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A Review of Empirical Research on Antecedents of Market Orientation

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Abstract: *Market orientation is widely recognized as critical for competitive advantage and superior performance by researchers and marketing practitioners. A review of empirical studies on market orientation reveals that there are limited studies on the drivers of market orientation in both developed and developing economies. This paper reviews past studies with the intention of identifying possible avenues for further research on antecedents of market orientation based on the prepositions and framework by Kohli and Jaworski (1990).The paper also examines the research methodology employed in the studies and suggests solutions to the identified problems.*

Keywords:*Market Orientation,Antecedents,Empirical Research, Research Methodology.*

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I. Introduction

In a business environment characterized by change in consumer preferences, market liberalization, rapid technological advancement and intense global competition, market orientation is emerging as a key competitive weapon (Hussain, Shah &Akhtar, 2016). Market orientation is conceptualized as the implementation of the marketing concept that effectively and efficiently creates superior value for customers and, thus leads to-sustainable competitive advantage (Johnson, Dibrell & Hansen, 2009) and long-term performance(Pulendran, Speed &Widing, 2000; Hult&Ketchen, 2001). Following Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990), several studies have investigated the relationship between market orientation andbusiness performance, customer satisfaction and loyalty and organizational commitment (Dauda&Akingbade, 2010; Kumar, Jones and Venkatesan, 2011; Davis, Babakus, Englis&Pett, 2010; Hajipour&Ghanavati, 2012; Jaworski&Kohli, 1993; Themba&Marandu, 2013). While there is a lot of attention paid to the extent and direction on the relationship between market orientation and business performance in varied environmental conditions, (Hajipour&Ghanavati, 2011; Aziz &Yassin, 2010; Ghani& Mahmoud, 2011;Demirbarg, Lenny, Koh, Tatoglu&Zaim, 2006; Keskin, 2006) there is little systematic effort to understand the drivers of market orientation (Harry, 1999; Kirca, Jayachandran, & Bearden, 2005; Hinson & Mahmoud, 2011).This paper presents the framework by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) for identifying possible avenues for future research on antecedents of market orientation. The paper also examines the research methodology employed by these studies with the intention of enhancing research precision and generalizability of research findings.

II. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Conceptualization of Market Orientation

In reviewing literature on market orientation, it is clear that market orientation has been widely conceptualized from a cultural and behavioral perspective (Blackson& Stokes, 2002). Both cultural and behavioral approaches are similar in the sense that the customer is the most important component of the organization (Grinstein, 2008). The behavioral approach by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) presents market orientation as the implementation of marketing concept. The authors define market orientation as a set of ongoing activities that are related to three components namely generation, dissemination and responsiveness of market intelligence. According to the study, market intelligence includes an assessment of latent and future customer needs and wants. It also entails an analysis of exogenous factors such as government regulations, technology, environment forces, competitive intensity (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990). The generation of market intelligence involves collection and analysis of all relevant information about the market. Intelligence may be generated from business meetings, discussions with suppliers, distributors and customers, sales reports, customer attitude surveys as well as formal market research. Dissemination of market intelligence involves vertically and horizontally dissemination of informationto departments and individuals within the firm through formal and informal channels. This enables a united basis for concerted actions by different departments within an organization (Gheysari, Rasli, Roghanian&Norhalim, 2012). The last component of market orientation is responsiveness to market intelligence. Responsiveness is actions taken and implementation of strategic initiatives in response to intelligence generated and disseminated (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990). On the other hand, Narver and Slater (1990) theorizes market orientation as made up of two decision criteria namely long term focus and profitability and three essential components of equal importance namely customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Customer orientation is concerned with sufficient understanding of the expressed and latent needs of target customers with a view of creating products and services with superior value (Deshpande, Farley & Webster, 1993; Reijonen&Komppula, 2010). Competitor orientation component of market orientation involves understanding the strengths, weaknesses, capabilities and strategies of existing and potential competitors. This enables quick response mechanism, prompt adjustment of promotional and pricing strategies (Ellis, 2006; Grinstein, 2008). Inter-functional coordination component entails the collective effort of different departments to create a greater value for the customers through coordination of decision making (Johnson, Dibrell & Hansen, 2009).

