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## Variable Roles and Impact Mechanisms in Market Orientation Studies

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to systematically examine the multifaceted role of market orientation in the literature. To this end, a total of 79 academic studies indexed in the Web of Science, which position market orientation within analytical models, were analyzed. The review provides a comprehensive evaluation of the variables influenced by market orientation, the factors affecting it, and the relationships in which it serves as a mediating factor. Within this framework, dispersed findings in the literature were synthesized to present the role of the concept and the interrelationships among variables in a systematic and comparable manner.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of marketing has undergone a profound transformation in response to evolving competitive dynamics, globalisation trends, technological advancements, and expanded production capacities. Traditional production- and sales-oriented approaches have been supplanted by a modern marketing perspective centred on customer needs and expectations. For contemporary businesses, merely offering a product is no longer sufficient. Ensuring customer satisfaction, creating value, and establishing enduring customer relationships have become core objectives. Within this transformation, market orientation has emerged as a key focus. In modern business literature, market orientation is recognised as a strategically significant concept, considered crucial for enabling firms to adapt to unpredictable environmental conditions and achieve long-term competitive advantage [42,51,58, 64,78,80].

## 2. Market Orientation: Definition, Components, and Its Place in the Literature

Market orientation is regarded in the business management literature as a strategic approach reflecting a firm's capacity to respond systematically to current and potential customer needs [51]. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define market orientation as the process of gathering customer information, disseminating it within the organisation, and taking action based on these insights.

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Narver and Slater [71] conceptualise market orientation as an organisational culture in which all employees are committed to consistently delivering superior value to customers and developing behavioural patterns that enhance firm performance. Laukkanen et al. (2013) emphasise that this approach centres on creating superior, sustainable customer value while taking into account the expectations of key stakeholders. Deshpande, Farley, and Webster (1993) frame the concept as a belief and decision-making system that prioritises customer needs to enhance long-term profitability. Ruekert (1992) further demonstrates that the level of market orientation is directly linked to the collection of customer data and its integration into strategic planning.

According to Kohli and Jaworski's [51] behavioural model, market orientation comprises three core components: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interdepartmental coordination. Customer orientation refers to the firm's efforts to create value for its customers. Competitor orientation involves analysing the strengths and weaknesses of other actors in the industry to develop effective competitive strategies. Interdepartmental coordination is the organisational mechanism that ensures different departments work cohesively towards common objectives [26,43].

In the literature, the concepts of market orientation and customer orientation are sometimes used interchangeably [80]. Kotler (2000) emphasises that market-oriented firms analyse customer expectations in their target markets and develop higher-value, more effective practices and decisions relative to their competitors. In this regard, market orientation is not merely a marketing philosophy but also a central element of corporate strategy [78].

In summary, market orientation constitutes a holistic management model that enables firms to collect and analyse customer and competitor data and make strategic decisions across the organisation. Comprising customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interdepartmental coordination, this framework plays a critical role in enhancing organisational performance and competitive advantage. Empirical research consistently supports the positive effects of market orientation on outcomes such as customer satisfaction, innovation capacity, and financial success [43,71].

### 3. Research Method

This study is designed as a *qualitative literature review* aimed at comprehensively examining the role of market orientation in the scholarly literature. Within this scope, a total of 79 academic articles indexed in the Web of Science database, which address market orientation within the framework of analytical models, were systematically analysed. The primary objective of the study is to explore how market orientation is positioned within research models and to identify the nature of its relationships with other variables.

Rather than relying on quantitative classification or frequency-based analysis, the study adopts an *interpretive and relational approach*. Accordingly, each article was examined to determine whether market orientation acts as an influencing factor, is influenced by other variables, or takes part in interaction mechanisms within the model. The analysis focused on identifying the *direction and nature of relationships*, such as the variables that shape market orientation (e.g., organisational change, environmental conditions), the outcomes it contributes to (e.g., performance, innovation, product success), and the contexts in which it interacts with other strategic orientations.

*Qualitative Content analysis (QCA)* was employed as the primary method of data analysis. The findings were thematically synthesised to reveal recurring patterns in how market orientation functions across different studies. This approach enabled a holistic and multidimensional

understanding of market orientation, highlighting not only its role as a variable but also its dynamic interactions within complex organisational and environmental contexts.

#### **4. Independent, Dependent, Mediator, and Moderator Variables in Market Orientation Research**

In the literature on market orientation, independent variables predominantly focus on market orientation and its derivatives. These variables enable firms to understand customer needs, monitor competitor actions, and integrate this information across the organisation to inform strategic decision-making processes. In the studies, alongside classic market orientation, sub-dimensions such as proactive and responsive market orientation, operational-level market orientation, and international market orientation have also been examined.

