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Market Orientation and Firm Performance: The Role of Organizational Culture and External Environment-A Proposed Model

[1]Innocent Otache and [2]Rosli Mahmood
[1]Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
[2]School of Business Management, College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract: This study proposes a model which depicts the mediating and moderating effects of organizational culture and external environment on the relationship between market orientation and firm performance. From the review of existing literature, the proposed model is developed. Based on the proposed model, we argue that although market orientation has impact on firm performance but that its impact will be greater when organizational culture and external environment are supportive.

Key words: Market orientation, firm performance, organizational culture, external environment, moderating

INTRODUCTION

An understanding of the market that an organization serves is one of the prerequisites for gaining competitive advantage and achieving superior performance and success in today's highly competitive business environment (Jyoti and Sharma, 2012; Maydeu-Olivares and Lado, 2003). Today's business environment is highly dynamic and competitive occasioned by globalisation, trade liberalization and developments in the technological world, especially in the area of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) (Farrell *et al*., 2008). Consequently, the competition scene is broadly expanded and highly intensified (Farrell *et al*., 2008). More so, customers have become well-informed (or enlightened) about their needs and expectations and there are many competitors in the marketplace who are ready to provide superior values for the customers. Given these scenarios, the need for business firms to be market-oriented becomes very important. This means business firms must be market-oriented for them to achieve success, gain competitive advantage, increase market share and achieve superior performance.

Furthermore, available literature on marketing acknowledges that market-oriented firms perform better than less market-oriented firms (Farrell *et al*., 2008; Pulendran *et al*., 2003). It is argued that market-oriented firms have the capacity to secure customers' loyalty, create more customers, increase sales and market share and achieve new product success (Farrell *et al*., 2008; Jyoti and Sharma, 2012; Maydeu-Olivares and Lado, 2003; Rojas-Mendez and Rod, 2013).

On the one hand, to be market-oriented means that business firms must understand customers' needs and wants. Business firms should be able to identify both current and future needs of customers and then offer products that meet the customers' needs and expectations (Jyoti and Sharma, 2012). A customer-oriented firm is that firm which puts into practice the philosophy of marketing concept. Marketing concept is described as a business philosophy which places customer at the centre stage of all business activities (Farrell *et al*., 2008; Jyoti and Sharma, 2012). It states that business firms must first identify customers' needs and wants and then produce goods and services that can satisfy the needs and wants in a more effective and efficient manner than competitors and doing that profitably (Sin *et al*., 2003). Marketing concept presupposes that even before production takes place customers' needs must be ascertained. Existing literature on marketing describes Market Orientation (MO) as the application of marketing concept (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Ramayah *et al*., 2011; Rojas-Mendez and Rod, 2013; Sin *et al*., 2003). This implies that market orientation is marketing concept in practice. It is an organizational culture of offering better values for the customers (Jyoti and Sharma, 2012). On the other hand, an understanding of the market that an organization serves goes beyond being customer-focused. It also encompasses an understanding of the nature of competition in the marketplace. To survive in today's highly competitive business environment, business firms must identify and understand their competitors and also get acquainted with their marketing and competitive strategies. They should have information about their

Corresponding Author: Innocent Otache, Othman Yeop Abdullah Graduate School of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

competitors' products and prices and also about their promotion and distribution strategies. In a nutshell, a market-oriented firm should have enough information about its customers and competitors and also, the activities and efforts of various units or departments within the firm must be well-integrated, so that every activity undertaken is geared towards customer satisfaction.

Empirically, marketing scholars and researchers have examined the relationship between market orientation and firm performance (Blankson and Cheng, 2005; Mahmoud, 2010). However, literature review shows that findings concerning market orientation-performance relationship are mixed (Mahmoud, 2010). Some researchers affirmed a significant relationship between market orientation and firm performance (Barnabas and Mekoth, 2010; Charles *et al*., 2012; Eris *et al*., 2012; Idar and Mahmood, 2011; Jyoti and Sharma, 2012) while others confirmed a non-significant market orientation-performance relationship (Greenley, 1995; Harris, 2001; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Ngai and Ellis, 1998). Additionally, some researchers have posited that MO-performance relationship is moderated and mediated by factors such as personnel autonomy, customer loyalty, innovation, market turbulence, competitive intensity and technological turbulence (Barnabas and Mekoth, 2010; Harris, 2001; Maydeu-Olivares and Lado, 2003; Pulendran *et al*., 2003). Other researchers have equally argued that market orientation will have greater impact on firm performance when it is combined with other strategic orientations such as entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation and innovation orientation (Agarwal *et al*., 2003; Farrell *et al*., 2008; Kwak *et al*., 2013).

