

Evaluating Internal and External Factors of Chain Store for Improvement in Iran: A Case Study (Etka Chain Stores)

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to extract main indicators for review the internal and external dimensions of Etka chain stores and after the studying the organizational documentation and with using of the customer reviews, was determined the position of Etka chain stores in attractiveness and capabilities matrix. For any organization in any level, it is important to determine its position compared to competitors in terms of attractiveness and capabilities. Considering now that the "Etka chain stores" are the largest supplier of goods and services in Iran and in order to its mission tries to improve the processes of supply, storage, distribution, sales and after sales services company with an economic approach. According to peripheral changes in different dimensions of economic, political, social and also with the emergence fundamental paradigm in business such as service businesses, penetration of IT in business like E-commerce, the answer to this question is important "Where is the position of Etka chain stores in this industry?". The data collection method is using the questionnaires. Finally the customer reviews have been analyzed.

Keywords: Attractiveness and capability matrix, etka chain stores, internal and external factors

INTRODUCTION

Retailing has undergone an intense transformation during the past few decades (Gonzalez-Benito, 2005). One of the types of retailing is retail stores and chain stores. Chain stores have recently made considerable leaps in their level of market orientation and customer responsiveness. It is well understood that responding to customer needs more efficiently and effectively than competitors is an important source of advantage for chain stores (Merlo *et al.*, 2006). Providing a secure and safe environment has become an important factor in chain store's management (Coleman, 2006; Peek-Asa *et al.*, 2006). If customers do not feel safe and comfortable in the store, they are not likely to spend their time and money there (Hunter, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 1999; Pretious *et al.*, 1995; Overstreet and Clodfelter, 1995). So the answer to this question is important "From the perspective of customers, what features should be have chain stores from the internal and external dimensions to increase customer satisfaction?"

In this study extracted the main indicators for review the internal and external dimensions of Etka chain stores, based on characteristics of the native country of Iran. the internal factors allude to here are

business strength according to economic indicators and financial ratios, quality of service to customer, technology and infrastructure and the external factors are market size, space competition, market homogeneity, prediction of potential sales, barriers to entry and market presence. And further, as a case study based on customer comments and organizational documentation determined the position of Etka chain stores in attractiveness and capabilities matrix. Considering now that the Etka chain stores with over 440 sales centers in Iran are the largest supplier of goods and services in Iran, this case study examined in 4 branches in Tehran (Shahid Chamran Branch, Shahid Fallahi Branch, Shahid Fakoori Branch and Shahid Rajaei Branch).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of retail stores and chain stores: Retail comes from the Old French word *tailer* (compare modern French *retailer*), which means "to cut off, clip, pare, divide" in terms of tailoring (1365). It was first recorded as a noun with the meaning of a "sale in small quantities" in 1433 (from the Middle French retail, "piece cut off, shred, scrap, paring") (Douglas, 2008).

All direct sales activities of goods and services to final consumers for personal and noncommercial uses are called retailing. Retailing may include subordinated services, such as delivery. Purchasers may be individuals or businesses. In commerce, a "retailer" buys goods or products in large quantities from manufacturers or importers, either directly or through a wholesaler and then sells smaller quantities to the end-user.

Chain stores are retail outlets that share a brand and central management and usually have standardized business methods and practices. E. Thomas defines a Multiple Shop, as "is one of a chain of similar shops owned and controlled by a single business firm" (Dhanapal *et al.*, 2004). North *et al.* (2003) define chain stores as "organization that own and operate several retail store units that sell similar lines of merchandise by a standardized method and function under a centralized form of organizational structure, centralized distribution and standardized store décor and layout (store image)".

Despite the apparent differences in chain stores, all of them have a specific mission. The main missions of all the chain stores are optimizing the distribution network, lower commodity prices and profitability. As well as reduce cost, improve quality, enhance service to the people, are the joint mission of chain stores in most countries.

