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SUGGESTED MODEL OF MARKET ORIENTATION AND SUPPLY CHAIN AGILITY FOR BOOSTING BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Muthanna ALOBAIDI

(Ph.D) University of Mustansiriyah -- College of Touristic Sciences.

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Abstract

In the last four decades, efforts linking literatures of marketing management to management discipline sparks market orientation concept. Driven by the assumption that maximization of profit and long term performance can be achieved only through understanding customer's needs and problems as well as competitor's strategies, two comprehensive studies pioneered the thinking around the market orientation concept, serving as the benchmarks for subsequent research in this field.

1- Introduction

The first study (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), that is defined market orientation in sense of wide generating of intelligence and disseminating of it among departments and organization responsiveness to marketintelligence. From that viewpoint it is considered as an information based activities and correlated activities,i.e., innovation and new product development (Atuahene-Gima, 1996; Deshpandé, et al., 1993).Whilst the second viewpoint envisaged by the cultural standpoint, and defined it as "the organizational culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers and, thus, continuous superior performance for the business" (Narver and Slater1990; 21). In support for Kohli and Jaworski' framework, Narver and Slater suggest that market orientation is comprised of three behavioral subcomponents: customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination, all embedded in organization-wide generation, dissemination, and responsiveness to market intelligence activities (Menguc and Auh, 2006). Benefiting from Kohli and Jaworski (1990)'s seminal work, many researchers have been drawn upon their work approaching market orientation from behavioral point of view (Kohli et al, 1993; Wood and

Bhuian, 1993;Gray et al., 1998).Even though, Narver and Slater (1990) conceptualized market orientation as a culture, they used both attitudinal and behavioral scales in there measuring for market orientation implementation (Gray and Hooley, 2002). Thus, the Narver and Slater (1990) study considered clearly the most comprehensive to date and has many positive features.Kohli et al(1993) asserted, that firms striving to take advantage and overcoming other competitors should be competition and customer's needs focused in addition to factors that drive customer needs and expectation such as technology and regulation. Rather, gaining competitive advantage require enhancingfirm ability to respond quickly and advantageously to fast-changing market conditions (Dong et al., 2013). Hence, sustaining competitive advantage can be achieved by adopting a market orientation approach as astrategic solution, that provide market focused firms with strategic options (Javalgi et al., 2005).

Although it is a multi-faceted concept, there are also cases where the market orientation remains unsufficient for providing a broad vision for businesses (Akgün et al., 2010). Vulnerable against arguments due to shortcomings, marketing researcher failed to produce convincing scientific evidence for the superiority of the market orientation for a long time (Fritz, 1996), or how listening too carefully to the customer may not lead the firm to introduce "me-too" products and kill innovation (Lukas and Ferrel, 2000; Bennett and Cooper, 1981).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, staggering diffusion of education and technology triggered more intense competition and greater change in marketplace. Hence, this situation led to improve customer focus,and increasing expectations made him more demanding (Sheehan, 2010).Under such circumstances significant revisions required to rearrange priorities and allocation of resources, strategic vision, and feasibility of classical and even some contemporary approaches so far (Sharifi and Zhang, 1999). Surviving in such competitiveness changing markets, force firms to adapt quickly to these changes and demands for shorter delivery times and more secure delivery capacity (Bjorkman, 1991; Yusuf et al., 2004). Hence, the degree of maneuverability in all activities within the organization represent a vital demand for modern organization. In this context, embracing agility turned to be the dominant feature of today's competition, because it gives the customer-focused firms a wide range of new techniques to adjust its activities in order to react quickly and effectively (Tsai et al., 2008).

From this point of view, this study is aims to examine the links among market orientation, supply chain agility, competitive advantage and firm performance using balanced scorecard with regards to hospitality organizations. Conducting a single-informantapproach, 185 executives within Iraqi accommodation industry participated in the survey. Fromthe collected data covariance structure models with multiple indicators for all latent constructswere tested.

