

Comparative Analysis between various Schools of Thought Of Market Orientation and its impact on Firm Performance

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Abstract

Purpose – Market Orientation is an important tool of Marketing and there are different schools of thought related to market orientation which have tried to comprehend the concept in diverse manner. All schools of thought have shown their impact on firms' performance but none of them has been able to completely explain the concept of Market orientation. This paper compares the various measurement methods for Market Orientations and suggests the best approach that enhances the overall firm value.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach – Data has been collected from secondary sources i.e. the published articles that include various methods proposed by researchers (from 1990 to 2012) for measurement of market orientation. A detailed synthesis has been presented in the paper that highlights the major components of these measurement techniques.

Findings – The synthesis shows that almost all the major measurement techniques are based on the methods proposed by Slater and Narver in 1992 known as MKTOR and Kohli and Jaworksi in 1990 known as MARKOR. However, the latter approach i.e. MARKOR is more market oriented and tends to cover the major aspects important for enhancing firm value.

Originality Value – Prior research studies have focused on discussing single method / approach for measuring market orientation and have compared it with MARKOR or MKTOR. This paper is an attempt to present a comprehensive analysis of all the major methods proposed by researchers.

Practical Implications – This analysis is important for modern organizations, as it helps them in formulating a marketing strategy that is focused towards meeting the needs of consumers and attain the needed competitive edge.

Keywords Market Orientation, Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, Market Intelligence

Research type Conceptual Paper



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The recent research studies being conducted by marketing experts have called for the modern organizations to be more responsive to the needs of the market and focus on how to develop a customer-centric marketing strategy (Wilson, Perepelkin, Zhang, Vachon, 2014). The concept of “market-orientation” has been widely discussed in literature throughout the past decade (Homburg & Pflesser, 2000; Hooley et al., 2003; Sandvik & Sandvik, 2003; Shoham & Rose, 2001). According to Brian (2012) the needs and expectations of the customers continually evolve over time, thus there is a need to be responsive to these market changes. This concept is known as Market Orientation. However, Kohli & Jaworski (1993) have defined MO in a more formal manner i.e. MO refers to the organization-wide generation of market intelligence, dissemination of intelligence across departments, and organization wide responsiveness to it. Market orientation is a business approach that focuses to identifying and meeting the stated or hidden needs and wants of different customers. Market orientation is also defined as the generation & distribution of market intelligence which is composed of information about the customer’s current and future needs and exogenous factors that influence those needs (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). According to (Slater & Narver, 1994) market orientation is considered as an organizational culture consisting of three behavioral components namely customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination.

According to Brian (2012), the research work on market orientation has focused on the intra-firm domain from cultural and behavioral perspectives only. There is a need for academic research that compares the various “schools of thought” related to market orientation and investigates which one contributes more towards increasing firm’s value. There is also a concept of “Marketing Orientation” in literature and there is a difference between market orientation and marketing orientation. Marketing orientation is closely associated with customer’s orientation whereas market orientation is broader term which applies to all activities of the organization. But, the concern of this study is to understand the concept and importance of market orientation by different schools of thought.

Moreover, Market orientation is the business culture that most effectively and efficiently creates superior value for the customers (Slater & Narver, 1992). According to (Becker, 1999) market orientation is considered as the degree to which the different management systems of an organization are designed in a market-oriented way. Market Orientation in conceptual point of view considered in three different perspectives such as behavioral, culture and system based perspectives (Becker, 1999).

A point to be discussed in this subject area is that why some organizations are considered more market oriented than others? Interestingly, this basic issues has not been discussed by many researchers and empirical evidences in this regard are quite rare. Several authors such as Slater & Narver (1992) and Kohli & Jaworski (1990) have proposed antecedents of market orientation, but their empirical validation is still questionable. Slater & Narver (1994, 2000) tried to gather empirical evidence for the relationship between MO and business performance, however the literature that came afterwards strongly focused on the environmental factors i.e. market turbulence, competitive intensity as the primary reasons for the success, partial success or failure of MO within an organization.