2.2 Market Orientation Framework

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) developed an integrated framework which highlights the complicated interrelationships that surround market orientation as shown in Figure 1.The model suggests that market orientation is dependent on the nature of its internal and external environment. This study restricts itself to the organizational factors that were posited by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as antecedents of market orientation. The antecedents include: - top management factors (emphasis, risk aversion, upward mobility, education, attitude towards change and their ability to win the trust of marketing managers); interdepartmental dynamics (conflict, connectedness); and organizational systems (formalization, centralization, departmentalization, reward system).

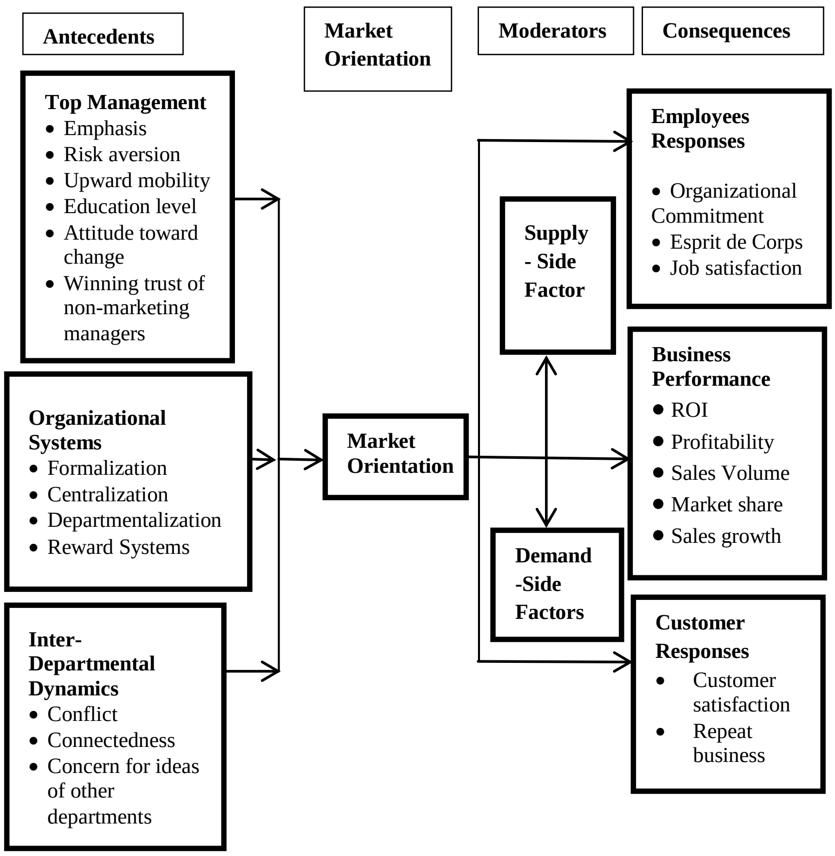

Figure 1: Adapted from Kohli and Jaworski (1990**)**

2.3Antecedents of Market Orientation

Consistent with Kohli and Jaworski(1990), theantecedents of market orientation are classified into three categories: top management factors (emphasis, risk aversion, upward mobility, education, attitude towards change and the ability to win the trust of marketing managers), inter-departmental dynamics (connectedness, conflict) and organizational systems (departmentalization, formalization, centralization and market-based reward systems).These are the organizational factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of market orientation within organizations.

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) noted that the role of top management was a key success factor for enhancing a market orientation. Jaworski and Kohli (1993) assert that top management reinforcement of the importance of a market orientation is likely to encourage junior employees to track and respond to market needs. According to Webster (1988), top management "set the tone" of the firm which shapes and determines the adoption of market orientation. Thus, regular communication of their commitment is necessary if individuals within the firm are to be encouraged to implement market orientation (Slater &Narver, 1994). Moreover, a clear signal from top management of their commitment to market orientation encourages generation, dissemination and responsiveness to market intelligence by all employees, which results in greater market orientation (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990; Harris &Ogbonna, 2001; Day, 1994).Another top management factor that has the ability to hinder or foster market orientation is top management risk aversion (Mahmood, 2011). When top managers demonstrate a willingness to take high risk and an acceptance of occasional failures, itencouragessubordinates to meet customer latent needs and wants by offering new products (Zebal& Goodwin, 2012;Jaworski&Kohli, 2000). In contrast, when top management is not willing to take risks, then junior employees feel discouraged and are less likely to respond to customer needs (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993). Furthermore,Avlonitis and Gounaris (1999) postulates that risk aversion policies espoused by senior management tend to inhibit innovativeness and creativity of employees.

