

## **‘Market Orientation’ As An Efficient Marketing Strategy: An Investigation Of Its Concepts And Measurements**

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### **ABSTRACT**

At times of changing customer needs and increasing competition, instances of brand switching have been on the rise necessitating businesses to keep “customers “as the focal point of all their marketing efforts. All it needs is a strong mechanism to gather information related to the factors affecting customer needs and make strategic moves to position itself ahead of its competitors. Thus, businesses are resorting to spending considerable time on market orientation. A market-oriented business can fulfill the varied needs of the different interest groups, namely: customers, employees, regulators, and society. Different scholars have put forward different perspectives on market orientation. The present study attempts to compile the different perspectives of selected scholars and highlight the different measurement scales devised by scholars to measure market orientation. The study outlines nine different perspectives on market orientation; and four measurement scales: MKTOR, MARKOR, MORTN, and MOS which are mostly used in different studies.

**Keywords:** market orientation, MKTOR, MARKOR, MORTN, MOS

### **Introduction:**

A market is generally perceived as a place (physical or virtual) where the exchange of goods and services takes place between the two crucial parties viz., the seller (the business) and the buyer (the customer). Businesses view customers as the king of the market in a free market, where supply and demand determine the rules of the market. They focus all of their efforts on satisfying customers so that they won't contemplate moving to another supplier. So, businesses are continuously developing their skills and capabilities of gathering relevant information regarding the customers – their expressed and latent needs, the factors that affect these needs, the present and potential competitors, the competitors' strategies, and the competitor's strengths and weaknesses at the appropriate time and in a continuous manner. The business develops appropriate strategies for positioning itself well ahead of its competitors through the information generated. This is the concept of market – orientation. Today most businesses, irrespective of their sizes, are shifting from being marketing-oriented (emphasis on customers solely by the marketing department) to market-oriented (all the departments work unitedly on delighting customers). So, the concept of market orientation has been the spotlight of a good number of research works and has received great importance in both academics and the business world. Different scholars have highlighted the theoretical constructs of the term "market orientation" [42,74] and its relationship with varying indices of performance like profitability, new product success, ROA, and overall performance [59,53,40,58] and have also studied the mediating role of innovation, Entrepreneurial Orientation and Learning Orientation on the link between market orientation and organizational performance [10,33,65,51,79]. In this context, the present study is an attempt to compile the different perspectives on market orientation proposed by selected scholars and also to highlight the different measurement scales developed by scholars to measure the degree of market orientation.

### **Research Methodology:**

The present study is descriptive. It is based on secondary data. Through an extensive review of the literature of selected articles on “market orientation” accessed from Google Scholar, the study has tried to fulfill its objectives.

### **Objectives of the study:**

- To find out the different perspectives on market orientation proposed by selected scholars.
- To highlight the different measurement scales developed by scholars to measure the degree of market orientation.

### **Different perspectives on market orientation:**

The idea of market orientation is not new. It has its linkages to the marketing concept of business which places the customers at the focal point of all the marketing efforts. It was only during the 1990s that market orientation was conceived as a different perspective that was mostly concerned with the effective application of the marketing approach [40]. Over the last 30 years, many scholars have tried to give a theoretical construct to the term "market orientation". Though many perspectives on market orientation have been developed, namely: a business philosophy, an organizational culture, a resource, a set of managerial practices, a competitive strategy, a source of competitive advantage, and a set of unique capabilities [4], yet the similarity among these perspectives is that their focus is on finding out ways to acquire and retain more and more customers. In the following section, a detailed explanation of the different theoretical thoughts on market orientation suggested by scholars is given:

**1. Decision-making perspective:** [71] is the first to propose the decision-making perspective on market orientation. According to his conceptualization, market orientation is a process by which organizations make decisions. At the very foundation of this process lies management's strong commitment to "sharing information" about the various market components while also encouraging "open decision-making" between staff and the line personnel (Lafferty & Hult, 1999).

**2. Behavioral Perspective:** According to [40], market orientation is an ordered set of actions taken by organizations involved in “intelligence generation” (collecting information relating to the needs of clients, both present and future, and the variables related to them), "intelligence dissemination" (distributing the information garnered to its different units) and the organization-wide “responsiveness” to the new information received.

**3. Cultural Perspective:** According to [59] market orientation is an organizational culture where all the units of an organization are committed to regularly offering superior customer value. They suggested three behavioral dimensions of a market-oriented business: “customer orientation” (collecting information regarding the customers’ expressed and latent needs), “competitor orientation” (collecting information regarding their key current and potential competitors and keeping track of their strengths, weaknesses, strategies and long term capabilities) and “inter-functional coordination” (the unifying efforts of all departments to provide superior customer value).

