



Identification and classification of audit fee components in Iranian audit firms

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to identify the components of audit fees in Iranian audit firms. The method of the present study is combined. In the first stage, the components were identified by using the grounded theory approach and by interviewing 15 experts. The identified components were classified into six categories of causal conditions, axial category, and action of guidelines, intervening conditions, background and implications. According to these categories, the identified components include audit risks, type of complexity of audit operations - audit standards and rules - auditor's experiences, expertise and knowledge of the audit team and communication between auditors and audit firms - audit quality and fee payment system Duties to auditors - the structure system of audit firms and professional behaviors of auditors were categorized. Next, a questionnaire was designed and the statistical population includes certified accountants and managers working in companies, and the questionnaire was sent to 342 people. Auditors with audit firms, audit standards and laws, auditor experiences, expertise and knowledge of the audit team, audit risks, auditors' professional behaviors, audit quality, auditors' fee payment system, audit firms structure system, and the type of audit operation complications in order of priority are located. The results of the present study are prerequisites for achieving the appropriate audit quality, evaluating and receiving a reasonable fee by auditors, and by identifying the components that determine the audit fee received, appropriate policies can be explained for some issues facing this profession

Keywords: fee components, classification.



1. Introduction

Understanding how to determine the audit fee is important for auditors, their employers, and people who follow policymaking and legislation. It is necessary to identify the components that determine the audit fee correctly because the auditor considers the risk of litigation and the future contingent losses of the business owner, so one of the best tools that can be used to analyze the market Audit work and continuity of activity in competitive conditions will help to identify the components of audit fees in Iranian audit firms and prioritize them. The world stage is planning a small and compact world due to the advancement of technology. Undoubtedly, the industrial and information revolution has had a great impact on the way of life and career. Today's business world has undergone many changes. Globalization has spread not only to business, but also to various professions. This means that the demand for higher precision regarding the result of professional jobs and their cost has increased and it is no longer possible to rely on traditional systems and methods (Wu, 2012). The auditing profession is no exception to this. The auditing profession has not been able to keep pace with its rapidly changing environment. During the past years, this job has undergone many changes with the increase of competition among audit firms (Ópez & Pitman, 2014). During this period, the American Association of Independent Accountants moderated its prohibitions on advertising. In the 1980s, the need for auditing services in companies that were created as a result of business combinations caused the coordination of companies to decrease (Sarkhani et al., 2014). The economic depression of 1981-1982, increasing global competition, and economic recession were many pressures that sensitized firms to the evaluation of audit fee services (Ying et al., 2018). Today, with the growth of competition in the profession, audit firms have considered the need to provide better audit services at a lower price to be important. In order to compete in audit firms, apart from quality and differentiating the services of audit firms, one should seek to optimize the audit fee and the best offer for it. So that they both maximize their income and do not lose work in competitive conditions. For this, knowing how to determine the audit fee can be very useful (Seo, 2021). One of the goals of this research was to contribute to the international auditing literature by designing a model

for determining audit fees in Iran. Besides, according to the researcher, certain disturbances have been seen in the audit work market of Iran, there is no written model for determining the audit fee, and sometimes the auditors' judgments lead to contradictory proposals that are not compatible with each other. Considering the issues raised and the disturbances and disorders in the Iranian audit services market, and since the audit fee can be considered an important factor in the audit profession, the purpose of this study is to identify and categorize the components of the audit fee in Iran.