Other top management factors that are likely to influence a market orientation of a firm include top management's formal education, the extent to which top managers are upwardly mobile, top management's attitude towards change and their ability to win the trust of marketing managers (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990).Horng and Chen (1998) found a strong and positive relationship between formal education of managers and market orientation. Similarly, a study byZebal and Goodwin (2012) suggests that managers with formal marketing education tend to be market oriented. Studies by Zhou, Li, Zhou (2008) and Ramesh and Ramesh (2014) advance that a positive attitude is critical for the development and maintenance of market oriented strategies. From the perspective of the Upper Echelon theory, the internal environment of any firm is influenced by the experience, educational background, functional background, and other demographic factors of top management (Hambrick& Mason, 1984). Becherer, Halstead and Haynes (2003) found that the internal culture of a firm is influenced by the background of the company president.

Interdepartmental connectedness, concern for others' ideas and interdepartmental conflict are interdepartmental dynamics factors that determine the level of market orientation in a firm. Interdepartmental connectedness is the degree of formal and informal direct contacts among employees of a firm across departments (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990). Interdepartmental connectedness promotes open flow of resources, work and assistance across various departments(Vierra, 2010; Ghani&Mahmood, 2011; Jaworski&Kohli, 1993). Interdepartmental connectedness also facilitates regular interactions between employees from different departments which reinforces supplier/customer relationships, enables dissemination of collected market intelligence as well as facilitates an appropriate market focused response (Beneke, Blampied, Dewar & Soriano, 2016; Shoham, Rose &Kropp, 2005). Concern for others refers to openness and receptiveness to the suggestions and proposals of other individuals. Low level of concern for the ideas of others can hinder the dissemination and responsiveness of market intelligence due to ineffective group processes occasioned by distrust, constrained information flows and antagonism (Kohli&Jaworski, 1990).Interdepartmental conflict refers to the tension among departments that hinders the development of market orientation (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993). Literature notes that interdepartmental conflict results in frustration, disharmony, and breakdown in communication and secrecy which hinders the dissemination of market intelligence in a firm. In addition, interdepartmental conflict leads to less market information sharing and less life-quality at workplace, which ultimately decreases the focus on the customers and market (Harris & Piercy, 1999; Ruekert& Walker, 1987).

Organizational systems relate to formal systems within organization, that is, formalization, centralization, departmentalization and reward systems that can adjusted to drive a market orientation culture (Kim &Mauborgne, 2009; Ruekert, 1992).Formalization refers to the degree to which rules define roles, authority, communication, norms and sanctions. Departmentalization or specialization refers to the number of departments into which organizational activities are segregated. Centralization refers to the extent of delegation of decision-making authority throughout the firm(Jaworski&Kohli, 1993).Kohli and Jaworski (1990) andAvlonitis and Gounaris (1999) posit that formalization, centralization and departmentalization may be inversely related to generation and dissemination of market intelligence but positively related to responsiveness. Reward system refers to the extent to which managers are evaluated and rewarded. Literature shows that reward systems are instrumental in shaping the behavior of employees (Pulendran, Speed &Widing II, 2000). For example, Webster (1988) argues that if managers are evaluated on the basis of short term factors such as sales, they are likely to neglect long term factors such as customer satisfaction and service. On the other hand, if they are evaluated on the basis of customer satisfaction and service, they are more likely to gather market intelligence and respond to customer needs. Thus, market-based reward systems are more likely to motivate employees to respond to customers, which enhance long-term market orientation (Pulendra et al., 2000).

2.4 Content Analysis based on past research

Content analysis will include a review of empirical studies that examine the antecedents of market orientation as identified by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). Equally important will be the review of the research methodology employed by these studies. As research progresses, it is important to recognize research limitations of the studies and focus on increasing research precision and scope of the further research findings. Thus, the research methodology issues that will be considered are the generalizability of the studies, sampling and the informant bias associated with data collection.