**4. Strategic Perspective:** [68]’s strategic approach allows managers of a business unit to gather and interpret the information from variables outside the unit (mainly related to the customer), create a "customer-focused strategy" to meet their needs, then put the strategy into action by making the entire company "responsive" to their needs and desires. So, it can be inferred that he has borrowed aspects from both the behavioral and cultural perspective, but has kept his focus limited to a business unit.

**5. Client-oriented perspective:** [20] has proposed a more specific perspective of market orientation synonymous with “customer orientation”. According to them, a market-oriented business prioritizes the needs of its clients while also taking into account the interests of its owners, management, and

staff to be a long-term successful firm. They acknowledge the significance of gathering data about the needs of their customers and also “inter-functional coordination” among the owners, managers, and employees to serve those needs. However, they have excluded competitor orientation from the focus. In line with this perspective, [26] suggest a new dimension of “technological orientation” which is the ability and willingness of an organization to build a robust technology background (a strong R&D team) and use it in the development of new products to create and meet customer needs [34].

**6. Actions Perspective:** [46] proposed a broadened view on market orientation. They define market orientation as the degree to which a business uses intelligence about various stakeholders to carry out strategic actions towards those stakeholders in a coordinated manner. Accordingly, they integrated two additional dimensions into the measurement scale developed by (Narver & Slater 1990a): “Distributor orientation” and “Environmental Orientation.”

**7. Value Chain Perspective:** [8] proposed that a long-term channel partnership is essential to provide superior customer value. This partnership is based on the supplier’s perception of its channel partner’s market-oriented actions assessed in terms of trust, cooperation, commitment, and satisfaction. So, an organization requires “supplier orientation” and “distributor orientation” to help sustain this long-term mutually satisfying relationship without the incidence of any channel conflict.

**8. Learning Perspective:** [10] conceptualized that market orientation is a knowledge-producing characteristic of an organization that requires a “learning orientation”( shared vision, openness to learning, and commitment to learning) on the part of all the people working in it so that they continuously adapt themselves to new changes in the environment. It also requires its members to repeatedly question the organizational norms and make appropriate changes in their actions as and when needed.

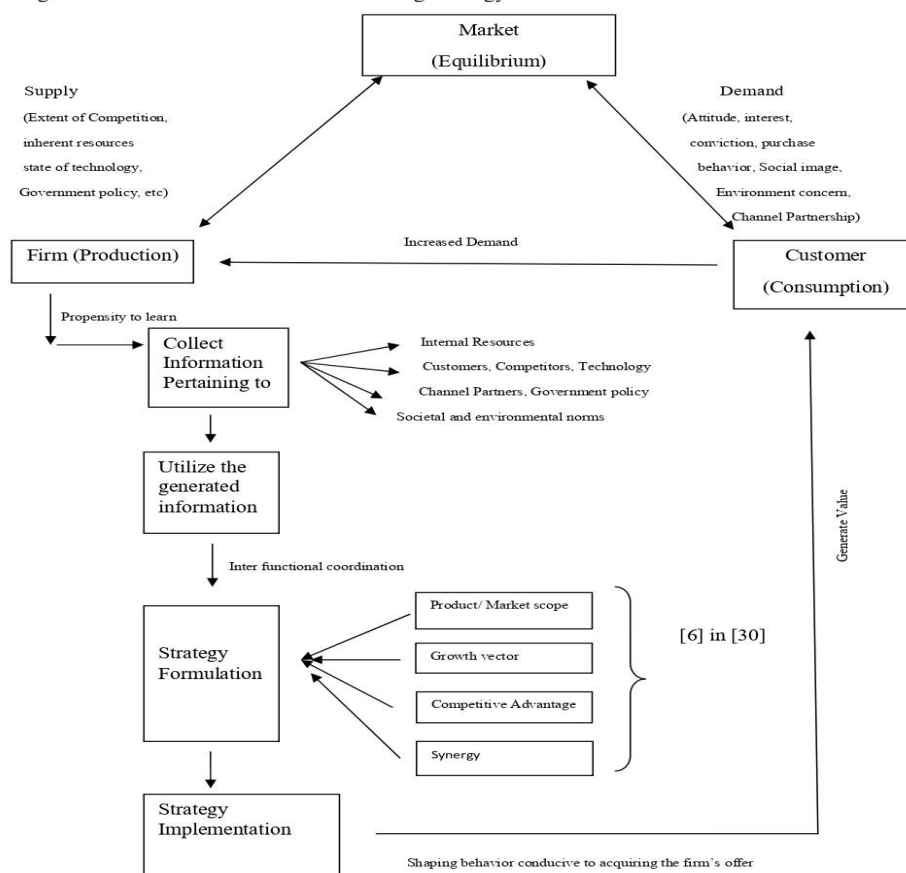
**9. Sustainability perspective:** [56] reconceptualized market orientation by incorporating macro aspects such as social and environmental responsiveness into the economic dimensions of profitability and efficiency. According to them, applying economic, social, and ecological value systems generates positive and long-term outcomes for both the primary stakeholders who derive direct financial benefit from it, such as employees, the investors, the loan providers and the owners, and the secondary stakeholders who derive indirect economic, social and environmental benefits.