A review of theoretical foundations

The audit fee is important in the policy and correct implementation of audit procedures. The low quality of the audit reduces the consumption of users, and this not only causes the failure to achieve the objectives of the audit, but also reduces the credibility of the audit in large areas and prevents the optimal allocation of capital. In the capital market, there is an increase in the cost of capital and financial capital, which is a figure worthy of attention for many owners. (Kikia, 2015). The auditor's economic interests are provided through a fee that is obtained from the conclusion of the contract with the owners. Auditors use various factors to price audit services (Amani and Davani, 2018). In his study, Shapiro (1989) has concluded that if more clients are required to use higher audit services compared to less clients, then these clients can be expected to pay higher fees in proportion to the increase of each monetary unit of Their average size compared to low paying customers. The results of the studies published in the period of 2014 to 2017 are significant and these results indicate lower audit fees for business owners with growth opportunities, and finally, the level of weak and positive significance can be seen for all research periods. (Xu et al., 2018). Chang et al.'s study (2022) investigated the extent of the employer and expertise in the industry on the increase of audit fees in connection with the provision of audit services in a competitive market. The results of this study show that in the market of audit services in Malaysia, the increase in audit fees is related to the expertise of audit firms in specific industries, and this condition is concentrated in the fees paid by the largest clients in each industry. Groff et al. (2017) believe that fewer competitors in the audit market can lead to an increase in audit prices. Also, less competition in the audit services market can

reduce the quality of audit services provided to clients. In the case of audit services, more focus can bring more satisfaction to audit firms. Hong & My (2017) believe that market size has two effects on audit fees. First, larger markets lead to greater demand for audit services, which can lead to higher audit fees. Second, market size has a reciprocal effect on the level of concentration in the audit services market. If the audit market is sufficiently concentrated and potential, auditors can achieve economic efficiency and transfer part of their benefits to clients. Wilkens (2012) points to the criteria based on which the expected costs of litigations against auditors have a positive relationship with audit fees specified for current period proceedings. In their study, Chen et al. (2015) confirm the existence of a positive relationship between abnormal accruals and audit fees. The number of large auditing firms that have the ability to provide auditing services to large national and international companies has increased from 8 in the 1980s to 4 at present. These 4 firms currently audit more than 78% of large companies and stocks in America. These companies also dominate international markets. There are many concerns that there will be only a few large auditing firms that have the ability to audit large joint-stock companies, because as a result, there are potential and specific concerns for auditor selection, pricing, quality, and monopoly risk. However, the US Government Accountability Office, when the measures of concentration (monopoly) provide an adequate reflection of the market structure, the issue of competitiveness is more complex than it is often assumed (Orbin and Strauss, 2008). Auditors always seek to benefit from a rule and a logical model for determining the audit fee so that they can maintain the audit work (taking into account their independence from the audited unit) and work in a time budget that is proportional to the amount of the contract. Do yourself in the best way and finally benefit from this contract. This important issue, especially in the case of small companies that mostly lack appropriate and sufficient internal controls, becomes more important because the audit firm lacks the necessary frameworks to rely on the internal control system and benefit from the audit system approach. And the risk-based audit is inevitably led to a substantive approach that requires spending more working hours and ultimately even losing the contract. In Iran, the method of determining audit fees has become a problem, and the confusion in

the pricing of audit services has caused that there is no definite basis for determining audit fees, and often the auditors' professional judgments lead to contradictory proposals that are not compatible with each other. It does not exist (Badvar Nahandi et al., 2013). Therefore, the prerequisite for achieving the appropriate audit quality is to evaluate and receive a reasonable fee by the auditors, and by identifying the components that determine the audit fee received, appropriate policies can be prepared for some issues facing this profession.

Research background

Mehrani et al. (2019) in a research entitled Comparison of the Accuracy of Black Hole Algorithms and Gravitational Research and the Hybrid Method in Portfolio Optimization, used the method based on the purpose of the applied research and based on the way of data collection as a descriptive research and correlation type and Hybrid algorithms in optimization. Wang et al. (2023) in a research entitled abnormal audit costs and audit quality in a group of Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchange companies in China and concluded that abnormal audit costs had a significant inverse (negative) relationship with audit quality. Machukoto et al. (2022) in a study entitled Abnormal audit fee and audit quality, the effect of the business context on auditors' priorities, showed that companies facing serious financial problems are more likely to manage earnings than normal companies to compensate for poor performance to hide. Al-Rashidi et al. (2021) in a study entitled Audit fees, non-audit fees and access to financial resources in India, show that normal and non-audit fees have a negative relationship with financial constraints of companies. Ying et al. (2018), in a research, investigated the effect of audit seasonality on the pricing of audit services. The results of the research indicate that only large audit firms reduce the size of the busy and busy season effect, but do not eliminate it and the size of the busy season effect can be large. Walter et al. (2015) in a research titled determining the audit fee in Brazilian public companies, stated that there was a positive relationship between the fee and the size of the variables, the complexity of the client's activity and large audits. Qanad (2023) in a study analyzed the network of scientific collaborations and visualization of audit fee research in Iran. The results showed that between 2018 and 2018, with the publication of 108