One of the earliest studies to empirically validate the prepositions pertaining to the antecedents of market orientation was by Jaworski and Kohli (1993). Primary data was collected from a sample of large American firms. The study investigated the influence of top management factors (emphasis, risk aversion), interdepartmental dynamics (conflict, connectedness) and organizational systems(formalization, centralization, departmentalization, reward system)on the different components of market orientation. The study findings showed that top management emphasis a critical factor in generation of market intelligence,and thedissemination and responsiveness of the market information. Furthermore, the study indicated that top management's risk aversion did not affect intelligence generation or dissemination, but it had a negative effect on responsiveness. As regards interdepartmental dynamics, the study findings revealed that inter-departmental conflict inhibits intelligence dissemination and responsiveness while inter-departmental connectedness promotes overall market orientation. The study also revealed that reward systems had a strongest relationship with all components of market orientation and that centralization of decision-making was a barrier to a market orientation. Finally, the study found that formalization and departmentalization had no effect on the level of market orientation of a firm.

Pulendra, Speed and Widing II (2000) sought to investigate the antecedents of market orientation in Australia. Primary data was collected from the manager of the strategic business unit by means of a self-administered mail questionnaire. The sample was selected from diverse industries as follows:- pharmaceuticals (29%), mining (14%), agriculture (17%), meat and game (3%), pottery and glassware (10%), milk and milk products (10%) and furniture (5%) with majority of them being larger firms. These industries were representative of all Australian states and diverse firm demographics. The sampling frame consisted of 505 companies. The study findings indicated that top management emphasis plays a crucial role in the development of overall market orientation. Thus the study proposed that the development of market orientation should start with resolve, communication and commitment from top management. The findings alsorevealed that interdepartmental conflict inhibits overall market orientation while interdepartmental connectedness, top management risk aversion formalization and centralization had no significant relationship with market orientation of firms. Furthermore, the study found that reward system based on customer satisfaction leads to higher levels of market orientation.

Ghani and Mahmood (2011) sought to identify antecedents that determine the level of market orientation of microfinance providers in Pakistan. All microfinance providers (MFPs) operating in Pakistan were considered as the target population for the study. The sample size comprised of 19 MFPs representing the different categories of the providers. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires from area/branch managers. The results of the study showed that top management emphasis and formalization had significant relationship with market orientation of 19 microfinance companies in Pakistan. Specifically, the study noted that top management emphasis had a positive relationship with market orientation while formalization had a significant negative relationship with market orientation. The study demonstrated that top management risk aversion, inter-departmental conflict, interdepartmental connectedness, centralization and reward system had no significant relationship with market orientation of microfinance providers in Pakistan.

A study by Zebal and Goodwin (2011)investigated the antecedents of market orientation in Bangladesh. The sample size comprised of 29 private commercial banks which formed the entire population of the study. Primary data was collected from bank managers using a questionnaire. The findings showed that top management emphasis, interdepartmental connectedness and market based reward systems are statistically significant and positively related to market orientation of private commercial banks. Conversely, top management risk aversion was not found to be statistically related to market orientation while formal marketing education was statistically and negatively related to market orientation.

Malik and Naeem (2009) used the model proposed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) to identify the drivers of market orientation among diversified industries of Pakistan such as textile (25.33%), telecommunication (9.41%), pharmaceuticals (20%), home appliances (18.82%), chemical (10.76%) and FMCG sector (16.47%). Primary data was collected from key informants, that is, the business unit heads/senior managers of these industries using self-administered questionnaires. The research findings revealed that top management emphasis and interdepartmental connectedness act as drivers of market orientations while centralization had a negative relationship with market orientation, and as such a hindrance to a market orientation.

There are limited studies that focus on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in developed and developing economies. For example,Ramesh and Ramesh (2014) sought to investigate the factors underlying the development of SMEs in Bangalore. The sample size consisted of 100 SMEs within Peenya cluster of Bangalore City. The target population consisted of managers and owners of these SMEs. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. The study noted that top-management risk aversion and inter-functional conflict had a significant negative influence on market orientation. Furthermore, centralization and top management emphasis had a positive relationship with the development of market orientation among SMEs. Additionally, the research findings revealed that reward systems and organizational commitment had no significant relationship with market orientation. A study by Mahmoud (2011) examined the driver of a market orientation of 600 Ghanaian SMEs operating in service and manufacturing industries. The study employed a convenience sample of managers and business owners of SMEs. Primary data was collected using questionnaires. The study found that top-management emphasis and centralization were related to a market orientation while reward system was not. Furthermore, the research findings found that interfunctional conflict had a relatively negative but insignificant relationship with market orientation. The study results also showed that top management risk aversion had a significant negative relationship with market orientation. Dubihela (2013) examined the determinants of market orientation by SMEs in South Africa. Primary data was collected by means of a structured questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The cross industry field survey of 350 SMEs was carried out in Vaal Triangle. The target population comprised of SME owners, heads of marketing departments and managers. The study findings revealed that market-based reward systems, top management emphasis, interfunctional connectedness and management risk posture may determine the extent to which overall market orientation is adopted by SMEs in South Africa.