### **Market Orientation as a Marketing Strategy:**

Marketing is one of the most dynamic aspects in the domain of management [83]. The continuously evolving nature of the market throws new challenges for businesses and academicians, requiring them to devise novice marketing ideas to respond to those challenges [42]. This exercise of continuously evaluating the market is referred to as market orientation. Even though market orientation and marketing strategy are considered two different constructs with the former focusing on the measurable outward orientation towards the market and the latter the actual execution of the marketing function [23], [41] have described the practical application of the marketing concept as market orientation. [80] has stated that marketing strategy is the behavior of organizations in the market because of their interactions with different parties such as consumers, customers, competitors, and external parties that influence the exchange mechanism, generally for delivering value to the customers. This is in line with the description given by [68], where market orientation is described as the process involved in the formulation and implementation of a customer-focused strategy. [17] have emphasized that the purpose of a marketing strategy is to achieve competitive advantage which can only be possible if a firm comprehends its internal and external environment and adapt itself regularly. The definition of marketing given by the American Marketing Association (AMA) has undergone repeated revisions with the new official definition being “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customer, clients, partners, and society at large” [53],

which shifts the focus of the firm not only on the customer but also on the different actors that play a significant role in influencing the business environment. [2] also mentions that market orientation is a relevant strategy for higher educational institutions in the face of the changed environment. Figure 1 explains market orientation as a marketing strategy. Market, which links the producers and consumers also acts as an equilibrium of the two major forces of demand and supply. The factors that play an important role in influencing the supply by firms are: the extent of competition, the inherent resources of the firms, the state of the technology, government policy, etc. while those that influence the demand by the customers include their attitude, conviction, interest, purchase behavior, social image, environment concern, channel partnership, etc. The exercise of market orientation starts with the firm gathering information regarding all the important components that influence the two market forces of demand and supply. This practice of collecting information continuously depends to a large extent on the propensity of the firm to learn. Through inter-functional coordination, the generated information is utilized in the formulation of different strategies. Four factors considered while formulating strategies include: product/market scope, growth vector, competitive advantage, and synergy [6] in [30]. Further, out of the different strategies formulated, an appropriate strategy is implemented that apart from aiming towards creating value [21] for the customers and the different players can also shape the behavior of the customers conducive to their acquisition and consumption of specific firm's offering, thereby increasing the demand. This is in line with the holistic emphasis incorporated by AMA in its definition of marketing.

Figure 1: Market Orientation as a Marketing Strategy:



Source: Developed by the authors

## Different Measurement Scales to test the degree of Market Orientation:

The idea of market orientation rose to popularity in research during the 1990s. It was considered important as it was related to the superior performance of business [71]. However, no instrument was developed to measure the degree of market orientation of firms. [59] took the initial step in creating the MKTOR measurement scale to gauge how market-oriented a business is. Subsequently, a few other measurement scales of market orientation, namely MARKOR, MORTN, and MOS were also developed. The section below provides a detailed description of the different measurement scales:

**TABLE 1: MEASUREMENT SCALES OF MARKET ORIENTATION**

Measurement Scales	Developed by	Items
MKTOR	[59]	Total items =15 based on 7 point Likert scale. 6 items correspond to customer orientation. 4 items correspond to competitor orientation. 5 items correspond to inter-functional coordination.
MARKOR	[41]	Total items = 20 based on 5 point Likert Scale. 6 items correspond to intelligence generation, 5 items to intelligence dissemination and 9 items pertain to responsiveness.
MORTN	[19]	Total items =10 based on a 7-point Likert Scale. 4 items correspond to understanding customer needs. 4 items correspond to assessing customer satisfaction. 2 items correspond to providing superior quality or service.
MOS	[46]	Total items=36 on a 10-point Likert Scale. 6 items correspond to customer orientation. 5 items correspond to distributor orientation. 4 items correspond to competitor orientation. 1 item corresponds to Environmental orientation. 5 items correspond to inter-functional coordination. 6 items correspond to strategic actions on the final customer. 5 items correspond to strategic actions on distributors. 2 items correspond to strategic actions on competitors and, 2 items correspond to strategic actions in the macro environment.