This study aims to adds three significant contributions to the literatures. First, since the vast majority of studies addressed market orientation from behavioral standpoint (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Murray et al., 2011; Gligor et al., 2019; Harris andPiercy, 1999), accordingly, we intend to examine market orientation in thecontext of a firm's supply chain agility, competitive advantage, and firm performance from a cultural viewpoint, that is, make us able to shedding light on firm ability of creation some market led strategies,design coordinated organization structures and implement its strategies through valuing employees. Second, based on debates on effects of market orientation on firm's performance, andJavalgi et al(2005)'senquiry, that perhaps some mediating factors may be involvedin that relationship.Hence, goingbeyond the direct relationship to explain the influential relationship between market orientation and performance through supply chain agility represents a fundamental issue for this study.Consequently, the mediatingrole of supply chain agility between market orientation and firm performancewill be tested.Third, the study of supply chain as a crucial element that improves performance' superiority through market orientation representing important addition to the scant literatures that have beenconducted in the context of supply chain agility and market orientation.

The followingsections are organized as follows: a summary of literature, the conceptual model and hypothesis. Next, methodology, the empirical test of the model and the results are described. Finally, the paper end with discussion of findings.

2- Conceptual framework and hypothesis development

In order to instruct thedevelopmentofaproposedmodelanditssubsequent analysis, RBV's frameworkwas employed toguidethedevelopmentofourresearchmodel.A fundamental issue of Resources-Based Theory is that, resources with attributes of valuability, rareness, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable should contribute to competitive advantage.Srivastava(2001) argued that before any application of resources based view, identification of these resources marketing specific, which is manifest at least some of the desired RBV aforementioned attributes. These resources synergistically bundled to create capabilities (Cording et al., 2002). (Sirmon et al., 2007). Barney and Clark (2007) stated that, prior to firm's acquiring the resources needed to implement a strategy in gaining competitive advantage, they must control the resources they already have in choosing and implementing strategies. Moreover, identifying firm's resources suggests that firm should have the capabilities to exploit it in effective manner (Hitt et al., 1997; Fawcett et al.,2012).Makadok(2001) considers capabilities as particular firm's unique resources, entrench in the organizational processes.Additionally, Murray (2011) stated that capabilities are the accumulation of knowledge and skills of a firm. Accordingly, capabilities cannot be transferred or imitated, they are built (Teece et al., 1997).

While, Kyriakopoulos and Moorman, (2004) asserted the crucial role of market orientation in reconfiguration and integration of accumulated knowledge that originated from practice of fulfilling customer needs.Hult et al (2005) and Hunt and Morgan (1995) consider "market orientation as one important firm-level resource and capability, distinguish with valuability, rarity, complexity, and ambiguity".Furthermore, Day (1994) noted that in order to gain competitive advantage it is not necessary that all firms have the same ability to perform a successful market orientation strategy.Implementing market orientation enable firms to choose from a wide array of approaches whenfulfilling market needs.Narver and Slater (1990) define market orientation from a cultural standpoint as "the organizationalculture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessarybehaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers, andthus, continuous superior performance for the business."By definition, listening and delivering solutions based on the needs and requirements are the key elements of market orientation perspective.

According to Narver and Slater (1990), described market orientation as a combination of three subcomponents, first, "Customer orientation",where a firm market orientation is indicative of activities such as listening to customers and providing solutions in order to understand them in an effectively and highly efficient manner so as to continue providing superior value to them, which means understanding and realizing the value chain and its evolution for the buyer and the factors involved in that process (Deshpandé, et al., 1993). Second, "Competitors orientation", whichindicates to the knowledge that the seller has about the strengths and weaknesses in the short term, as well as the capabilities and strategies of the current and expected major competitors in the long termto deter market positional erosion (Gimeno, 1999).Third, "Inter-functional coordination"that is refers to a functions of intelligence generation, dissemination, and responsiveness (Change et al, (2003). Since, market orientation is a wide-organization perspective, coordination and optimal use of the company's resources and capabilities in creating superior value for targeted customers. Any point in the buyer's value chain gives or carries with it an opportunity for the seller to create value with the buyer; accordingly, any individual in any job in the seller company contributes almost to the creation of that value superior to buyers(McNaughton et al, 1999; Slater and Narver, 1995; Conduit and Mavondo, 2001).

As the main objective of the market orientation approach is to create superior value for the customer, then the company must create a market knowledge system that includes clients, competitors and the market. The market-oriented company invests in the acquisition and collection of information on customers, competitors, and the environment surrounding the market through various and advanced sources and means such as suppliers. The company should not only monitor and collect information, but must also accelerate its dissemination among departments and departments in order to obtain the appropriate response to customer's changing needs before other competitors, based on the information collected.