Learning- and knowledge-based variables assess organisations' capacities to generate, acquire, share, and utilise information, supporting their ability to adapt to environmental changes and develop competitive advantages. These variables are often analysed in conjunction with market orientation and play a complementary role, particularly in explaining the relationship between innovation and performance. Entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented variables reflect firms' tendencies to engage in risk-taking and innovative activities, which are critical for achieving competitive advantage in dynamic markets. Organisational and managerial factors, such as leadership, strategic human resource management, internal marketing, and change processes, represent internal mechanisms that shape the effectiveness of independent variables. Additionally, customer- and marketing-related sub-dimensions—including customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interdepartmental coordination—highlight the firm's integration with the market and its capacity to create customer value. Contextual variables, such as environmental conditions, strategic flexibility, or production orientation, further support the effects of independent variables within specific sectors or types of organisations.

Dependent variables encompass various performance and outcome indicators used to measure the effects of independent variables [20,59,69]. General performance variables include organisational efficiency, operational success, and firm outputs, representing the most commonly employed category of dependent variables in the literature. Financial performance variables measure economic success through indicators such as profitability, return on investment (ROI), and return on assets (ROA). Innovation- and product-related performance variables capture the impact of independent variables via metrics such as new product success, degree of innovation, R&D outputs, and product development performance. Competitive and strategic outcomes reflect a firm's performance within its competitive environment, whereas customer- and market-related outcomes are directly associated with indicators such as customer satisfaction, market share, and value creation. Other, more heterogeneous dependent variables encompass unique and supplementary outcomes, including organisational commitment, philanthropic performance, or managerial behaviour. Collectively, this structure enables the effects of independent variables to be manifested across multiple dimensions of performance.

Mediating variables play a crucial role by explaining or strengthening the effects of independent variables on dependent variables [13,47,65,75]. In the literature, constructs such as market orientation, innovation, organisational capacities and competencies, relational quality, market performance, strategic balance, and positional advantage have been employed as mediators. These variables allow for a more nuanced understanding of the effects of independent variables and facilitate modelling of the processes through which organisational outcomes are achieved.

Moderating variables are factors that increase or decrease the effect of independent variables on dependent variables under specific conditions [13,47,65,75]. Variables such as competitive intensity,

market turbulence and dynamism, organisational structure (departmentalisation, formalisation, size), economic and political environmental conditions, leadership, strategic alignment, and individual differences (age, experience, level of customer knowledge) serve as moderators. These variables clarify under which conditions independent–dependent relationships are strengthened or weakened, enabling accurate interpretation of performance and strategic outcomes in research.

Overall, in the literature, independent variables are primarily framed around market orientation and complementary factors, while dependent variables capture multidimensional indicators of performance. Mediating variables explain the direction and mechanisms of effects, whereas moderating variables reveal how these effects vary according to contextual conditions.

## **5. The Interaction of Market Orientation with Other Variables: A Review of the Empirical Literature**

Bhuian *et al.*, [18] demonstrated that market orientation interacts with entrepreneurial orientation to enhance organisational performance, although at very high levels of entrepreneurial orientation, the effect of market intelligence-gathering processes diminishes. Beverland and Lindgreen [17] found that in industrial firms, market orientation is influenced by organisational change processes, with leadership, the utilisation of market knowledge, and organisational learning shaping these behaviours. Cadogan *et al.*, [23] showed that market-oriented behaviours improve performance through processes of knowledge generation, dissemination, and responsiveness, but excessive formalisation can negatively affect these processes.

Berthon *et al.*, [16] revealed that environmental conditions impact the strategic balance between innovation orientation and customer orientation, a balance that is critical for success. Becker and Homburg [15] found that alignment in organisational structure and information systems strengthens the financial performance of market-oriented practices, while Beck *et al.*, [14] demonstrated that in family businesses, market orientation and innovation are shaped by intergenerational transitions. Breman and Dalgic [22] showed that a learning organisation combined with market orientation enhances business performance. Major *et al.*, [66] found that market orientation increases the proportion of commercially valuable products.

Baker and Sinkula [10-12] revealed that market and learning orientation strengthen performance and innovation success. In small firms, market orientation directly increases profitability, whereas entrepreneurial orientation has an indirect effect through innovation performance. Augusto and Coelho [9] found that customer and competitor orientation influence innovation, while Atuahene-Gima *et al.*, [8] demonstrated that responsive and proactive market orientations have complex effects on new product programme performance. Atuahene-Gima [7] showed that market orientation strongly affects project performance. Appiah-Adu [5] found that in developing countries, environmental factors shape the impact of market orientation on performance.