The purpose of this study is to explore the concepts related to Market Orientation (MO) and suggest (based on empirical evidences) which concept or approach is better for a modern-day firm.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have shown that market orientation is very important for the firms because of its positive impact on the performance. According to (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990) the success of a firm depends upon the *extent to which it adopts the marketing concept*. As per Houston (1986), MO may have weak or strong effect on business performance, as it is primarily dependent upon environmental conditions such as competitive intensity and market turbulence. Many recent research studies (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001; Kirca, Jayachandran, & Bearden, 2005; Langerak, 2003; Shoham & Rose, 2001; Slater & Narver, 2000) have illustrated that market orientation is positively associated with superior performance for the firm. Similarly, in previous researches (conducted in the 90's) Ruekert (1992) and Narver & Slater (1994) stated that MO is positively linked to profitability and also increases sales revenue and results in higher levels of employee satisfaction and commitment. Jaworski & Kohli (1993) further elaborated this concept and stated that MO is directly related with overall performance of a business. However, the more recent studies in this subject area have focused on innovation capability (Vazquez, Alvarez & Santos, 2002; Farelley and Quester, 2003), customer services and retention, innovation and corporate success (Helfert, Ritter & Walter, 2001) and have cited them as the critical factors for business success. But, if we analyze all these concepts carefully, we realize that these concepts find their roots in the high level concept of market orientation.

On the other side, literature also consists of research studies which have not found any significant relationship between MO and firm performance i.e. studies conducted by Bhuian (1997) and more recently by Sandvik & Sandvik (2003) have highlighted the negative aspects of market orientation and how this concept is not useful for a modern day firm.

With the changing dynamics of the market, several researchers attempted to propose methods of measuring market orientation (MO) of a company. All these methods comprised of items related to customer, market, competitor etc, however their arrangement, priority and focus was different. Some of the important measurement methods for market orientation (as available in the literature) are as follows:

- In 1990, Narver and Slater put forward the first version of the market orientation measurement method known as MKTOR. It included three behavioral components i.e. customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. This method also included two decision components i.e. profit and long-lasting; however after running the reliability tests the decision components were removed from the model. The present version of the measurement technique has 15 items on the basis of 7 degree Likert scale (Narver & Slater, 1990).
 - There have been several criticism on this technique i.e. (Langerak, 1997) said that the focus is only customer and competitor, whereas there are other stakeholders as well.
 - As per Pelham (1997) MKTOR does not reflect the particularity of the firms.
- In 1993, Kohli and Jaworski presented another major method of MO measurement i.e. MARKOR which was also based upon three main components. The first component was related to gaining information, the second one deal with dissemination of the information and the final component focuses on responsiveness.
 - Langerak (1997) stated that for MARKOR the indicator of validity is not satisfactory and this technique does not include items about perception of customers and distributors.
 - Pelham (1997) also wrote that MARKOR does not measure customers' value.
- Hooley at al. (1990) proposed a method of MO measurement that defined the role of marketing in a company and how a marketing department manages its activities. Majority of the items in this technique focus on the customer and only one item is related to the competitors.
- Liu (1993) proposed that market orientation be measured using the key marketing mix components such as product, market segmentation, marketing activity coordination, marketing plan and marketing research. As evident, this method only focuses on the inter-functional coordination and that too for the customers only. Discussion about competitors and their strategies is not included in this method.

- Deng & Dart (1994) gave a method that focused on factors like orientation of competitors, orientation of customers, inter-functional coordination and performance orientation. Although this method is similar to MKTOR, yet the authors tried to introduce a newer version in 1999, but it was also not considered revolutionary.
- Gima (1995) developed a method of measuring market performance based upon “information”. The items are based on collection of information, designing a market-oriented strategy and response to customers based upon their preferences and opinions.
- Fritz (1996) engaged in the relationship between market orientation and business prosperity. He introduced a method which included items relevant to business prosperity and did not focus on market orientation.
- Lado, Olivares and Rivera (1998) tried to develop an alternative method for measurement of market orientation. In their study, market orientation is being measured in terms of customers, distributors, competitors and environment and inter-functional coordination. They have named their method MOS. In 2000, the authors added items related to innovation in their method.
- In 1993, Deshpande, Farley and Webster introduced a new method for measurement of market orientation known as DFW. The entire method is focusing on the “customer” rather than the market. This method primarily integrates MKTOR and MARKR. In 1996, Deshpande and Farley introduced a method named MORTN, which was again focused on customer orientation. Major components of market orientation have not been included in the method.
- In an attempt to unite the items of MKTOR and MARKOT, Oczkowski and Farrell (1998) proposed new method of MO measurement. The second version of the method was presented in 2002 and was called “New Measurement of Market Orientation”. It included items such as holding the customers, success of new products, return of investments and the business performance.
- Research has known that the method “New Measurement of Market Orientation” has higher coefficient Cronbach Alfa than MKTOR or MARKOR. This method does not include some other components of market orientation.
- Cadogan et al. (1999) devised a method for measurement of market orientation named EMO. The aim of EMO is to know the behavior of market orientation at the exporting companies. MARKOR is basis of this method. EMO includes three components of behavior (to gain information, information dissemination and response.