Traditional organizations are no longer the common in todays' environment. Because rivaling in such environment characterized with swiftly change in market structure and customer's demands, and intense competition, needs gaining and sustaining competitive advantage. Modern organizations started shifting focus to outside relationships of suppliers and customers in searching for competitive advantage (Tyndall, 1988).In such environment, when everything doesn't go as expected, supply chain agility may become a remedy for such situation, help firms to sense the change early and give time to perform appropriate reaction (Richardson, 2006).

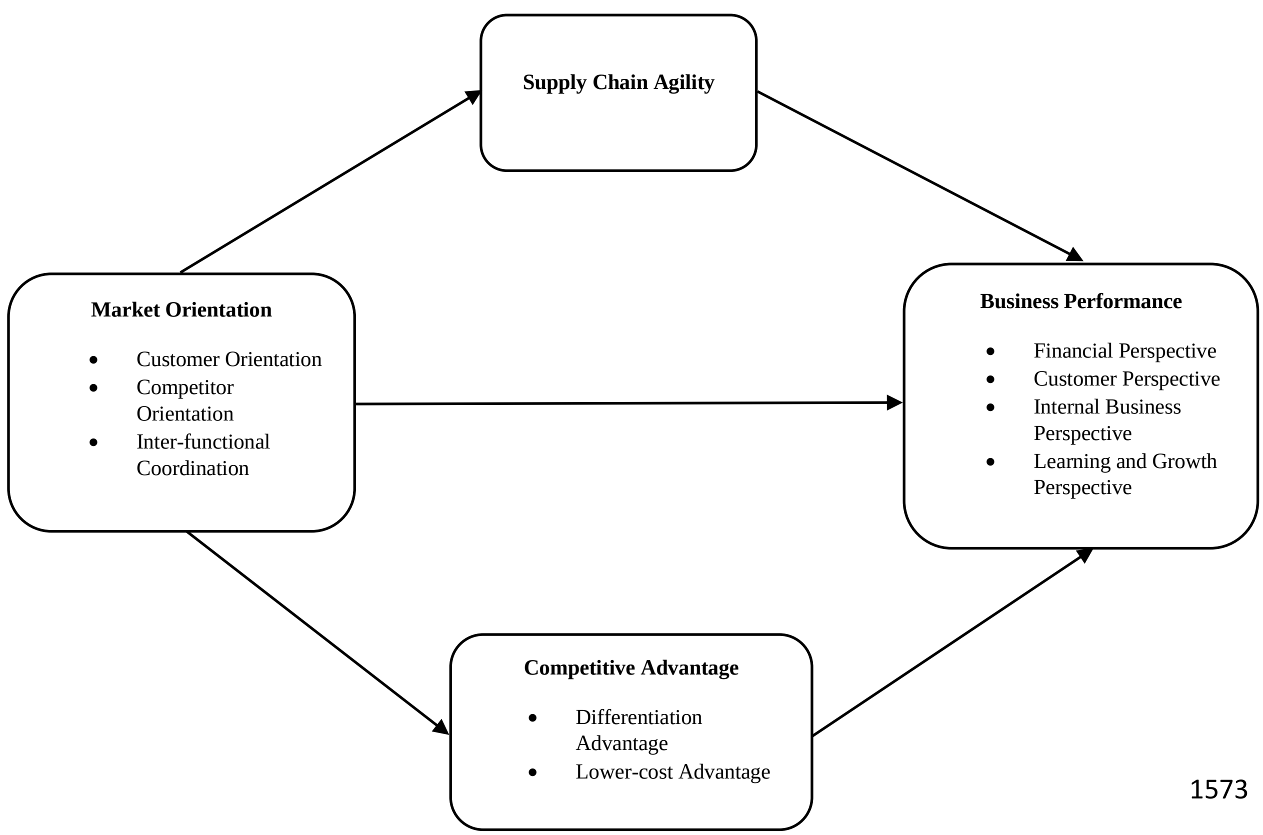

Figure 1 Conceptual model of the relationships among market orientation, supply chain agility, competitive advantages, and performance

