to the demographic characteristics of the studied population has been described and summarized as follows. In this section, with the help of descriptive statistics, demographic questions have been analyzed, which include the marital status, gender and education, background and organizational level of the subjects.

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of general characteristics of the subjects**

Variable	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male		
	Female		
Marital status	Married		
	Single		
Age	Under 30		
	30-45		
	46 and older		
Education	Bachelor's		
	Master's		
	PhD		
Job record	5 to 15 years		
	16 to 25 years		
	26 and higher		
Organizational rank	Auditor & Senior Auditor		
	Director		
	Manager		
	Shareholder		

The first demographic variable that was discussed is the gender variable of the respondents. This variable is categorized into male and female. The results related to the respondents' gender are shown in Table 1. The results show that 76% of respondents were male and 24% were female. The second variable was the marital status of the respondents. This variable is classified into two categories: married and single. According to Table 1, about 88% of the respondents were married

and about 12% were single. The third and fourth variables are based on the age and education of the respondents, the highest age value is 30 to 45, which is 48%. The variable related to education is the senior group with 61% and the next group of respondents are people with doctorate degrees, which make up about 25%. For the variable of work experience, it can be said that about 48% of the respondents have work experience between 5 and 15 years and about 11% of them have more than 26 years of work experience. Also, about 66 percent of the respondents to the questionnaires had the position of auditor and senior auditor, and the rest were supervisors, managers, and partners. In general, the information in the table indicates that the surveyed society had the necessary level of knowledge, expertise and experience in all aspects.

### 5.2. Reliability of the Research Variables

The reliability of the current research has been checked through factor loading coefficients, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and composite reliability, that is, these criteria are used to better measure reliability in the PLS method (Davari and Rezazadeh, 2014).

**Factor loadings criterion:** Factor loads are calculated by calculating the correlation value of the indicators of a structure with that structure. If this value is equal to or greater than 0.4, it indicates that the variance between the construct and the indicators is greater than the variance of the measurement error of that construct, and the reliability of that measurement model is acceptable (Tenenhaus et al., 2004). In the present research, according to the output of the software (Figures 1 & 2), the correlation value of the indices of all structures is greater than 0.4, and therefore it indicates the appropriateness of this criterion.

The figures above show the standardized factor loadings of the dimensions of ethical marketing on job performance of auditors. According to the values of the factor loadings, all the obtained values are acceptable criteria.

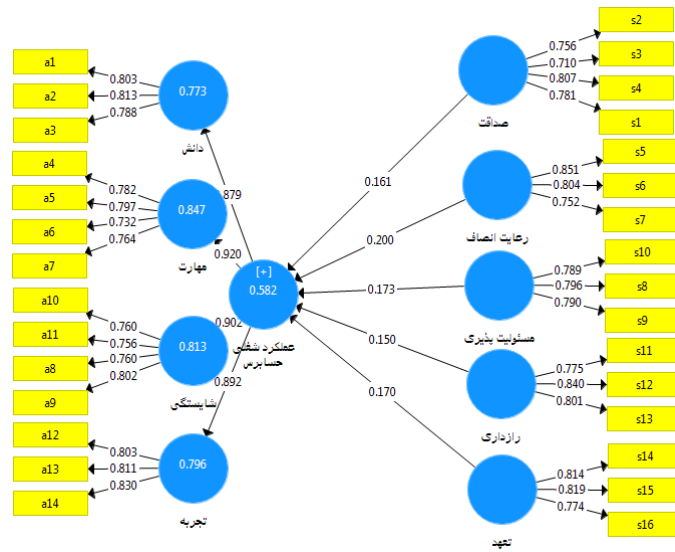


Figure 1: Standard coefficient of ethical marketing dimensions on auditors' job performance