History chain stores in Iran: Supplying goods to consumer as an idea was made and used from ancient times in Iran like indoor markets and incorporated. Therefore, "Sepah consumer cooperative store" was established for the first time in Tehran in early 1949 to meet the needs of society and to provide general supplies, lower prices for goods, high quality goods, price stability and finally raise the living standards of people (Parsianzafar, 2004).

"Etkā chain stores" covered by the war department to facilitate the purchase of military families are established in 1960. And now in addition to providing services to the armed forces, provide part of the consumer basket of society and response to needs of consumers.

"Ferdosi" store has opened with the help of foreign consultants about two years after that. "Iran" store has started its activity in private section industry about thirty years ago. These branches in other cities and its huge one in Tehran, with the name of Korosh had started to work. However, after some years, it has stopped its activity because of construction. In Iran, other stores like "Sepah", "Shahr-o-Rosta" has also existed for long period (Bagherpour, 2008).

In recent ten years, government has implemented some programs for the improvement of retail section

and make it same as other countries. Therefore, with the help of ministry, a huge super store called "Shahrvand" has established (Bagherpour, 2008). In recent years, other chain stores like Refah chain stores, Etkā chain stores, Shahrvand chain stores and HyperStar have continue their activities and the retail industry is growing in Iran.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

According to opinions of experts and professionals, the most important criteria related to Internal and external dimensions of chain stores are selected. These criteria with references that mentioned to each factors was determined in the Table 1:

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Statistical community of this study is including the experts and professionals in the field of chain stores, such as: chain stores managers, operational managers of chain stores with more than 10 years experiences, book authors and researchers, who have expertise in this area. Number of key company executives and experts from is over 70. This will be used for the random sampling. This will be used for the random sampling. We should use this formula for calculating efficient samples quantity:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

If the above formula to calculate the sample size is less than 5% of the sample used is calculated as follows and as otherwise we should use follow formula (Table 2):

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$

Statistical community of this study is including the customers of Etkā chain stores in in 4 branches in Tehran (ShahidChamran Branch, ShahidFallahi Branch, ShahidFakoori Branch and ShahidRajaei Branch).

Since the data are qualitatively and the number of statistical community is unlimited, so the sample size calculation formula is as follows (Cochran, 1977):

$$n = \frac{Z_{\alpha/2}^2 p_0(1-p_0)}{e^2} \quad (1)$$

In this study, researcher has set the alpha level a priori at 0.05, plans to use a proportional variable, has

Table 1: The internal and external factors of chain stores

	Factors	References	Criteria
Internal factors	Business Strength according to economic indicators and financial ratios	(Bandyopadhyay <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Jamal, 2005; Seock, 2009; Simkin and Dibb, 2009; Perrott, 2011; Sheng and Mullen, 2011; Damoiseau <i>et al.</i> , 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liquidity Ratio • Growth Ratio
	Quality of service to customer	(Bandyopadhyay <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Jamal, 2005; Seock, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Amin <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Manteghi and Zohrabi, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand • Beauty, performance and durability • Store cleanliness • Air conditioning in the Store • Decoration and layout • Facilities and transportation in the store • Behavior of employees with customers • Special services
	Technology and infrastructure	(Hubner and Kuhn, 2012; Seock, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Perrott, 2011; Sheng and Mullen, 2011; Wigley, 2011; Amin <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Manteghi and Zohrabi, 2011; Varma, 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors
External factors	Market Size	(Hubner and Kuhn, 2012; Simkin and Dibb, 2009; Sheng and Mullen, 2011; Damoiseau <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Wigley, 2011; Gaston-Breton and Martin, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market growth rate
	Space Competition	(Hubner and Kuhn, 2012; Bandyopadhyay <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Jamal, 2005; Seock, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Simkin and Dibb, 2009; Wigley, 2011; Perrott, 2011; Kraus <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Meng and Layton, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of competitors
	Market Homogeneity	(Bandyopadhyay <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Seock, 2009; Gonzalez-Benito <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar pattern of consumption and Similar needs, interests and characteristics of consumers
	Prediction of potential sales	(Hubner and Kuhn, 2012; Bandyopadhyay <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Jamal, 2005; Seock, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to long-term benefits
	Barriers to entry and market presence	(Jamal, 2005; Perrott, 2011; Wigley, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government regulation • Customer loyalty • Advertising