*Source: Compiled from existing literature.*

Measurement scales often utilized by researchers in various studies are highlighted in Table 1. Many authors have also created their scales to measure market orientation to test the relationship of market orientation with different dimensions: [28, 18, 44, 54, 82, 14, 35, 81, 12, 76, 32, and 36] etc. Nevertheless, the recently developed scales are either predicated on the refinement of items or the inclusion of new dimensions to the scales mentioned above.

#### **A critical outlook on the different measurement scales of Market Orientation:**

The most used scale for assessing market orientation is MKTOR. Different scholars have used this scale to study the effect of market orientation on business profitability [59]; product innovation [52, 13]; export performance [61]; competitiveness [74], and business performance [5]. However, a few scholars have criticized this scale on different grounds. [59] created the first version of the MKTOR Scale, which had 21 components. The three behavioral components of market orientation namely: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination—as well as the two decision criteria of long-term focus and profitability (outcomes) were intended to be measured by this one-dimensional construct. However, through a series of refinements, the developers have withdrawn two decision criteria based on their low acceptable reliability estimates. [41] criticizes this scale due to its reliance on only two dimensions of customers and competitors while ignoring the other important dimensions (technology and regulation). Furthermore, the scale does not

illustrate how quickly information can be generated and responses to this information can take place through adequate decision-making. To reflect market orientation, the scale also contains several items that have nothing to do with particular behaviors and activities [24]. [72] attempt to apply the LISREL process of confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether MKTOR is one-dimensional or multi-dimensional. To test its uni dimensionality, they created three models. Model 1 combined the three crucial dimensions—customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination—into one factor. Model 2 viewed the three dimensions as distinct factors and Model 3 added a new factor called general market orientation to the construct.

Model 2 and Model 3 were created to test its multidimensionality aspect. The study used primary data collected from the salespersons of 251 US-based firms through the help of a questionnaire. Their study reveals that several variables included in the scale do not reflect the nature of the particular dimension. There is cross-loading of items into other dimensions. This has been supported by [7]. Also, neither Model 1 nor Model 2 represents an adequate data fit. Though the result of Model 3 is marginally good, the data fit is not particularly impressive. [64] tests the reliability of the scale by using the LISREL measurement model. The study found that the scale possesses poor psychometric properties and that customer orientation should be studied from two aspects: customer understanding orientation and customer satisfaction orientation. Inter-functional coordination should not be included as a separate dimension; it is an integral part of customer orientation. Subsequently, the developers of the MKTOR scale reduced the number of components to 15 following a series of evaluations. Using a sample size of ten Russian high-tech small and medium-sized businesses, the study by [67] examined the applicability of the MKTOR Scale in high-tech industries and transition economies. Because the Likert scale's market orientation score is primarily based on respondents' perceptions of its various components, the study shows that using it to gauge respondents' actual behavior is ineffective.

The study of [63] shows that MKTOR does not specifically measure the reactivity and pro-activity of a business on its different dimensions. Also, its excessive reliance on only one dimension of customer orientation supports the inconsistency of the original definition of the cultural perspective given by . The "customer value" which is the base of the definition of the developers fails to find a place on the list of the items included in the "MKTOR" scale. So, there is a difference between concept development and its practical operation.

[41] created MARKOR to measure market orientation. This scale is developed to give an integrated view of the market rather than focusing on only one dimension of customer orientation. The original scale which consists of 32 elements is divided into three main categories: responsiveness, information distribution, and information generation. Also, response design and response implementation are two more subcategories of responsiveness. However, the items are reduced to 20 on subsequent developments. Many academics utilize MARKOR extensively in their research to quantify market orientation and examine its impact on business performance [16, 31 and 69], employees [11], product innovativeness [75] and financial performance [70, 50]. But, the scale has also been criticized on various grounds. [64] states that the conceptualization of the scale is too narrow and merely gathering and distributing information and developing strategies based on the information cannot operationalize the concept of market orientation. [48] states that i) MARKOR is formed based on the marketing concept which is doubtful and also inconsistent among different scholars. ii) The scale fails to include the perception of the customers and channel partners in its different dimensions. iii) The scale's reliability is questionable as the developers provide no evidence of it other than the score based on Cronbach's alpha. iv) There are also problems with the scale's face validity. This is also supported by [25]. [72] find the data fit of the scale to be poor and the scale has poor psychometric properties [78]. [24] criticizes the scale on the ground that although the developers claim the scale to be an integrated view of the market, it only comprises one item measuring the market. Further, the reduction of items to 20 is made from the analysis done from the

survey of a single informant (only executives) however, it is subsequently used in data of a multi-informant sample thereby making the veracity of the scale questionable. This is also supported by [23].