articles (44%), a revolution has taken place in the publication of research on audit fees in Iran, and the scientific journal of professional audit research, with 23% of published articles devoted to this topic, had the greatest tendency towards audit fees. Esmaili et al. (2021) in a research titled determining the pricing strategies (strategies) of audit services. They concluded that the pricing of audit services shows the steps and how to determine the price for audit services, including the audit fee, so auditors are successful if they can have the best estimate of their fee according to the characteristics of the unit under review. Nayeبزadeh and Bani Mahd (2017) investigated the pricing of independent audit services and competition theory in a research. The results of the research indicate that there is a significant relationship between audit fees, entrepreneur's competitiveness, company size, debt ratio and sales growth. Bani Mahd et al. (2016) studied the effect of audit fees on the auditor's opinion. The findings of this research show that there is a significant relationship between the auditor's fee, the size of the employer, the loss report by the employer and the age of the company under consideration and the issuance of an unqualified audit report. According to the results of the research, the auditor's fee has a direct relationship with the issuance of an unqualified audit report. The size of the company, the age of the company and the loss report have an inverse relationship with the unqualified audit report. Also, the change of auditor, the type of auditor, the tenure of the auditor have no relationship with the issuance of an acceptable audit report. Ebadi and Nazari (2012) have investigated the comparative changes in audit service fees and auditor's opinion in the private and non-private sector. The results of the research show that the adjustment of the number of audit clauses before the opinion paragraph in the non-private sector has a significant relationship with the changes in the audit fee in the confidence level, but in the private sector, it is not related to the change of the fee but to the change of the auditor.

Objectives of the research

In this regard, the objectives of the present study are presented as follows:

- 1) Identifying the components affecting audit fees in Iranian audit firms.
- 2) Classification of components affecting audit fees in Iranian audit firms.

Research questions

According to the stated contents, the research questions are presented as follows:

- 1) How to identify the components affecting audit fees in Iranian audit firms?
- 2) What is the classification of the components affecting audit fees in Iranian audit firms?

Conceptual model of research

According to the theoretical foundations and the study of articles related to audit fees in other countries, the following conceptual model, regarding the components identified in audit fees, is presented as follows:

Operational definitions:

Experiences of auditors: includes work records related to audit operations, legal inspection and other assurance and non-assurance operations that the auditor has acquired during their activity.

Expertise and knowledge of the audit team: includes mastery of accounting standards, audits, circulars and relevant laws related to the audit process.

Communication between the auditor and audit firms: It includes after the audit process, which implies the manner and extent of communication between auditors and audit firms, especially before accepting an audit work.

Audit risks: generally includes inherent, control and non-discovery risks, which itself includes components that auditors will have their own approach to the tolerance level of each of these risks.

The structure system of audit firms: includes the organizational components of audit firms, including the composition of partners, the composition of audit teams, control of the quality of work and issued reports, and the administrative and support and welfare departments of the firms.

Auditors' professional behaviors: Auditors' reactions to each incident in the process of accepting and performing audit services and how to manage it include.

Auditors' fee payment system: It includes matters related to how auditors' salaries are determined and paid, related deductions and working hours and proportionality with inflation in the society.