Qu and Ennew [77] demonstrated that in China, market orientation enhances customer loyalty, distributor power, and corporate social responsibility outcomes. Aldas-Manzano, Küster, and Vila (2005) did not find a direct relationship between market orientation and innovation in the textile industry. However, they noted that market-oriented firms make more intensive use of innovation tools. Harris and Piercy [46] observed that managerial behaviours and organisational barriers shape market orientation in retail companies, while Harris [44] found a positive relationship between market orientation and subjective performance in the UK, alongside an environmentally contingent relationship with objective performance measures. Farrell and Oczkowski [34] demonstrated that market orientation, in combination with a learning orientation, enhances performance. Harris and Ogbonna [45] showed that strategic human resource management influences performance via market orientation.

Grewal and Tansuhaj [41] found that following an economic crisis, market orientation negatively affected performance, whereas strategic flexibility had a positive impact. Matsuno *et al.*, [68] observed that entrepreneurial orientation enhances market orientation and, consequently, business performance. Brady *et al.*, [21] demonstrated that knowledge-generation systems in non-profit organisations improve fundraising performance. Narver and Slater [71] showed that a market-oriented culture enhances both market and financial performance, while Morgan *et al.*, [70] found that market orientation and marketing capabilities complementarily strengthen firm performance.

Kaya and Patton [56] revealed that knowledge-based resources, market orientation, and a learning orientation improve innovation performance. Langerak [62] demonstrated that a manufacturer's market orientation enhances customer and supplier relationships, increasing financial performance. Subramanian *et al.*, [85] found that market orientation strengthens organisational competencies in hospitals, while Kennedy, Goolsby, and Arnould (2003) showed that customer orientation enhances organisational performance.

Pulendran, Speed, and Widing [76] found that leadership and reward systems influence market orientation, and that market turbulence strengthens this relationship. Pelham [74] demonstrated that market orientation strongly impacts firm performance in small manufacturing firms. Ellis [31] identified market orientation as a universal determinant of firm performance, although its effect varies according to cultural and economic contexts. Abzari *et al.*, [1] showed that internal marketing enhances both market orientation and organisational commitment. Farrell [33] reported that market and learning orientations affect business performance, while Sorjonen and Uusitalo [84] found that market orientation improves commercial performance in arts organisations. Devlin and Ennew [28] highlighted that the intangibility and complexity of services hinder the translation of market orientation into competitive advantage. Ellis [31] observed that marketing practices affect performance in developing economies, though no significant relationship between market orientation and performance was identified.

Dobni and Luffman [29] showed that market orientation strengthens strategy implementation, improving performance, and Slater and Narver [81] found that it supports sustainable competitive advantage. Gotteland *et al.*, [40] demonstrated that market orientation enhances organisational performance. Jones and Hecker [53] emphasised the conceptual understanding limitations that restrict the universal applicability of market orientation, whereas Hult and Ketchen [48] highlighted that market orientation, entrepreneurship, innovation, and learning collectively generate positional advantage. Hult *et al.*, [49] further illustrated the indirect effects of a market-oriented culture and information-processing activities on performance. Ma and Todorovic [64] found that externally focused market orientation in universities increases commercial value. Tse *et al.*, [86] showed that economic conditions influence the relationship between market orientation and hotel performance. Connor [27] argued that strategic success requires market orientation balanced with customer focus. Kwon and Hu [60] demonstrated that market orientation in small exporters enhances long-term competitive advantage.

Kahn [55] found that the effects of market orientation and interdepartmental integration on performance vary across departments. Ottesen and Grønhaug [73] demonstrated that in premium food markets, market orientation enhances managers' information-gathering capabilities and customer understanding. Coban and Eren [26] reported that internal marketing improves both market orientation and firm performance, while Jaiyeoba and Amanze [50] observed that market orientation increases firm performance in Botswana. Le Phi Hoa *et al.*, [63] found that customer focus and coordination strengthen innovation in Vietnam. Smith *et al.*, [82] showed that market orientation enhances performance in Chinese firms. Kyriakopoulos [61] highlighted that existing production orientation in agricultural cooperatives hampers market strategies. Akimova [2] found that market

orientation improves competitive advantage in Ukraine. Alpkın *et al.*, [4] demonstrated that market orientation and planning flexibility positively affect performance in SMEs. Gluić and Mihanović [37] reported that international market orientation enhances audience management in cultural and arts institutions. Józsa [54] found that market orientation increases customer satisfaction and service quality in Hungarian municipal services.