[19] attempt to provide a more concise market orientation measurement scale. By synthesizing MKTOR, MARKOR, and their previous measure DFW [20], they develop a scale consisting of 10 items focusing solely on customers. For them, the essence of market orientation is customer satisfaction and so emphasis should be given to customers only. Many scholars have utilized this scale in different contexts: [38] to create a new scale of MOTOTAL by combining MORTN (responsive market orientation) and MOPRO (proactive market orientation), [60, 9, 49] to study the complementary effect of Market Orientation and Entrepreneurial Orientation on Performance, [66] to measure customer value and performance and [77] to measure market orientation in the manufacturing sector. MORTN has also been criticized by different scholars. [29] view that to create superior customer value (which is the essence of their client-oriented perspective) four critical behaviors by a business are essential: i) Clarity in how to create value and practice it consistently, ii) Leading the market by discovering the latent needs in addition to satisfying expressed needs of the target customers, iii) Seeing itself as a service business, irrespective of its core offerings, iv) Focusing on relationship marketing to achieve customer loyalty. However, the 10-item scale fails to reflect all these behaviors. So, the conceptualization of the scale is too narrow. [58] state that MORTN fails to discover the customer's latent needs related to a proactive market orientation, It is only concerned with the customer's expressed needs.

[46] provide a more comprehensive framework for measuring market orientation. The rapidly changing customer needs and the growing competitive rivalry require firms to coordinate different functions and embrace different market participants. To measure the degree of market orientation, they created the MOS scale, which has nine facets that make up a unidimensional construct. They also introduce two additional dimensions: i) Environment and ii) Distributor in their construct. However, the construct emphasizes only research on the different market participants and taking strategic actions based on the information gathered. It does not take into account the aspects of innovation and relationship marketing. So, [15] developed MOS-R (Market Orientation Scale Revised), a shortened version of the MOS consisting of 30 items on a 10-point Likert scale. MOS-R integrates the three dimensions of market research, innovation, and relationship marketing into one construct. The basic postulate behind the modified scale is that businesses require improving their innovativeness to expand their customer base. Also, to facilitate customers for life (one of the critical behaviors for customer value [29], a business has to resort to relationship marketing to enhance customer loyalty. The application of MOS and MOS-R have been made only in a few studies: [62] to study the effect of market orientation on the business performance of insurance companies; [45] to examine the impact of CSR and market orientation on firm performance; [3] to analyze the relationship between market orientation and SME performance. Although the scale received strong support for its strong theoretical base and its structural validity, it has been criticized because of its difficulty in application to large studies [78].

Scholars typically employ MKTOR and MARKOR in their research, either in their entirety or in combination with one another. The study of [1] provided evidence, revealing that 40% of market orientation studies employ MARKOR, 35% use MKTOR, and 5% use both [27]. The use of MORTN and MOS (including MOS-R) in different studies has been relatively less.

### **Findings and Conclusion:**

To survive, a business has to acquaint itself with information related to the market. The information may pertain to the customers, the competitors, the distributors, the regulators, and the environment. So, a business has two options available at its hands: to collect information regarding the present affairs of the market and adapt its behaviors accordingly or to collect information in advance to

serve the future needs of the market and lead it. Accordingly, businesses are either “market driven” or “market driving”. This is the background of the concept of market orientation.

Extant literature does not agree on a common definition for "market orientation". Different scholars have viewed the concept from distinct perspectives. The present study outlines nine perspectives on market orientation, each focusing on several dimensions. Through an analysis of all the dimensions, it is found that a few dimensions namely: customer orientation, competitor orientation, inter-functional coordination, information collection, information dissemination, and responsiveness are common to most of the perspectives while some additional dimensions like supplier orientation, distributor orientation, environmental orientation, and learning orientation are also encountered. So, the study concludes by stating that to be market-oriented, a business should adopt a holistic approach in collecting necessary information concerning the different internal and external factors; distribute this information among all its units, and through inter-departmental connectedness and unifying efforts use the information in a way to create superior customer value. However, it should be cautious and responsive to the dynamic social and environmental aspects to ensure that it can meet both its economic goals as well as global sustainability norms.

Scholars have developed several scales to assess organizations' degree of market orientation, including MKTOR, MARKOR, MORTN, and MOS. Each scale has been used in several research works, despite being critiqued for various reasons. MKTOR and MARKOR have been used the most, followed by MORTN and MOS.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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