The content analysis reveals the following issues:- First, top management emphasis is a crucial driver ofa market orientation of large, small and medium enterprises(Jaworski&Kojli, 1993; Pulendran, Speed &Widing II, 2000; Ramesh & Ramesh, 2014; Mahmoud, 2011; Dubihela, 2013). Second, there is a lot of attention paid to emphasis and risk aversion of top management with little consideration is given toother upper management characteristics that may facilitate market orientation behavior in firms (Zebal& Goodwin, 2012; Ghani&Mahmood, 2011). Hence, there is need for further research on the relationship between CEO attributes such as CEO education, experience level, leadership style, decision-making style, entrepreneurial experience and a firm’s level of market orientation. Third, a close examination of empirical studies reveals there is no consensus among researchers on how and wheninter-departmental dynamics factors and organizational systems facilitate or hinder the development of market orientation in firms. The problem of inconsistent findings is compounded when firm size and environmental characteristics are examined.For example,while centralization was found to hinder marketorientation of large firms in America (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993), it was found to be unrelated to market orientation in large firms in Australia (Pulendran, Speed &Widing II, 2000). Furthermore, while decentralization was found to influence market orientation in large firms (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993), research showed that centralization has a positive relationship with market orientation of SMEs in the African continent (Ramesh &Ramesh, 2014; Mahmoud, 2011)but unrelated to market orientation of SMEs in Pakistan (Ghani&Mahmood, 2011). As such, further research needs to be done to investigate the influence of the antecedents of market orientation of large, small and medium enterprises in varied external environments.

2.5 Research Methodology Analysis

The research methodology analysis reveals concerns as to the generalizability and research precision of the research findings. Generalizability refers to the extension of research findings and conclusions from a study conducted on a sample to the population at large (Prifti&Alimehmeti, 2017). Research shows that primary data collected from a sample across multiple or diverse industries yields research findings that are more generalizable than single setting studies (Pulendran, Speed &Widing II, 2000). Similarly, representative sample that are small or conveniently sampled can temper the generalizability of study results (Ghani&Mahmood, 2011; Zebal& Goodwin, 2011).Majority of the reviewed studies collected primary data from samples that were small or conveniently sample. Furthermore, most of the studies relied on the self-report of a senior manager of a strategic business unit (SBU) or an owner/manager (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993; Ghani&Mahmood, 2011; Malik &Naeem, 2009; Mahmoud, 2011; Zebal& Goodwin, 2012; Dubihela, 2013).To enhance the generalizability of the results, further studies should use large samplesor havelarger representatives drawn from multiple settings. However, it should be noted that multiple settings studies introduce the possibility of confounding (industry) effects that can lead to misleading results if not controlled(Jaworski&Kohli, 1993; Pulendran, Speed &Widing II, 2000). Also needed in further studies is a greater use of multiple informants, both managers and non-managers, in order to reduce the potential of informant bias from the informants (Jaworski&Kohli, 1993). Informant bias relates to the extent to which observations are based on the self-report of an informant, and not the variable being measured in the study. For example, there is sufficient evidence that an informant's position in a firm, memory decay or knowledge deficiency can systematically affecttheirresponses, thereby creating a biased measure (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin &Frese, 2009).

III. Conclusion

The review of empirical studies suggests that demographic and functional background of upper management needs tobe thoroughly examined in further studies as they play a crucial role in the development of market orientation within firms. Other areas of interest for further studies include the influence inter-departmental dynamics factors and organizational systems in the development of market orientation in SMEs. Furthermore, researchers need to conduct studies across multiple industry settings so as to enhance generalizability of study findings. Majority of the studies that were collected data from a single industry setting or one geographical region which limited the ability to take the specific findings to draw more wide ranging conclusions about general events in different industries and geographical areas. Finally, further studies need to involve the use multiple informants in order toreduce the potential for informant bias and its confounding effects. Given the subjectivity introduced by perceptual measures, there tends to be substantial risk of increased measurement error when one informant is used.

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