2.1. Market orientation and supply chain agility link

In order to highlights the link between market orientation and supply chain agility, The RBV offers guiding principles for building a better understanding of the internal environment of the organization and improving internal business skills.As we stated early, a knowledgeable organization have a better maneuverability in resources over rivals to build competitive advantage. Characterized by intense competition and greater change in marketplace, contemporary markets require firm to pay greater attention to product quality and to adapt to regular changes in consumer demands (Kuratko et al., 2001; Kima and Shcherbakova, 2011).In such complex markets, cascading of rivalry will be no longer between firms itself, but concurrencewill move to the supply chain toward the supply chain (Christopher, 1998). Accordingly, some recommend a new approach "Agility", to boost competition in a highly dynamic market with rapidly evolving demands (Gligor et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2019; Kim and Chai, 2017).Although, internal integration was often promoted as a critical phase in supply chain integration (Zailani and Rajagopal, 2005), becoming agile means supply chain gaining inherent capacity to succeed in changing conditions in long-term position (Huang et al., 2007).Hence, by following best practices to elevates supply chain efficiency, agilisedof supply chain in contemporary markets become inevitable (DeSmet, 2017).

Debates about supply chain agility is permanence and complex. Agility in the supply chain refersto a company's capability to develop joint organizational partnership action plans in close coordination with internal and external stakeholders (Lee, 2004).RBV suggest, that gaining competitive advantages required integrating compiled valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutableresources and capabilities ((Rumelt, 1984;Barney, 1991; Knudsen 2003).Capabilities provide the skills that facilitate forming the framework which aggregate these resources to perform advantageously over other competitors. As mentioned earlier, market orientation considered as rare resource, that is when work with complementary capabilities integrately they perform as key market-focused regarding mechanism (Morgan et al., 2009). The success model of the strategy framework provides theoretical support to deeming market orientation as a direct supply chain agility clear antecedent. Gligor et al (2016) stated, that market-oriented firms show a high level of supply chain agility are eligible to achieve competitive advantages. Hence, needs-based market orientation activities of intelligence generation, dissemination, and responsiveness, provide more detailed and appropriate details on consumer needs and their experience and satisfaction in post-purchase phase. Simultaneously, gaining a capability of supply chain agility expedites the response process to changes in customer demand in exact time (Kaur et al., 2019; gligor, 2016).Within business context, possessing market orientation strategy influencing supply chain agility with capability for detecting environmental changes give the firm precedency over other competitors. Consequently, we developed the following hypothesis:

H1: Market orientation directly and in a positive manner related to supply chain agility.

Research in the field of market orientation depending on the analytical focus can be classified into two streams (Pulendran et al., 2000). The first stream suggests, that firms possessing comprehensive understanding in this field and conducting effectively market oriented activities and behaviors must be able to lever business performance and related outcomes (Morgan and Strong, 1998; Pulendran et al., 2003; Han et al., 1998). However, it has not been shown that the set of customer-oriented beliefs, values, and market focus philosophies embedded in the firm, to directly impact the firm’s performance. It is market-oriented behavior that has been shown to drive business success (Dong et al, 2013). The aforementioned proposition advocated by results from conducted studies in the western contexts such as the United States (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990), United Kingdom (Diamantopoulos and Hart, 1993), and Australia (Pulendran et al., 2000). In line with this stream, (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993) noted that a market orientation may differ in the extent to which it effects on business performance between strong or a weak depending on the environmental conditions such as market turbulence, competitive intensity and technological turbulence. In fact, some studies even did not find relationship (Greenly, 1995), suggesting that perhaps some mediating or moderating factors may be involved (Javalgi et al, 2005). Market orientation involves wide range of improvements activities concerning product-related aspects and facilitation of the administrative facets in an organization (Han et al., 1998). Driven by the aforementioned suggestion, we hypothesize that supply chain agility strategy mediating the impact of marketorientation on business performance. Proclaiming that supply chain agilityrepresents an alternative approach for implementing a market orientation business strategy.

H2: Supply chain agility mediating the impact of market orientation on firm performance.

2. 2. Market orientation and competitive advantage link

Plethora of studies in RBV ambitclaimed, that to perform advantageously over competitors, firms should create a unique combination of resources and capabilities. Asserted, that to achieve superiority in performance continuously and constantly, firms should reinvestment in resourcesand capabilities (Mengucand Auh, 2006). As stated early, firm having resources with attributes of valuability, rareness, imperfectly imitable, and not substitutable should contribute to sustained competitive advantage.Porter(1980) described competitive advantage as the ability of a firm to overcome its rivals by creating value and overridingthe firm’ cost of creating value, that is leads to establishing a positionalsuperiority in the marketplace. So forth, a firm can establish unique position when it operates at a low cost but delivers a comparable value. Likewise, a firm can achieve differentiation advantage when it will be able to offer superior products that is perceive consistently different with respect to competitors’ products (Porter, 1985).