- Akimova (2000) developed a specific method for measurement. MO is assessed from the view of competitor advantages, response to unfriendly environment and business performance.
- In 2000, Dawes conducted a comprehensive study where he combined a few methods such as MARKOR, MKTOR, DFW, Pelham's method etc. However, his study was more focused on evaluating the market orientation measurement methods, rather than proposing a new method.
- Harrison-Walker (2001) proposed a measurement method that includes three components – competition orientation, customer orientation and business performance. Competition orientation and customer orientation contain statements as gaining information, information dissemination, interpretation the information and utilization the information. Business performance is divided into financial performance, performance of firms' response to customers' wishes and innovation performance.
 - This method has been regarded as incomplete by some of the researchers (Zebal, 2003; Tomaskova, 2009).
 - Moreover, the inclusion of business performance as a component of market orientation has not been appreciated as well.
- Haijat (2002) developed a method named "CUSTOR". Purpose of this method was to measure customer orientation through variables like trust level, profit for customers and significance of customers for the company.
 - Pumphrey (2004) criticized this method by stating that it only focuses on customer orientation and misses some of the major aspects of market orientation.
- Helfert et al. (2002) attempted to redefine market orientation. The method used items such as efficiency of selling, efficiency of developing performance, efficiency of developing market, analysis of customers, relationship management and the ability to gain information.
- Vázquez et al. (2002) devised a method for non-profit organizations. The method includes three components such as, gaining information, disseminating information and giving response. Items have been used from the perspective of non-profit organizations and cannot be applied to other branches.
- Farelly & Quester (2003) developed a measurement method especially from the sponsoring point of view. All the items were based on MARKOR, MKTOR and Dawes

method. However, this method adapted to the condition of sponsoring and it was not possible to apply it to other domains.

- In 2003, Pulendran et al. highlight that market orientation is dependent upon the marketing plan of the firm i.e. market orientation is governed by factors such general orientation, rational perspective, political perspective etc. The authors integrated the elements of the marketing plan with MARKOR to devise this new measurement method.
- Varela and Rio (2003) introduced the method named “MOB”, which was simply the implementation of MARKOR. It included items such as intensity of gaining information, speed of utilizing information, information dissemination, market oriented response and implementation of this response. However, Zebal (2003) and Tomaskova (2009) criticized this method and stated that this is not a new method and is simply an adaptation of MARKOR.
- Bigne et al. in 2004 proposed a method that was based on MARKOR and MKTOR. This method also takes into account some items from other methods such as price policy, segment identification, product success etc.

It is evident from the above discussion that majority of the methods proposed by researchers are focusing on MKTOR and MARKOR. Hence, this research paper would focus on discussing the aspects present in both these methods and would suggest as to which method results in better firm performance.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research study is based upon the synthesis presented in the preceding section. Based upon the empirical evidence presented by the researchers, this study will investigate the best method which can be used by a modern day firm to enhance its overall performance.

The summary of the articles which have been used in this study are as follows:

Table 1 Summary of MO measurement methods

AUTHOR(S)	YEAR	COMPONENTS OF MARKET ORIENTATION
Kohli and Jaworski	1990	Gaining Information, Information Dissemination, Information Response
Narver and Slater	1990	Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, Inter-functional Coordination
Hooley et al.	1990	Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation
Liu	1993	Inter-functional coordination, Customer Orientation
Deng and Dart	1994	Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, Inter-functional Coordination, Profit Orientation
Gima	1995	Gaining Information (customer), Strategy Developing (Customer), Implementation of MO

Fritz	1996	Customer Orientation
Lado, Olivares and Rivera	1998	Gaining Information and Analysis, End-Customer, Competitor, Distributor, Environment Inter-functional Coordination, End-Customer, Competitor, Distributor, Environment
Deshpande and Farley	1998	Customer Orientation
Oczkowski and Farell	1998	Gaining Information (Customer, Competitor, Inter-functional cooperation) Information Dissemination (Customer, Competitor, Inter-functional cooperation) Response on the Information (Customer, Competitor, Inter-functional cooperation)
Cadogan et al.	1999	Gaining Information, Information Dissemination, Information Response, Profit, External Environment
Akimova	2000	Competitor Advantage, Response to hostility environment
Dawes	2000	Customer Orientation Information Dissemination (to customers) Competitor Orientation Information Response External Environment
Harrison and Walker	2001	Competitor Orientation, Customer Orientation, Business Performance Orientation
Farrell	2002	Customer Orientation, Inter-functional Coordination, External Environment
Hajjat	2002	Customer Orientation
Helfert et al.	2002	Customer Orientation, Profit Orientation, Inter-functional coordination, Gaining Information
Vazquez et al.	2002	Gaining Information, Information Dissemination, Information Response
Farely and Quester	2003	Gaining Information, Information Dissemination, Information Response
Pulendran et al.	2003	General Aspect, Rationalization Aspect, Political Aspect, Business Performance
Varela and Rio	2003	Gaining information, Information Dissemination, Information Response, External environment
Bigne et al.	2004	Competitor Orientation
Tomaskova	2009	External Environment, Branch Environment (Customers, Distributors, Competitors, Suppliers) Internal Environment Analysis, Inter-functional Coordination