Table 2: Summarizes the operation

Variable	Concept	Amount	Explain
N	Total number of population	70	Leaders and key experts
P	Population success ratio	0.5	Maximum of success is obtained
E	Estimated error rate	0.05	According to the researchers considered
1- α	Estimate level	0.95	According to the researchers considered
n	Prototype samples number	150	Calculated by the formula obtained
$\frac{n}{N}$	Prototype samples number than total	2.14	The needs of compared to the prototype samples are adjusted according
n'	Samples with adjusted	48	Samples with adjusted is obtained

set the level of acceptable error at 5% and has estimated the standard deviation of the scale as 0.5. Cochran's sample size formula for categorical data and an example of its use is presented here along with explanations as to how these decisions were made:

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.1^2} = 96.04 \quad (2)$$

where, $Z_{\alpha/2}$ = value for selected alpha level of .025 in each tail = 1.96.

(The alpha level of .05 indicates the level of risk the researcher is willing to take that true margin of error may exceed the acceptable margin of error).

where, (p) (q) = estimate of variance = 0.25.

(Maximum possible proportion (0.5) *1-Maximum possible proportion (0.5) produces maximum possible sample size).

where, ε = acceptable margin of error for proportion being estimated = 0.1 (Error researcher is willing to except).

Data collection: Collecting data needed for research, the methods of collecting primary data and secondary data collected is used to. This study uses primary data from questionnaire and interview key executives and experts will gather. The study of secondary data available in the industry, chain stores, the Internet, books, magazines, Conferences, organizations and agencies related to the topic will be used. The general methods and tools for collecting data and information will be used: Questionnaires, documents and reports in various parts of the chain stores, interviews with experts in the areas of strategy, industry statistics and chain stores. The main tool is a questionnaire for collecting data in this study. Before the questionnaires were distributed and used by experts has been amended and revised. According to experts and professors and experts in this field, validity has been reviewed and approved. Also questions extracted for the

questionnaire are based on the fundamental studies. According to the formula at least 97 samples are needed. Therefore, 100 questionnaires were collected between customers in each one of 4 branches of Etk chain stores that mentioned above. Before sent the questionnaires, according to reviews of experts and professors and experts in this field, validity has been reviewed and approved. Also questions extracted for the questionnaire are based on the fundamental studies.

Validity: In this study, two validity (face validity, content validity) were evaluated to assess the accuracy of the results of these four funds is detailed below.

- **Face validity:** In this study face validity by the test subjects were studied in and after the reform, the face validity of the tool was confirmed.
- **Content validity:** A widely used method to measure the content validity of Lawshe (1975) coined. This level of agreement among the assessors or jury "or a fundamental right to be" one of the items specific measures. Lawshe (1975) suggested that all buoy or a series of questions the assessors or jury will be asked whether they intended to measure the buoy structure of "essential or useful" or not? According Lawshe, if more than half of the evaluators or judges stated that it "is essential or beneficial, At least some of the items have content validity. The evaluators agree with the amount of certain items or benefits of a higher level of content validity are also higher. Lawshe using this formula is devised to measure the content validity of the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) is called (Mirzaei, 2010).

$$\text{Content validity of the formula: } CVR = \frac{(ne - \frac{N}{2})}{\frac{N}{2}}$$

It should be noted that the questionnaire was given to 20 experienced the least amount acceptable to the 0/42 is. The following table is summarizes the content validity:

Reliability: In this study to examine the reliability of two methods of internal consistency reliability and test-retest reliability have benefited from the results in detail below.