González-Benito and González-Benito [38] showed that operational market orientation improves subjective performance, and Martín-Consuegra and Esteban [67] found that market orientation strengthens performance and competitiveness in the airline sector. Šályová *et al.* (2015) reported that market orientation improves financial and economic outcomes in Slovakia. Doucouré, Fort, and Dankoco [30] demonstrated that in Senegal, market orientation enhances performance through innovation. Naudé *et al.*, [72] found that internal market orientation is influenced by a variety of individual and organizational factors. Chao and Spillan [24] observed that responsive processes improve performance in SMEs. González-Benito, González-Benito, and Muñoz-Gallego [39] found a strong relationship between market orientation and entrepreneurship. Sørensen [83] highlighted that subdimensions differently affect performance. Aldas-Manzano, *et al.*, [3] showed that innovation tools are used differently across market orientation groups. Jiménez-Jiménez *et al.*, [52] found that market orientation and learning increase performance through innovation. Bodlaj (2010) reported that proactive market orientation enhances the degree of innovation. Fonseca and Baptista [35] demonstrated that market orientation, learning, and innovativeness influence performance in non-profit organizations. Chen and Quester [25] showed that customer value-focused market orientation improves performance. Webb, Webster, and Kreppa [87] found that customer-defined market orientation strengthens organizational success.

Most studies show that market orientation positively affects performance, innovation, and customer outcomes, but inconsistencies exist across contexts. For example, Bhuian *et al.*, [18] found that at very high levels of entrepreneurial orientation, the benefits of market intelligence diminish, while other studies report consistently strong effects. Cadogan *et al.*, [23] also note that excessive formalization can weaken market-oriented behaviors.

Contradictions appear across industries and regions. Aldas-Manzano *et al.*, [3] found no link between market orientation and innovation in textiles, whereas other sectors report positive effects. Grewal and Tansuhaj [41] show that economic crises can reduce the positive impact of market orientation. Effects in non-profits, service sectors, and emerging markets are also less consistent, indicating that context and culture play a major moderating role.

Although the reviewed studies provide valuable insights into market orientation, their methodological strengths and limitations vary. Some studies rely on large, cross-sectional samples, while others are context-specific or based on small organizational settings, which may limit generalizability. Measurement approaches also differ, with some using well-validated scales and others relying on self-reported or single-source data. This affects reliability. Additionally, several studies do not fully account for contextual variables, such as industry, cultural, or economic conditions, which may moderate the observed effects. A critical evaluation of these factors is essential for interpreting the results and identifying avenues for more robust future research.

## **6. Conclusions and Contribution**

Empirical studies generally treat market orientation as an independent variable. However, it is often examined together with other organizational factors. Market orientation is shaped by variables such as entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, internal marketing, leadership, organizational structure, and marketing capabilities. It also influences key outcomes through

processes of generating, disseminating, and responding to market information. Therefore, the importance of market orientation becomes clearer when considered alongside other strategic and behavioral factors.

From the perspective of dependent variables, firm performance is the most frequently studied outcome. However, market orientation also affects multiple other outcomes, including innovation, customer loyalty, new product success, service quality, organizational capabilities, and competitive advantage. The strength and direction of these effects vary depending on the context.

Mediating variables, particularly innovation and organizational learning, explain the indirect impact of market orientation on performance. Moderating variables such as environmental uncertainty, competition, organizational structure, leadership, and levels of entrepreneurship influence the effectiveness of market orientation. For example, in highly competitive environments, its effect is stronger. In contrast, excessive formalization or very high levels of entrepreneurship can reduce its impact.

This study treats market orientation as a dynamic capability. The findings show that market orientation not only affects firm performance but also interacts with a wide range of strategic and behavioral outcomes. Its effects are more accurately understood when examined alongside other strategic orientations. The study provides a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of market orientation's role within complex organizational and environmental systems. It contributes a new perspective to the literature and offers a guiding framework for future research. Highlighting the influence of different contextual conditions and interaction mechanisms also clarifies the strategic importance of market orientation in management and practice.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. No financial support, grants, or other forms of compensation were received that could have influenced the outcomes of this work. The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest

### **Data Availability Statement**

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article. Additional datasets are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Where applicable, publicly available datasets used in the study are cited in the references.

### **Ethics Statement**

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee. Ethical approval was obtained where required, and informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the research.

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