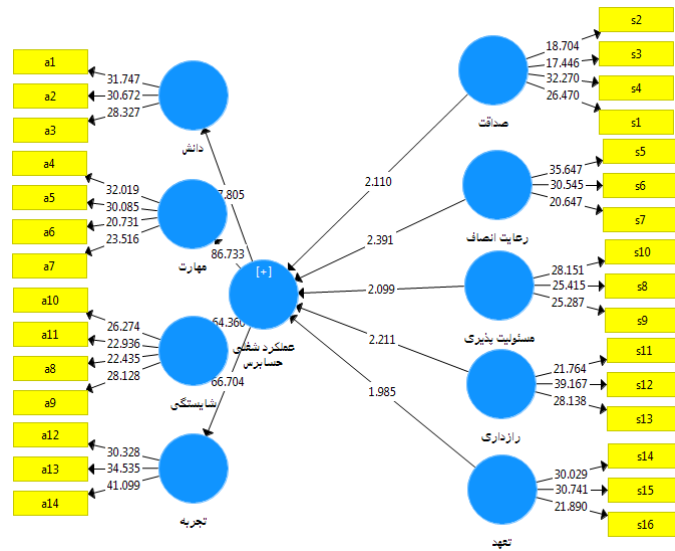


Figure 2: T coefficient of ethical marketing dimensions on auditors' job performance

- **Cronbach's alpha:** it is considered a classic measure and a suitable measure for evaluating internal stability. One of the things that is used to measure reliability in the structural modeling method is the internal stability (internal consistency) of measurement models. Internal stability indicates the degree of correlation between the structure and its related indicators. The high value of the expressed variance between the construct and its indicators against the measurement error related to each indicator results in high internal stability. A value

of Cronbach's alpha higher than 0.7 is an acceptable indicator of reliability. According to Table 2, since the value of Cronbach's alpha of the whole questionnaire and other dimensions is greater than 0.7, the test has acceptable reliability.

- **Composite Reliability (CR):** Since Cronbach's alpha is a traditional criterion for determining the reliability of structures, the reliability method is considered a more modern criterion, and its advantage over Cronbach's alpha is that the reliability of the structure

is not absolute. Rather, it is calculated according to the correlation of their structures with each other. As a result, both of these criteria are used to measure reliability. The composite reliability value of a structure is obtained from a ratio, which in the case of its deduction, the variance between a structure and its indicators is added to the amount of measurement error. If the composite reliability value for each construct is above 0.7, it indicates the internal stability suitable for the measurement model, and a value less than 0.6 indicates the absence of reliability. In Table 2, the reliability for all factors is above 0.7 and it shows a good combined reliability.

- **Convergent Validity:** It expresses the relationship of different criteria or indicators to each other. In fact, if the correlation between the scores of tests that measure a single trait is high, the test has convergent validity. If the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for all constructs are higher than 0.5, which means that the items explain more than 50% of the variance of their respective constructs, it indicates the existence of convergent validity in the tests (Tenenhaus et al., 2004). According to Table 2, the calculated values of the average variance extracted for all the structures have the average values of the extracted variance higher than 0.5, so the items explain more than 50% of the variance of their respective structures. The appropriate values of this index indicate the existence of convergent validity of the used tests.

**5-3- External Model**

If the average values of variance extracted for all constructs are higher than 0.5, that means that the items explain more than 50% of the variance of their respective constructs, and it indicates the existence of convergent validity of the tests (Rezazadeh and Davari, 2014). According to Table 2, the calculated values for all the constructs have average variance extracted values higher than 0.5, therefore, the items explain more than 50% of the variance of their respective constructs. The appropriate values of this index indicate the existence of convergent validity of the used tests. The high value of the expressed variance between the construct and its indicators against the measurement error of each indicator results in high internal stability. (Davari and Rezazadeh, 2013). As seen in Table 2, all the factors are above 0.7 and it shows good composite reliabilities.

Table 2: Values related to model fitness

Variables	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability	Cronbach's alpha
Ethical marketing			
Honesty			
Fairness			
Responsibility			
Commitment			
Confidentiality			
Auditor performance			
Knowledge			
Experience			
Competency			
Skill			

**5.4. Fitting the General Model (Structural Model)**

Unlike measurement models, the structural model part has nothing to do with the questions and only hidden variables are examined along with the relationships between them. To evaluate the model, regular indicators are used for the test, which include R<sup>2</sup> path coefficients and critical coefficients (Tenenhaus et al., 2004). In order to check the significance of the path coefficient or beta, the Bootstrapping method was used, and for this purpose, Bootstrapping was used in three modes of 100, 300 and 500 samples, according to Table 2, the results show that there is no change in whether the parameters are significant or not in all three cases and the results have strong validity. Therefore, it is possible to test research hypotheses by regression model.