- **Internal consistency reliability:** One way to measure reliability internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha is used. Between individual items in the tool or test the correlation with the total score is used. In the study of this method is used to calculate the internal consistency reliability. The minimum

acceptable reliability for research surveys 0/6 is. This study was calculated Cronbach's alpha 0/82.

- **Test-retest reliability:** Tools for test-retest reliability, a test for the second time, with the previous week on the subject (50) have performed. Pearson's correlation coefficient obtained from the two tests with 0/87 the test-retest reliability of the test will be confirmed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis the external factors of Etk chain stores: The influence of external indicators has been prepared using outside data of the organization. These indicators are as follows:

- **Market growth rate:** Retail Market in Iran was encountered with growing 4.7% in 2010 that this amount was the highest growth in the Middle East during this year.

Statistics show that for every 38 persons in Iran there is a retail unit. From this perspective, Iran has first ranks in the world. Of course, in terms of number of retail units Iran is in the third rank. And the first and second ranks are the most populous countries in the world, China and India. This information is given in the Table 3.

According to the Iranian Statistics Center, the number of retail units has increased from 621 thousand units to two million units during 1993 to 2011. This information is shown in Fig. 1:

Established several chain stores in recent years are confirm the increasing rate of market growth. Therefore, according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 4 (from 5).

- **The number of competitor:** Etk chain stores have many Competitors that the most important competitors are: Refah, Shahrvand, Sepah, Hyperstar and other new retail stores that have been established in recent years. The number of these retail branches will be 2000 unit until 2012. Therefore, according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 5 (from 5).
- **Similar pattern of consumption:** Despite the apparent differences in chain stores, all of them have a specific mission. The main missions of all the chain stores are optimizing the distribution network, lower commodity prices and profitability. As well as reduce cost, improve quality, enhance service to the people, are the joint mission of chain stores in most countries.

Table 3: Capita of retail in the world

Country	Population	The number of retail units	Capita of people per retail
India	1, 215, 939, 000	13, 000, 000	94
China	1, 341, 414, 000	6, 400, 000	210
Iran	75, 350, 000	2, 000, 000	38

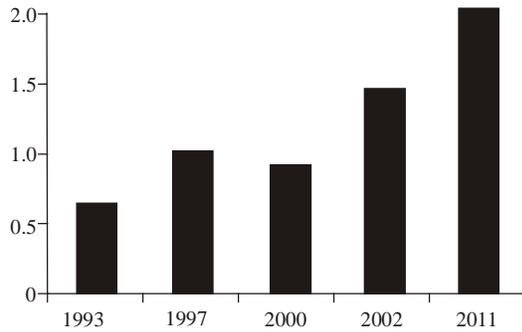


Fig. 1: The number of retail units in the past 18 years

So chain stores have three similar main objectives shown below:

- Providing required goods of society
- Eliminate unnecessary intermediaries
- Modification of consumption patterns, guidance and support for produce major important items

Therefore, according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 3 (from 5).

- **Pay attention to long-term benefits:** It is clear that if the investment is higher; serving to customers will be better. But there is a ratio in the economy as "ratio of space available to sales profit". Chain stores should try to obtain a high ranking in this ratio. If the chain stores can gain a high ranking in this ratio, it can be said that they are capability. Therefore, according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 4 (from 5).
- **Government regulation:** Etk chain stores are relying on government laws therefore they have many limitations, while many competitor chain stores don't have these limitations. Some of these limitations are as follows:
 - **Limitation of transfer of employees:** According to government laws, transfer of employees on the Etk chain stores is very difficult. So the store manager for a simple transfer should coordinate arrangements with many sectors and individuals. It may an employee not be successful on one sector

but on the other sectors provide better services that this transfer on some cases is very difficult.

- **Limitation of surplus staff:** Many employees are working on Etk chain stores that may not meet the real needs. But according to government laws, there is no possibility of reducing or transfer employees. And store managers are required to pay and the use of these surplus employees.
- **Limitation of entry of new employees:** According to government laws there isn't possibility of entering a new force.
- **Limitation of overtime hours:** According to government laws, employees couldn't have over 175 h of overtime per month. While there is no limitation on overtime on non-government chain stores.
- Suppliers of Etk chain stores obey of government laws and this will create a lot of limits on purchase or sale of products.