The issues with the above discussed methods for measuring market orientation are quite visible i.e. a lot of methods only include a few components of market orientation. The center of focus is customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Likewise,

some of the methods include business performance as a component, whereas it should be treated as a result. The focus of this Research paper is on two important schools of thought of market-orientation i.e. MKTOR proposed by Narver and Slater (1990) and MARKOR proposed by Jaworski and Kohli (1993). MARKOR considered market orientation as the implementation of the marketing concept, whereas MKTOR treats market orientation as the organizational culture.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first study to identify market orientation as the determinant of a company's profitability is done by (Narver & Slater, 1990) and later in 1993 and then 2000, they identified a stronger relationship between market orientation and business performance through variables like profitability, sales growth, new product success and customer retention. According to them, market orientation is a business culture in which all employees are committed to the continuous creation of superior value for customers. Market orientation perspective includes the culture-based behavioral perspective and market orientation as an organizational culture consisting of three behavioral components such as competitor orientation, customer orientation and inter-functional coordination.

- Customer orientation involves understanding target buyers in order to create superior value for customers.
- Competitor orientation involves acquiring information on existing and potential competitor to understand the short term strengths and weaknesses and long term capabilities of both and thirdly.
- Inter-functional coordination is involved to coordinated utilization of company resources in creating superior value for target customers.

The second important study that has been used by researchers extensively was given by Kohli and Jaworski in 1990. They referred market orientation as a mechanism for organization wide generation of market intelligence, dissemination of the intelligence across departments and organization wide responsiveness to it. MO is found to be an important determinant of business success.

Market orientation by these two schools of thought is culture based (Narver & Slater, 1990) and activity based (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The concept of market intelligence perspective of market orientation is also proposed by (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) which is considered as most acceptable among different market scholars.

Furthermore, the Kohli and Jaworski have described that market-oriented organizations are one in which there are three pillars of the marketing e.g. co-ordinate marketing, customer focus and profitability. According to this method, a modern day organizations works as follows:

- 1- One or more departments engaging in activities toward developing an understanding of customer's current and future needs and factor which affect over them.
- 2- Sharing of this understanding across different departments and lastly,
- 3- Different departments engaging in activities designed to meet selected customer needs.

The method given by Narver and Slater highlights the culture based behavioral perspective of market orientation. They divided behavioral perspective of MO in three different elements e.g. customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional co-ordination. Moreover, market orientation as organizational culture which effectively creates necessary behavior to create the superior value for different buyers and then superior performance of business continues. Moreover, different researchers described market orientation as a determinant of company's profitability. However, all the aspects and components cannot be explained in one single school of thought. All the researchers have tried to utilize different combinations of the market orientation components, but none of the method has been "empirically validated" to determine the real picture of the market orientation.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The evidence found in the literature favors the measurement method suggested by Kohli and Jaworski known as MARKOR. As almost all researchers who have proposed new methods have somewhat used the components of MARKOR. This school of thought approached MO as a broader concept as intelligence generation not only understands the current needs of customers but also the future needs. This enables the organizations to go beyond the needs and preferences of the customers. Secondly, through this approach, this intelligence is shared across all departmental units so as to ensure synchronization of facts. Thirdly and more importantly, through this approach the departments engage in marketing activities which correspond to customer needs, thereby 'responding' to the consumer needs. The modern era, which is driven by intense competition requires the organizations to follow this approach for market orientation, as it brings them closer to the consumer needs and enhances their overall performance. This research also clarifies that any single school of thought is not completely enough to generate a real picture of market orientation.

As far as MKTOR (proposed by Narver and Slater) is concerned, the critics claim that this approach only considers the competitors and customers, there by ignoring the other stakeholders. Secondly, this approach does not consider the speed with which market information is generated and dispersed across an organization. Thirdly, the scale items used in MKTOR do not reflect specific activities and behaviors which reflect market orientation.

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