Unlike measurement models, the structural model part has nothing to do with the questions and only hidden variables are examined along with the relationships between them. To evaluate the model, regular indicators are used for testing, which include R<sup>2</sup>, path coefficients, and critical coefficients. In order to check the significance of the path coefficient or beta, it was used; for this purpose, Bootstrapping was used in three states of 100, 300 and 500 samples, and the results showed that in all three cases, there is no change in whether the parameters are significant or not, and the results have strong validity. Hence, it is possible to test research hypotheses in the form of regression model. In the approach of modeling structural equations using the partial least squares

method, the GOF index is the most complete index to check the efficiency of the model.

$$GOF = \sqrt{\text{Cummunality} \times R^2}$$

Cummunality is the average subscription of each variable and measures the quality of the external model. (R<sup>2</sup>) is the average coefficient of determination related to each endogenous latent variable and measures the quality of the internal model and is calculated for each endogenous variable according to the latent variables that explain it. Three values of 0.01, 0.25 and 0.36 have been introduced as weak, medium, and strong values for GoF in Table 3 (Rezazadeh and Davari, 2014).

Variables	Common values	Adjusted determination coefficient	determination coefficient
Ethical marketing			
Honesty			
Fairness			
Responsibility			
Commitment			
Confidentiality			
Auditor performance			
Knowledge			
Experience			
Competency			
Skill			
GoF			

According to the value obtained for GoF, a very good fit of the overall model is confirmed. Therefore, the value of the goodness of fitness index is 0.68, which indicates an overall above-average fitness for the structural model. This means that the internal model has enough power to test the hypotheses and the test

results can be considered statistically 100% reliable. In the following, according to the path coefficients between research variables, the hypothesis test results are shown in Table 4.

As can be seen in Table 4, the main hypothesis of the research is that ethical marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance. It has a T-coefficient (32.98), which is higher than 1.96, so this hypothesis is confirmed. The second hypothesis of the research that honesty has an effect on the job performance of auditors, has a t-coefficient (2.11), which is higher than 1.96; therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed; The third hypothesis of the research that compliance with fairness has an effect on the job performance of auditors has a T-coefficient (2.39), which is higher than 1.96; therefore, this hypothesis is also confirmed; The fourth hypothesis of the research that accountability has an effect on auditors' job performance, has a T-coefficient (2.09), which is higher than 1.96; therefore, this hypothesis is confirmed; The fifth research hypothesis that commitment has an effect on the job performance of auditors has a T-coefficient (1.98), which is higher than 1.96, and this hypothesis is confirmed, too. And finally, the sixth hypothesis of the research is that confidentiality has an effect on the job performance of auditors and with a T-coefficient (2.21), which is higher than the limit of 1.96; therefore, this hypothesis is also confirmed. According to Table 4, all relationships between variables are significant at an error level of less than 0.05. According to this model, the path coefficient is significant for all relationships related to research variables. As a result, all relationships have been confirmed and this indicates the good fitness of the model. The highest value of the coefficient is related to the effect of ethical marketing on auditors' job performance and the lowest is related to commitment on auditors' job performance.

Table 4: Path coefficients between research variables

Hypotheses	Path coefficient	Standard coefficient	standard deviation	T coefficient	probability value	Results
1	Ethical Marketing -> Auditor's Job Performance					
2	Honesty -> auditor's job performance					
3	Fairness -> auditor's job performance					
4	Accountability -> Auditor's job performance					
5	Commitment -> auditor's job performance					
6	Confidentiality -> Auditor's job performance					