Therefore, this is the most important external factor affecting the chain's stores. And according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 5 (from 5).

- **Customer loyalty:** Customer loyalty is a key component for a brand's long-term viability (Krishnamurthi and Raj, 1991). Loyalty of customers is considered to be a function of satisfaction and that loyal customers contribute to company profitability by spending more on company products and services, via repeat purchasing and by recommending the organization to other consumers (Bowen and Chen, 2001; Fecikova, 2004). Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as 'a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior'. Customer loyalty expresses an intended behavior related to the service or the company (Mokhtar *et al.*, 2011). The most important benefits of customer loyalty is as follows:
 - Reduce costs of attracting new customers
 - Reduce customer sensitivity to price changes
 - Benefits of customer lifetime value
 - Positive performance by increasing power of prediction
 - Increase barriers to entry for new competitors

Therefore, this is the most important external factor affecting the chain's stores. And according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 4 (from 5).

- **Advertising:** Today, production and delivery of goods may not be sufficient, because activities in developing has changed and in a competitive environment should be attracting the customers. Advertising has several advantages which are as follows:
 - Helping to introduce new products on the market
 - Promote sales of goods and services through informing and persuading people to buy them
 - Educate people about new products and methods of using them;
 - Stimulate research and development activities
 - Saving time of customers for shopping

So according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 2 (from 5).

Analysis the internal factors of Etk chain stores:

- **The financial ratio (liquidity ratio and growth ratio):** Because the amount of goods and services in the community is limited, so the amount of cash should be equal with the goods and services. If the

amount of cash find an increase, the goods and services in society will be reduce and prices will be increases. Therefore, according to statistics provided and opinions of experts in this field, the weight of this factor was chosen 4 (from 5).

- **Other internal factors:** These factors are introduced below:
 - Brand
 - Beauty, performance and durability
 - Store cleanliness
 - Air conditioning in the Store
 - Decoration and layout
 - Facilities and transportation in the store
 - Behavior of employees with customers
 - Special services
 - The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors.

As regards these factors can be measured with a survey of customers, customer reviews of Etk chain stores were collected at 4 branches. These results in the following Table 4 to 7 are available:

According to customer reviews, weights of other external factors are defined. The Table 8 is shown the weight of all internal and external factors:

Attractiveness and capabilities matrix of Etk chain stores: Based on the average weight of internal and

Table 4: Results of a questionnaire distributed between customers of Etk chain stores (Shahid Chamran branch)

Criteria	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Brand	4%	16%	4%	52%	24%
Beauty, performance and durability	-	-	-	8%	92%
Store cleanliness	-	-	4%	48%	48%
Air conditioning in the Store	-	8%	4%	64%	24%
Decoration and layout	-	4%	16%	64%	16%
Facilities and transportation in the store	-	-	24%	52%	24%
Behavior of employees with customers	-	-	-	28%	72%
Special services	4%	-	16%	52%	28%
The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors	4%	-	20%	52%	24%

Table 5: Results of a questionnaire distributed between customers of Etk chain stores (Shahid Fallahi branch)

Criteria	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Brand	4%	4%	20%	44%	28%
Beauty, performance and durability	-	-	-	20%	80%
Store cleanliness	-	4%	4%	76%	16%
Air conditioning in the Store	4%	-	12%	76%	8%
Decoration and layout	-	12%	-	44%	44%
Facilities and transportation in the store	-	-	12%	40%	48%
Behavior of employees with customers	-	4%	4%	36%	56%
Special services	-	12%	12%	28%	48%
The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors	-	-	4%	64%	32%

Table 6: Results of a questionnaire distributed between customers of Etk chain stores (Shahid Fakoori branch)