The type of complexity of audit operations: the cases related to the complexities of the investigated industry, the complexities of the financial procedures

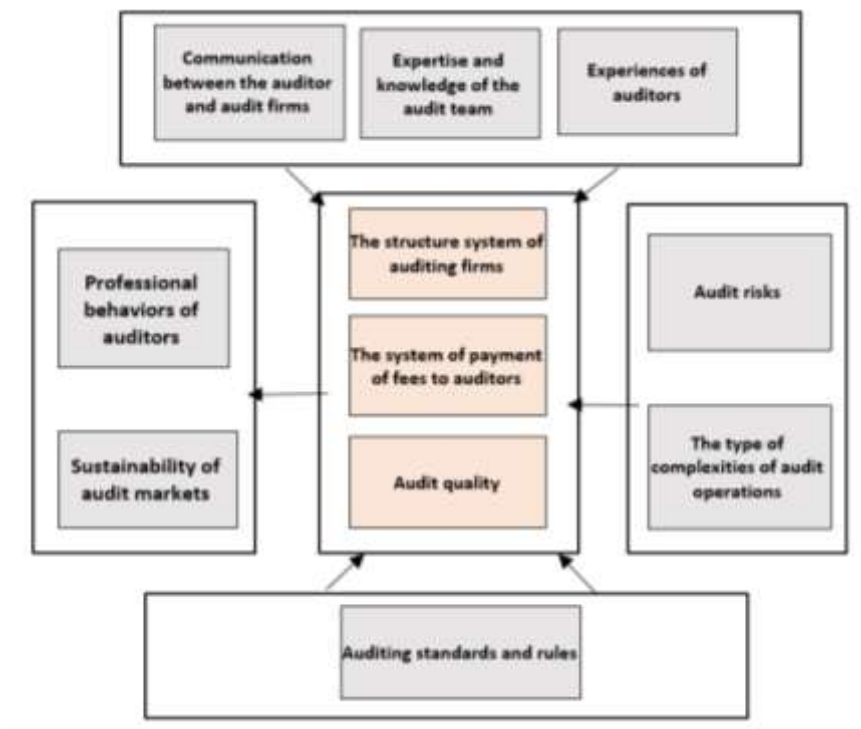
used, the time pressure and the limited budget of the work, and the extent and manner of knowing the audit team members from the unit under consideration.

Audit quality: Audit quality shows the level of assurance that the auditor obtains sufficient and appropriate evidence about the favorable presentation of the company's economic events by financial statements. (Gaynour et al., 2016)

The stability of audit markets: it means the existence of conditions with high continuity and

continuous and continuous repetition of accepting work and concluding contracts and performing the audit process by audit firms while maintaining their independence.

Auditing standards and rules: It includes the approved standards regarding the acceptance, conducting audit operations and reporting of audit firms and all the laws and regulations and by-laws in force by them.



Conceptual model of research Figure 1.

The statistical population of the research:

In the first stage, the statistical population of the research included interviews with 15 audit experts who were all partners and managers working in auditing firms, and in the second stage, questionnaires were sent to 342 partners and audit managers, financial managers and accounting heads working in It has been different organizations and companies.

Research method

In the first part, using the theory of Strauss and Corbin (1998), with the benefit of professional experts

(mainly partners and audit managers), the collection, analysis and analysis were done at the same time, and the data were collected, coded, and themed from the beginning of the research. It has been classified and analyzed. Research data has been collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. After each interview, the text of each interview was recorded, typed, and analyzed, and its output was analyzed in subsequent interviews. In this way, both the process of collecting and analyzing them is completely gradual, formative and stepwise. So, the data was counted and a "code" was considered for each point (open coding). Then, by comparing the codes, several codes that refer

to a common aspect of the investigated phenomenon are considered as a "concept" (axial coding). Then several concepts, one category and several categories were categorized in the form of a theory (selective coding). The method used in sampling in this part of the research is snowball type. The interviews continued until the researchers reached theoretical saturation. In the present study, researchers reached theoretical saturation after 15 interviews. In the next part, using the questionnaire designed from the first part, the items related to each of the components and their classification and prioritization were done.