## **6. Discussion and Conclusion**

In today's era, due to the intense competition in the field of marketing and business, individuals, institutions, and commercial organizations are trying to get ahead of their competitors by using the most efficient methods of attracting customers, and the field of auditing is no exception. Considering the importance of professional ethics and marketing, ethical marketing can encourage customers to choose goods and services by increasing trust and loyalty. The main goal of this research was investigating the effect of ethical marketing on auditors' job performance. According to the purpose, the research is of an applied type, and in terms of the research implementation method, it is descriptive of a correlation type, and the tool for measuring and collecting data is standard questionnaire. The statistical population includes 228 experts who are members of the Institute of Certified Accountants, who were selected using a random sampling method. Structural equations and Smart PLS software have been used for data analysis. The results of the analysis showed that ethical marketing and its components have a positive and significant effect on auditors' performance. For the main hypothesis regarding the effect of ethical marketing on auditors' job performance, we can say that by considering the components of ethical marketing that are consistent with ethics and professional behavior in auditing, observing ethics in trade and business is important and valuable to attract and retain customers, and all services and advertisements in marketing should be done in compliance with ethical principles and values so that individual and organizational performance can be improved. Also, by creating positive behavioral and appropriate performance supports, ethical marketing makes the performance of job duties more productive and earns a reliable position in the organization for auditors. This productivity and gaining a reliable organizational position is one of the most important factors that can increase and improve auditors' performance and organizational competitive advantage. When an auditing company or an auditor follows ethical procedures in marketing, customers also have a more favorable opinion about the services of that company and the performance of the auditor. Therefore, not adhering to ethical principles and procedures in marketing will result in nothing but increasing dissatisfied customers, notoriety, mistrust, and ultimately a decrease in market share. Therefore,

in order to improve their performance, auditors should pay attention to the needs, interests, and beliefs of their customers and, by observing professional ethics and marketing ethics, seek to secure the long-term interests of customers and gain profit, which in turn improves the performance of the institution and gains a competitive advantage. This result is in line with the findings of Mohammadian and Soleimani Amiri (2017), Habibi and Shahbazi (2014), Meshal & Mahfooz (2017), Defond and Zhang (2014), Broberg et al. (2013) and is inconsistent with the results of Taghipour and Azizi (2022), Lindstedt and Virman (2021). The results showed that honesty in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance, which confirms the second hypothesis. It can be said that when customers witness compliance with ethical principles in the marketing of products and services by auditors and institutions and observe honesty and correctness in the marketing and promotion of products and services, in addition to customer satisfaction, the possibility of loyalty also increases; therefore, auditors aim to increase and improve job performance. They must observe ethical considerations in marketing and oblige themselves to follow ethical standards. As a result, the role of honesty and truthfulness, along with the observance of ethical standards, has an effect on the performance of auditors in marketing, which is in line with Linkai's research (2013). The results showed that compliance with fairness in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance, which is based on the confirmation of the third hypothesis. It can be said that in auditing, all stakeholders expect to be fair in addition to providing various products and services, which is achieved by observing ethical values in marketing in the auditing market. As a result, being sensitive to the concept of fairness in marketing, while protecting the rights of customers, will lead to more profitability and an increase in market share for auditors. Because fairness is one of the individual factors that exists in the nature of every person. If the auditor observes fairness and conscientiousness in marketing, he will be more committed, more responsible and more ethical by observing ethical principles in dealing with customers, and this will improve his and even the company's credit, reputation, and performance. The results indicate that accountability in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance, and the fourth hypothesis is confirmed. It can be said that taking responsibility in

ethical marketing, if realized in companies and auditing institutions by observing the basic principles of auditing, improves the performance of auditors and obtains a competitive advantage for the company. Therefore, being responsible in marketing will make the auditors satisfy the needs of the customers and feel satisfied with the services provided and not be fooled by advertisements and false information, which will also lead to the satisfaction of the auditors with their job and improve their performance. Therefore, to improve the performance, the auditor should be responsible for marketing. For the fifth hypothesis, commitment in marketing has an effect on auditors' job performance, it can be said that if the auditor's obligation is to adhere to ethics and comply with professional standards, then the auditor obliges himself to comply with ethics in the framework of the auditing profession in order to achieve marketing goals. The auditor's commitment must be at a high level and follow the developments of the auditing profession in marketing. A auditor should not accept any marketing commitment unless he feels the commitment to perform them in the field of marketing and auditing ethics. Therefore, by having a commitment towards ethical marketing and complying with the rules and standards of the profession, auditors' performance improves. The results of the hypotheses test showed that the sixth hypothesis, that is, confidentiality in marketing, has an effect on auditors' job performance. It can be said that the more competition there is in the market, in order to stay competitive or overcome competitors, auditors must observe ethical principles in marketing such as confidentiality in order to improve performance, customer satisfaction, and gain more market share. Therefore, confidentiality in marketing improves the credibility and image of auditors and even the company among customers, which also leads to job satisfaction and higher performance. As auditors are confidential in keeping information and do not reveal the content of their information, they should also be confidential in marketing because having this feature improves the quality of services provided in marketing and increases performance and job satisfaction.