Furthermore while many previous researchers have examined the direct relationship between market orientation and firm performance (Chao and Spillan, 2010; Najaf *et al*., 2013; Rojas-Mendez and Rod, 2013; Sin *et al*., 2004), few have investigated the moderating role of external environment in market orientation-performance relationship (Gaur *et al*., 2011; Mahmoud, 2010; Pulendran *et al*., 2003). The use of organizational culture either as a moderator or a mediator in the study of market orientation-performance relationship is limited a gap which this paper constricts. In this proposed model, external environment is introduced to moderate market orientation-performance relationship while organizational culture is introduced to mediate MO-performance relationship. The introduction of a moderator and a mediator becomes necessary given the inconsistencies and controversies in the findings about market orientation-performance relationship. It is argued that when a relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable is unclear, an introduction of either a mediator or a moderator will help to enhance or clarify the relationship (Baron and Kenny, 1986; Wu and Zumbo, 2008).

Based on theory of Resource-Based View (RBV), market orientation can be regarded as an intangible organizational resource that is capable of giving a firm a competitive advantage which in turn contributes to improved performance. RBV theory stipulates that organizational resources which are valued, scarce and can not be easily imitated and substituted are capable of giving a firm a competitive advantage which also leads to enhanced firm performance (Barney, 1991). However, contingency theorists argue that the relationship between two variables depends on the third variable (Rauch *et al*., 2009; Wang, 2008). Relating these theories to this study, we argue that although market orientation has impact on firm performance but that its impact will be greater when organizational culture and external environment are supportive.

The objective of this study is to present a model which illustrates conceptually the mediating and moderating effects of organizational culture and external environment on the relationship between market orientation and firm performance. In order to achieve this objective, the remaining part of this study will review relevant literature on market orientation, organizational culture, external environment and firm performance with a view to formulating propositions which show the relationships among them. Thereafter, a model depicting the relationships among market orientation, external environment, organizational culture and organizational performance will be presented and explained. And lastly, the paper will be concluded and the implications of the proposed model will be highlighted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Market Orientation (MO): Marketing scholars have described market orientation as the application of marketing concept (Chang and Chen, 1998; Ramayah *et al*., 2011; Sin *et al*., 2004). Marketing concept is one of the concepts that have evolved in the field of marketing over the years (Modi and Mishra, 2010). The concepts represent the various transitions that the concept of marketing has undergone and each successive concept tries to remedy the weakness of the preceding concept in that order. The concepts that evolved before the marketing concept include: production concept which emphasises mass production of inexpensive products at the expense of customers' satisfaction; product concept which emphasises building of attractive features into the

products in order to make them attractive to customers irrespective of whether the products satisfy their needs and expectations or not and selling concept which emphasises the use of promotional means with the sole purpose of persuading customers to buy the products with a view to increasing sales volume regardless of customers' satisfaction (Andreasen, 1994; Dixon-Ogbechi *et al*., 2013). One common weakness of these concepts that existed before marketing concept is the fact that customers' satisfaction is being compromised which is what leads to the evolvement of marketing concept. Marketing concept, therefore is a business philosophy which holds that for a business to make profit; such business should be able to identify and satisfy customers' needs and expectations by providing. better values and must do that efficiently and effectively than the competitors (Darroch *et al*., 2004). It means that for a business to make profit or achieve its objectives, it must first of all identify what customers need and then goes ahead to provide the products that will satisfy the needs. Marketing concept is all about being customer-oriented. It is about considering customers' needs before products are developed. The basic features of marketing concept are: it is a business philosophy; profit oriented; customer or market-focused and it involves a coordinated effort of all persons and departments in the organization (Sin *et al*., 2003). Marketing concept has existed long ago and marketing scholars have opined that it is positively related to firm performance. This implies that a business firm can improve its performance by engaging in market-oriented activities. Some marketing scholars have even argued that firms that engage more in market-oriented activities perform better than those that engage less in market-oriented activities (Farrell *et al*., 2008; Pulendran *et al*., 2003). However, since the emergence of marketing concept decades ago, measuring its application and relationship with firm performance has been a difficult task to marketing scholars, researchers and managers alike (Chao and Spillan, 2010). This is what brings about market orientation. What then is market orientation?