Research findings

The implementation of the grounded theory approach method began with conducting interviews, collecting and coding data, so that the researcher gained more skill in conducting interviews by conducting preliminary exploratory interviews, which was very important for the research; Also, the records of the interviews have been named and stored in a database, which is based on the name of the interviewee, the audio file of the interview, and the date of the interview. After storing them, the researcher has listened and implemented them in order to conduct the research. The basis of the development of data theory is the conceptualization of data, which is done through open coding and constant comparison method during the research. In this way, a conceptual code is assigned to each data and the data is transferred from the experimental level to the theoretical level, gradually with the increase of the conceptual and abstract level after constant comparisons, central classes emerge, which are central classes. Through saturation, relevance and applicability are determined. During the research, based on theoretical sampling, wherever it

was necessary, the researcher was directed to the next source of data collection and interviews in order to create theoretical adequacy, theoretical completeness, and saturation and condensation of concepts. In this research, the main source of data was the interview, so that the initial interviews were exploratory and descriptive, and gradually, after each interview, the coding of the data obtained from the interviews was done by the method of constant comparison. The data was re-emerged as theoretical codes through coding, and in the same way, 15 interviews were coded and concepts and sub- and main classes emerged. It should be noted that the concentration and saturation of the axial classes was done based on theoretical sampling, so that the interview with the statistical population of the research continued until the concepts of that category were condensed and enriched. It should be noted that theoretical sampling for interviews was not based on the number of interviewees, but based on their role in condensing the categories. Although according to the research questions and the conceptual model of the research, each interviewee was asked about other dimensions as well, but the process of the interviews showed that each interviewee could help more in his specialized position, and this is one of the advantages of the sample. Theoretical collection is used to collect data in qualitative research, where data collection continues based on theoretical saturation. The results of collecting information from 15 experts are presented as described in Table 1.

According to the identified concepts and categories, the classification of each of the categories into causal conditions, axial category, and action of guidelines, intervening conditions, background and implications is shown in Table No. 2.

Table 1. Open coding of Audit fees determination in Iran

Categories	Concepts	Codes
Professional behaviors of auditors	Auditor rotation	Not having the same auditor in all years
		Change of auditor
	Professional skills	Independence of the auditor
		Auditor's decision
		Auditor's judgment
Type of audit operation complexity	The type of operations of audit firms	Corporate operations
	Complexity of the industry	Complexity of companies
	Type of providing audit services	Financial and non-financial services
		Type of service
	Time volume of operations	Audit time

Categories	Concepts	Codes
		Work size and time
	The volume of figures in financial statements	Figures in financial statements
Auditor standards and rules	New auditing standards	Newly approved standards
	Audit rules and regulations	Rules and regulations
		Regulations
	Internal control system	Proper internal control
The system of payment of fees to auditors	Transparent fee system	Employee fees
		Hours spent working
		Transparency of salary payments
		inflation
	Increase in fees based on inflation	Financial problems
Expertise and knowledge of the audit team	Required training for auditors	More salary
		Staff training
	Benefit from an expert audit team	Audit team
		Expertise of auditors
		Technical knowledge of the team
	Mastery of auditing technologies	Use of computer
		Mastery of technologies
Computer auditing		
Audit risks	The complexity of the audit work	Operation volume
		Audit workload
		The complexity of things
	Geographical distribution	Geographical dispersion of operations
	The risk of assigned tasks	Audit type
		Audit risks
Experiences of auditors	The first audit	Perform the first audit
	Auditor experience in the company	work experience
	The gender of the auditor	Staff certificate
	Fee receipts in previous years	Being male or female
The structure system of auditing firms	Organizational structure of audit firms	The amount of the previous fee
		Company structure
	The system of composition of auditors in auditing firms	Company size
		How to recruitment in the company
Communication between auditors and audit firms	Bargaining power of auditors	Composition of employees in firms
		Auditor bargaining
	Consultation and deliberation of auditors	Auditor consultation
	Communication between the auditor and the employer	Advertising and profitability for the employer
		Communication with the previous employer
Interaction between the auditor and the client	How to relate to the previous employer	
		Customer relationship