When it comes to a company standards, ethical marketing will increase the value of services in the minds of the current and potential customers. This an aim which will be reflected in services promotion through the better understanding of customers' needs

and specific targeting of the right customers. As a result, because of the intense competition in the field of marketing and business, auditors can encourage customers to choose services by applying ethical marketing and increasing their trust. Also, companies can take positive steps in keeping the customers at present and attracting new customers by realizing and observing the ethical marketing components at the highest point. This will also lead to gaining competitive advantage and improving performance. At the individual level, it is inevitable for auditors to use ethical marketing to improve their performance and customer loyalty, because the ethical marketing, by considering the customers' satisfaction, makes them not to trust to wrong advertisements that are only for making profits. Finally, it can be said that ethical marketing, with making supports such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, confidentiality and warranty, causes a better job performance at all levels and provides a reliable position in an organization for auditors, which will improve the performance of auditors and organizational competitive advantage. In general, it can be said that the increase in competitive pressures made auditors understand the importance of marketing more. The success or survival of any audit unit is rooted in a deep understanding of the importance and practical use of marketing techniques, among which ethical marketing is one of the most important ones. Marketers in general and auditors in particular can gain experiential knowledge of how to adapt to the changing environment of the profession with ethical marketing activities because ethical marketing is an important strategy for business expansion and auditors have also realized the importance of ethical marketing activities in getting and maintaining customers. Therefore, it is necessary to consider ethical marketing as a powerful tool to empower and make audit institutions competitive. Accordingly, a win-win relationship is established between auditors, customers, society, and other stakeholders. Therefore, auditors will be able to use ethical marketing in addition to paying attention to the principle of customer orientation, compliance with the professional regulations and established standards, independence, professional ethics, competition, and provide services that suit the wishes and needs of their customers; furthermore, by observing the ethical principles of loyalty and increasing customers' satisfaction, improving their performance and services,

they need to gain a distinct position in the minds of their customers and other competitors, which is in line with the findings of Meshal & Mahfooz (2017). According to the theoretical framework, since the ethics and professional behavior of auditors include the dimensions and framework of ethical marketing, as a result, in today's competitive environment, auditors must use ethical marketing to maintain their customers (employers) and to improve their performance at the individual and organizational levels. Therefore, ethical marketing is an effort to attract customers, provide better services and improve job performance, which will be achieved along with maintaining independence and complying with professional regulations in auditing.

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be suggested to the legislators and policy makers of the audit market, audit institutions, and audit organizations that in order to better monitor the performance of auditors in the field of marketing, they should make their ethical characteristics a basis for performance evaluation associated with the specified standards. Managers are suggested to consider ethical marketing as a marketing model in auditing. According to the results, since ethical marketing improves performance, auditors and audit institutions, if they want to improve their performance, should observe ethical considerations in marketing in the audit field and commit themselves to follow ethical standards in marketing. On the other hand, when customers and market participants witness the observance of ethical principles in the marketing of products and services and also observe the honesty and integrity, fairness, responsibility, commitment, and confidentiality of the auditors, in addition to customer satisfaction, loyalty and service reuse and competitive advantage also increase. It is suggested that in future studies, local indicators of ethical marketing and the relationship between ethical marketing and the market share of auditing companies be investigated. Finally, the data required for this research were collected through a questionnaire, the questionnaire also has inherent limitations such as the possible lack of coverage of all aspects, the lack of accurate and honest answers by some subjects, and such cases. However, a lot of effort has been made to control and neutralize the effects of such cases as much as possible.

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