Criteria	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Brand	20%	-	16%	24%	40%
Beauty, performance and durability	-	-	8%	20%	72%
Store cleanliness	-	-	4%	52%	44%
Air conditioning in the Store	-	-	20%	64%	16%
Decoration and layout	-	4%	16%	44%	36%
Facilities and transportation in the store	-	16%	12%	48%	24%
Behavior of employees with customers	-	-	12%	44%	44%
Special services	-	4%	20%	44%	32%
The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors	-	4%	8%	60%	28%

Table 7: Results of a questionnaire distributed between customers of Etk chain stores (Shahid Rajaei branch)

Criteria	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Brand	4%	-	12%	64%	20%
Beauty, performance and durability	-	-	4%	20%	76%
Store cleanliness	-	4%	8%	44%	44%
Air conditioning in the Store	-	-	12%	60%	28%
Decoration and layout	-	-	16%	60%	24%
Facilities and transportation in the store	-	-	20%	60%	20%
Behavior of employees with customers	-	-	4%	28%	68%
Special services	-	4%	32%	28%	36%
The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors	-	-	16%	60%	24%

Table 8: The weight of all internal and external factors

Criteria	Weight
External factors	
Market growth rate	4
The number of competitor	5
similar pattern of consumption	3
Pay attention to long-term benefits	4
Government regulation	5
Customer loyalty	4
Advertising	2
Internal factors	
The financial ratio (Liquidity Ratio and Growth Ratio)	4
Brand	3.5
Beauty, performance and durability	4.5
Store cleanliness	4
Air conditioning in the Store	3.5
Decoration and layout	4.5
Facilities and transportation in the store	3
Behavior of employees with customers	5
Special services	4
The rate of use the comprehensive integration information systems and computer equipment in comparison with competitors	3.5

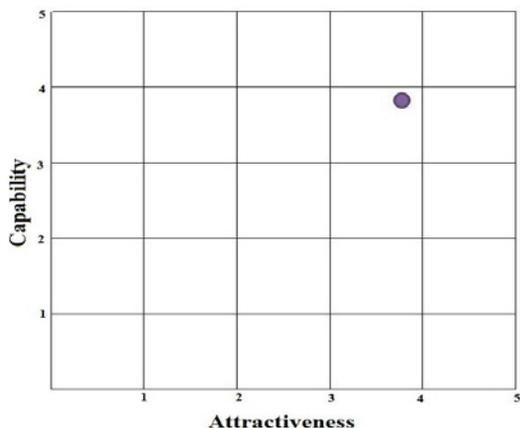


Fig. 2: The attractiveness and capability matrix of Etk chain stores

external factors, the weight of attractiveness was calculated 3.86 and the weight of capability was calculated 3.92. Therefore, Attractiveness and Capability Matrix are shown as follows Fig. 2:

CONCLUSION

Based on Fig. 2 and proper evaluation and ranking of stores, especially chain stores, as a measure of retail performance always has been proposed. Using those results, managers can easily achieve the measure of performance. And take important decisions, such as: expansion of stores, prioritize and test and etc. Finally, based on results, the managers can solve the problems. One way to determine the position of the stores is using the Attractiveness and Capability Matrix. The main

advantage of this matrix compare with the other matrix like BCG is this: the Attractiveness and Capability Matrix can be replacing more data in its two dimensions (industry attractiveness, competitive position/Capability Company, Power Company). And does not suffice only to be comparing the market growth rate and market share.

Therefore, according to fundamental studies, the most important internal and external factors related to attractiveness and capability of Etka chain stores is presented. Then, based on corporate data and customer reviews, weight of each factor was determined. And finally, the position of Etka chain store was determined in the matrix.

As regards the theoretical foundation of this research is reasonable and scientific, we propose to investigate indices obtained in this study in other chain stores and prepare the attractiveness and capability matrix for them. This matrix can also be obtained separately for any branches of chain stores. Thus, store managers could compare all branches of any chain stores. Also this matrix can be update base on new information and updated data (annually, half-yearly or quarterly).

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