Table 1 Categorization of categories

Categories	Axial coding
Experiences of auditors	interloper
Expertise and knowledge of the audit team	
Communication between the auditor and audit firms	
Audit risks	Causal conditions
Type of audit operation complexity	

Categories	Axial coding
The structure system of auditing firms	The axial category
Audit quality	guidelines
Fee payment system to auditors	
Auditing standards and rules	Background and context
Stability of audit markets	Consequences
Professional behaviors of auditors	

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to identify and categorize the components of audit fees in audit firms. Identifying these components in general can have a great impact on the correct determination of audit fees, reducing the gap between expectations, reducing legal claims and improving audit quality. According to the results of the research and using Table No. 1, it can be explained that audit risks and the type of complexity of audit operations can be effective on the fee structure system in Iran. This can be affected by the conditions of the auditors' experiences, the expertise and knowledge of the auditor's team, the communication between the auditor and the client, and auditing standards and rules. Also, auditors' professional behaviors will reduce audit risks, especially in situations where the industry is very complex and requires different decisions. This ultimately leads to the improvement of audit quality and more users' satisfaction with the audit report. The complexity of audit operations in some works is so high that to reduce its risks, all the aspects at risk must be examined and a special program must be set for each one, which obviously can lead to an increase in the duration of the audit and as a result The fee increase should be audited. Determining the fees of audit firms can lead to stability of audit behaviors. Auditing firms conduct audits in different industries, which can involve more or less fees for auditors depending on the Scarcity or abundance of the industry. It is obvious that some industries have certain operational and accounting complexities that auditors pay special attention to in determining their proposed fees. On the other hand, the geographic distribution of the place where the auditor must work is one of the other factors in determining the auditors' fees. The distance between the company's place of business and the office of the auditing firm requires paying additional fees from the mission to the employees, and it certainly increases the audit fee. On the one hand, the stakeholders and on the other hand, managers and

investors, are looking for quality audits, which can be effective in determining auditors' fees. Auditors can contribute to the validation of financial statements by following the correct principles and standards that they use to audit financial statements. Audit firms are looking for auditors who use professional principles correctly, and this leads to the determination of auditors' fees. Auditors need to have skills so they can get higher fees. Of course, an auditor who has more work experience is not the same as an auditor who is just starting his career in terms of receiving fees. So auditors need training and skills in their profession to receive higher fees. Auditors, like other classes of people, are involved in inflation and economic livelihood, which leads them to work more hours, and managers of firms, taking this issue into consideration, should provide conditions to pay appropriate fees, in proportion to the increase in work. Expect auditors to perform better. Auditors need client communication skills to provide better audit services. For this reason, auditors should be able to establish a relationship with customers and even managers and have better interactions. Auditors deal with different industries and different companies, which leads to them having more or less audits, the volume of such audits and the financial statements that the auditors agree to audit can be involved in determining the auditors' fees. Contemporary world is the age of technology and communication, and auditors, like other classes, must learn the necessary technologies. Auditors who can work with information and computer systems and new technologies and perform audits in this way can be involved in determining their fees. Nowadays, many software companies are trying to be effective in reducing the amount of time spent on auditing by providing a comprehensive audit platform, thereby reducing fees and increasing audit quality. Firms want an auditor to work in their firm that does not cause legal problems for them, and from a point of view, the reputation of the firm itself, which can be involved in

the determination of an auditor's fee. Audit firms, like other firms, need internal controls to monitor their employees and their performance. On the one hand, this can monitor auditors' payments. If it is a big or small firm, it can be involved in determining the audit fee. From one side, the size of the firms or the number and branches of the firms, which indicates the size of the firms, can give auditors higher or lower fees. Audit firms tend to compete and achieve stability in competitive markets by using the existence of auditors, so that they can provide better services to the market, which can be effective in paying and determining audit fees in audit firms.

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