As pointed out earlier, market orientation is often described as marketing concept in practice. Market orientation is a business orientation which defines the marketing behaviour or posture of a firm. It describes how a firm carries out its marketing functions. Market orientation is all about business firms aligning their strategies and visions to the realities in the marketplace. The conceptualisation and operationalisation of market orientation gained recognition from two groups Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990). Narver and Slater (1990) in their study entitled: "The Effect of a Market Orientation on Business Profitability" define market orientation as an organizational culture of providing superior values for customers. According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation is a unidimensional construct with three dimensions, namely customer orientation, competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination. Customer orientation is the gathering of market intelligence about specific needs of an identified target market while competitor orientation is the collection of information about identified competitors in a particular industry. This means that market orientation is not only about being customer-focused; it is also about being informed about the activities of competitors. A business firm that wants to have competitive advantage over competitors must be sensitive to the activities and strategies of competitors. On the other hand, interfunctional coordination is a situation where all individuals and departments within the organization are committed to providing superior values for the customers. It implies that market-oriented activities are not only the responsibilities of the marketing department or unit but the collective responsibilities of all departments in the organization. All employees and departments must work cooperatively and interdependently towards meeting customers' needs and expectations.

Similarly, having noticed dearth of clear definitions of market orientation and empirical findings relating to market orientation-performance relationship, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) in their study entitled: "Market Orientation: The Construct, Research Propositions and Managerial Implications" give an operational definition of MO and also develop an instrument for measuring MO of a firm. They define MO as a firm-wide collection and processing of market intelligence (or information) concerning the current and potential needs of customers and about the firm's external environment; the passage of same intelligence (or information) to all departments in the organization and firm's response to the information gathered and processed. To them, market orientation is about the collection, dissemination and responsiveness of a firm to the market intelligence gathered. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) like Narver and Slater (1990) conceptualise and operationalise MO as a unidimensional construct with three dimensions, namely intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and firm's responsiveness. Intelligence generation entails gathering of information about customers' needs and firm's external environment while intelligence dissemination is the passing of the information generated and processed to various stakeholders and units in the organization. Responsiveness, on the other hand, refers to plans drawn

up and actions taken by a firm in responding to the market intelligence (or information) generated and processed.

The two groups developed instruments for measuring market orientation of a firm. The instrument developed by Narver and Slater (1990) is called MKTOR while the one developed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) is known as MARKOR. A look at the conceptualisation and operationalisation of MO by these two groups shows that they are similar but a critical literature review reveals some degree of dissimilarity between them (Farrell and Oczkowski, 1997). Both groups conceptualise and operationalise MO as a unidimensional construct with three dimensions and both seem to agree that market orientation entails gathering of market intelligence (or information). While the two instruments developed are good in capturing market orientation of a firm, extant literature shows that MKTOR is better than MARKOR when considering subjective performance measures in the study of MO-performance relationship and MARKOR does better than MKTOR when considering objective performance measures (Rojas-Mendez and Rod, 2013). Also, whereas MARKOR is related to organizational behaviour, MKTOR relates to employee behaviour (Cano *et al*., 2004). More so, Narver and Slater (1990) view MO from both behavioural and cultural perspectives while Kohli and Jaworski (1990) see MO only from behavioural perspective (Cano *et al*., 2004; Shoham *et al*., 2005). A lot of studies have investigated MO-performance relationship but existing empirical findings show that the relationship is unclear. Some studies confirmed a significant MO-performance relationship (Barnabas and Mekoth, 2010) while others established a non-significant MO-performance relationship (Greenley, 1995). Consequently, MO-performance relationship requires further examination. Hence, the following proposition is developed:

- Proposition 1: there is a significant relationship between market orientation and firm performance

Organizational culture as a potential mediator: Organizational culture is one of the internal features that distinguish one firm from another. As an internal organizational variable, organizational culture influences every aspect of organizational behaviour and affects the behaviours of organizational members as well. It defines how organizations and organizational members behave and relate with people outside the organization (Abdul Rashid *et al*., 2003). Organizational culture is defined as the way things are done in the organization. It is the perception of organizational members regarding how organizational work should be undertaken (Van den Berg and Wilderom, 2004). Available literature shows that organizational culture has direct and indirect impact on business activities and performance (Chuang *et al*., 2012; Nazir and Lone, 2008). Thus, it is a potential mediator between business activities and performance. This is because for certain business activities to be carried out successfully, appropriate and supportive culture is needed and must be developed. For example, market and learning cultures are very important if a firm wants to be market-oriented (Cameron and Freeman, 1991) and that is why Narver and Slater (1990) describe market orientation as a business culture and a philosophy of being customer-focused. Market culture requires that a business firm must direct its activities towards customer satisfaction and be sensitive to competitors' activities and modus operandi (Cameron and Freeman, 1991). In addition, both Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) state that market orientation involves gathering of market intelligence (or information) about a firm's customers and competitors. This demands that a business firm should possess a learning culture. A learning culture makes it possible for a business firm to be interested in every bit of information about its customers, competitors and environment as a whole (Farrell *et al*., 2008). Given the influence of organizational culture on business activities and performance, it is assumed that organizational culture is a potential mediator of MO-performance relationship. Consequently, the following proposition is formulated:

- Proposition 2: organizational culture mediates market orientation-performance relationship

External environment as a potential moderator: Businesses interact with external environment on a daily basis. In fact, many business activities like planning and decision-making depend on certain environmental conditions. External environment refers to uncontrollable external forces or factors which influence business activities and performance (Nasiripour *et al*., 2012). External environmental factors can be categorized into micro (or task) and macro (or general) factors (Sul, 2002). Task environmental factors consist of the activities of customers, middlemen, suppliers and regulators which influence business activities directly. For example, changes in customers' tastes and preferences affect the products of a firm. Also, increase in the prices of raw materials by suppliers affects firm's production activities while the activities of the middlemen such as creation of

artificial scarcity (that is hoarding) affect the availability of the firm's product in the market. On the other hand, general environmental forces include: economic factors like interest rate, exchange rate, inflation and monetary policies; technological factors such as introduction of new technology; political cum legal factors like price control, government stability, export and import regulations; socio-cultural factors such as population growth, traditions and national culture and ecological factors like earthquakes and flood disasters. All these factors affect business activities indirectly and firms have no control over them. Business firms can only respond to these environmental forces by adjusting and adapting their internal processes and strategies.

Existing literature shows that external environment affects business activities both directly and indirectly (Awang *et al*., 2009; Covin and Slevin, 1991; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005). The impact of external environment on business activities and performance are usually assessed by looking at the various dimensions of external environment (Sul, 2002). The dimensions of external environment that are considered in this proposed model are competitive intensity and environmental dynamism. Competitive intensity refers to the degree of competition that exists among firms operating in a particular industry (Alexandrova, 2004; Rosenbusch *et al*., 2013). Business firms compete for things like raw materials, customers, human resources and technology. Also, competition could be in the areas of price, quantity, quality and promotion. For example, a firm can reduce the price of its product and can also increase the quality and quantity of its product so as to increase its market share. Some business firms also engage in "promotion wars" with a view to increasing their sales volume and outperforming other competitors. Competition in whatever form, poses threats to other firms and makes the environment hostile. Competitive intensity is also called environmental hostility. Environmental dynamism, on the other hand, refers to the unpredictability of external environment (Idris and Momani, 2013; Rosenbusch *et al*., 2013). It also refers to the degree of stability of the external environment. Changes in the external environment affect business activities and performance. For example, changes in customers' tastes and preferences can affect the demand for a firm's product. Also, changes in technology affect a firm's modes of operation. Considering the impact of external environment on business activities and performance, it is presumed that external environment is a potential moderator of market orientation-performance relationship. Thus, the following proposition is formulated:

- Proposition 3: external environment moderates market orientation-performance relationship

MARKET ORIENTATION, ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

Most business activities are undertaken with a view to improving business performance. Performance measures tell how well a business firm is doing. Market orientation is said to be related to certain performance measures. For instance, available literature shows that market-oriented activities are positively related to market share, sales volume, customer loyalty and retention, profitability and overall firm performance (Farrell and Oczkowski, 1997; Ngai and Ellis, 1998; Cano *et al*., 2004; Shoham *et al*., 2005). This means that when a business firm engages in market-oriented activities, its customer base will improve and by extension, leads to increase in market share, sales volume, customer loyalty and retention, profitability and overall firm performance.

Furthermore, organizational culture is also positively related to firm performance, directly and indirectly (Fard *et al*., 2009; Mathew, 2007; Nazir and Lone, 2008; Racelis, 2010; Trivellas and Dargenidou, 2009). In the context of this study, market and learning cultures are needed for a business firm to be market-oriented and for market-oriented activities to impact positively on firm performance. This implies that without a firm developing these cultures; it will be difficult for it to undertake market-oriented activities fully. This also implies that organizational culture serves as an antecedent to both market orientation and firm performance.

Additionally, external environment moderates and will continue to moderate business activities and performance as long as business firms continue to depend and interact with it. Like organizational culture, external environment is an antecedent to both market orientation and firm performance.

Extant literature reveals that market-oriented activities will benefit business firms more when environment is dynamic and competitive (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). External environment has impact on business activities and performance (Awang *et al*., 2009; Covin and Slevin, 1991; Mohamad *et al*., 2011; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2005). Business firms depend on the external environment for opportunities. Also, resources to exploit the opportunities presented by external environment are gotten from the same external environment. Also, business plans, forecasts and decisions are dependent on the prevailing environmental dictates.

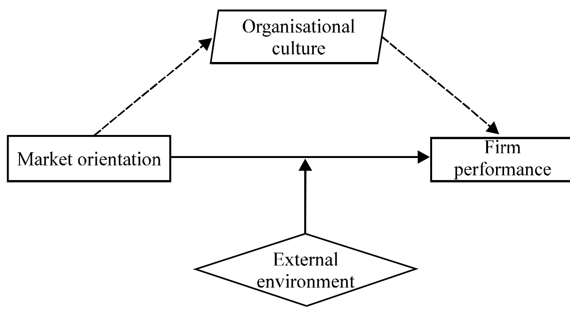

Fig. 1: Proposed model

PROPOSED MODEL

As stated at the introduction section, the main objective of this paper is to present a model which illustrates the relationships among market orientation, organizational culture, external environment and firm performance. From the review of existing literature on market orientation, organizational culture, external environment and organizational performance as discussed in the preceding sections, the proposed model is developed. Thus, Fig. 1 shows the mediating and moderating effects of organizational culture and external environment on the relationship between market orientation and firm performance. The dotted line depicts the mediating effect of organizational culture on market orientation-performance relationship. It means that market orientation affects firm performance through organizational culture. Put differently, organizational culture is related to both market orientation and firm performance. The thick line shows the direct relationship between market orientation and firm performance. It implies that market orientation has a direct relationship with firm performance. The thin line illustrates the moderating effect of external environment on market orientation-performance relationship. It means that the relationship between market orientation and firm performance is contingent on external environment. It also implies that external environment is related to both market orientation and firm performance.

CONCLUSION

This study presents a model which shows the mediating and moderating effects of organizational culture and external environment on the relationship between market orientation and firm performance. Based on this proposed model and as supported by available empirical findings, we can deduce that market orientation is an antecedent to firm performance while organizational culture and external environment are antecedents to both market orientation and firm performance. This proposed model shows that the impact of market orientation on firm performance depends on organizational culture and external environment. The implication is that market-oriented activities will have greater impact on firm performance when business environment is highly competitive and dynamic (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Also, for a business firm to be able to undertake market-oriented activities effectively, market and learning cultures are required. Business firms must consciously and continuously develop market and learning cultures. This is because a lot of market intelligence (or information) is required for a business firm to fully understand the market in which it operates and serves.

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