According to Itami& Roehl (1987), invisible resources (e.g., technology, customer trust, brand image, and control ofdistribution, corporate culture, and management skills) which they are for reasons of hardness to accumulate, capability of multiple uses simultaneously, and are both input and outputs of business activity, are the real source of competitive power and the key element in corporate adaptability. Capabilitiesare combination of skills and cumulative knowledge, exercised through organizational processes, rooted in the intricatenetwork of interconnected series activities that followdecisions making process over time, to perform value-creating tasks effectively (Day and Wensley, 2002).These capabilities empower managers with competitive skills and knowledge to capture information about the customer’ requirements (both internal and external) and competitors. These capabilities are extremely effective because they give managers privilege of pro-activeness over rivals through allowing managers to possess and extract valuable information about internal and external customer’ needs and competitors.Gathering information is at the core of the market orientation process. Therefore, marketing literatures assumed that building upon market knowledge about customer latent needs and competitors, should enables firms to forecast and respondquickly and properly by using market orientation (Day, 1994; Kumar et al., 2011). Accordingly, we hypothesis:

H3: Market orientation have positive effect on competitive advantage

H4: Competitive advantage mediating the impact of market orientation on firm performance.

Adopting Narver and Slater' perspective of market orientation, that is consists of three behavioral subcomponents: customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Customer orientation defined by (Deshpande et al, 1993) as "the set of beliefs that puts the customer's interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders such as owners, managers, and employees, in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise". Accordingly, customer here represents the hub for all the business. So forth, to assure long-term competition and health of business, management need to focus on customer satisfaction, and that means that management should comprehensively understand its customers' business and how customers in the immediate and downstream markets perceive value currently and in the future (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Slater and Narver, 1994).

Competition as Porter stated (1985: p 32):

"is at the core of the success or failure of firms. Competition determines the appropriateness of a firm's activities that can contribute to its performance, such as innovations, a cohesive culture, or good implementation."

That is, the main concern here is the management ability to mobilize and manipulate the organization's capabilities to convince customers that its advantages are superior to competitors, to eliminate them from the market. Hence, competitor orientation involves the collecting of information about its rivals and their intentions toward the organization (Sinkovics and Roath, 2004). Thus competitor orientation embraces appraising competitors' capabilities, and analyzing current and likely future objectives and strategies of the competitors in the same market (Deng and Dart, 1994).

Inter-functional coordination defined by (Narver and Slater, 1990; 22) as "the coordinated utilization of company resources in creating superior value for target customers". Gray et al, (1998) concluded that the inter-functional coordination may have the greater role with business performance superiority via the sharing of information and the use of coordinated planning methods throughout the deferent departments and functions. Change et al, (2003) regard Inter-functional coordination as a function of intelligence generation, dissemination, and responsiveness.

kumar et al (2002)) stated, although there are many studies supporting the relationship between market orientation and performance, it did not recognize organizations according to its different strategic orientations, assuming that there is a weak effect on the linkof market orientation and performance.whilst, strategic management research does not support such conclusion. Therefore, understanding these relationships should helpmanagers when making decisions about the best strategic solution.Additionally, Vazquez et al (2001), notedthat the differentiation strategy is more relevantto the behavioral perspective of market orientation, and that the lower cost advantage and the differentiation advantage are not contradictory as some might think.Choosing a cost leadership strategy does not mean ignoring the differentiation strategy. Javagli (2005)indicated many contradictory results about the link between market orientation and performance. Some of them found a strong relationship between them, whilst others refer to no relationship due to intermediate variables (e.g., market-focused strategic flexibility, environmental turbulence) that is play a pivotal role in gaining and sustaining competitive advantage and achieving superior performance. Transform it in terms of its impact on performance as well as in achieving competitive advantage. Building upon aforementioned debates we hypothesis:

H5: Market orientation directly and positively affecting firm performance.

The proposed relations between the MO, SCA, CA, and BP constructs are displayed in a conceptual model as shown in Figure 1.

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