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The Impact of External Environment and Moderating Role of Market Orientation on Export Performance (Case Study: Exporting Companies of Markazi Province)

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ABSTRACT

Background and objective: Although marketing concept is a basis for marketing task, little attention has been paid to the way it is implemented in organizations. The present study aimed to investigate the impact of external environment and moderating role of market orientation on export performance.

Materials and methods: The present study is included in the category of applied and causal research in terms of objective. The population under study consisted of export companies in Markazi province. In order to investigate the current condition, a questionnaire consisting of 19 questions was used. It was used to gather data after reliability and validity were confirmed. Structural equation modelling was applied in this study to investigate the relation.

Keywords: External Environment, Market Orientation, Export Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although marketing concept is a basis for marketing task, little attention has been paid to the way it is implemented in organizations. In its traditional sense, the term “market orientation” refers to the implementation of the marketing concept in an organization. Therefore, a market-oriented organization is the one whose measures are in keeping with the marketing concept. The recent years have been considered as the period in which the scientific concept of marketing and its implementation were revived and a considerable interest in developing a systematic theory of market orientation began to flag and many scientists made an attempt to implement marketing concept (Rojouei, 2008). According to Narver and

Slater (1990), market orientation consists of three components; i.e. behavioral components— customer orientation, competitor orientation and interfunctional coordination – and two decision criteria – long-term focus and profitability (Aghazadeh & Mehrnoosh, 2010). Market orientation has attracted attention not only within but also outside of an organization. Moreover, a lot of attention has been devoted to it not only in internal markets, but also in international ones. Market orientation is mostly considered as a strategic approach which can lead to a better organizational performance. This statement might apply to service organizations as well because they have undergone fundamental changes (Lytle & Timmerman, 2006). Exporting is one of the early key steps of organizations in their development and investment taken to enter global markets and develop their international activities.

Exporting is one of the most common ways for companies, especially small companies to enter foreign markets. One of the reasons is that exporting needs less resources compared to other international approaches. Therefore, export sales have been increasingly the focus of attention as an appropriate way to reach higher firm growth (Heidari & Biglari, 2015). Export performance refers to the extent to which a firm reaches its strategic and economic goals to export a product through planning and implementing export marketing strategies. Companies begin exporting due to various internal and/or external reasons; however, what is more significant in export development is the continuity of export or export commitment in companies. This involves many factors including export problems and constraints as well as those factors affecting export performance (Nategh & Niakan, 2009). Marketing is a part of an institution's activities which includes some functions such as planning, promotion, pricing and goods presentation or the services desirable for customers (Moschis & Friend, 2008). Kotler and Armstrong consider marketing as a kind of social and management process by which individuals and groups can meet their wants and needs through production, product development and exchange with others. In marketing, the focus is mostly on determining organization products or services based on costumers' needs and wants and also on using pricing, communication and effective distribution in order to inform, activate and motivate customers and provide them with services. Studies suggest that service firms that have embraced the principles of marketing and have developed their plans and programs based on the elements of marketing mix have achieved positive results (Ya'ghubi et. al., 2011). Concerning exporting activities, many authors assume that market orientation plays a key role in such activities since it controls the strategic behavior of organizations, competitive advantages in foreign markets and export performance (EP).

However, some scholars have reviewed the real domain pertinent to the current knowledge of market orientation in recent years. This viewpoint stems from the contradictory results of strategic outlook and the outlook on export performance (Navarro-García & Arenas-Gaitán, 2014).

This situation has developed a significant gap in the scientific community. In other words, there is a research gap concerning the appropriate role of market orientation in export activities. Accordingly, the following questions reflect the objectives of the present study:

- What is the real role played by market orientation in export activities?
- How does market orientation influence strategic behavior and export performance?
- Why and how does market orientation influence strategic behaviors and export performance?

The last one is the main question of the study to which the researcher is attempting to answer.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Business Environment from Different Points of View

Business environment refers to a set of factors which cannot be controlled by firms (companies, institutes, corporations, etc) and have direct or indirect effects on their performance and orientations. Firms get the required resources from environment and environment is influenced by the performance of products and their side effects. Thus, environment is more or less affected by the firms as well (Me'mariani, 2014).

2.2. Psychic Distance

Suasa and Bradley (2006) defined psychic distance as managers' perception of the differences between their home and host countries. A manager who intends to enter a foreign market will experience less psychic distance as there are more similarities between his home country and the destination country (Sousa & Lages, 2010). Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) have defined psychic distance as the factors which impede transfer of information between a firm and market. For instance, differences in language, culture, levels of education and industrial development are among the factors developing a psychic gap in international businesses. A review of the previous studies demonstrate that no clear definition of psychic distance has been provided so far (Ranjbarian et. al., 2014).

2.3. Adaptation of Marketing Mix Elements

Adaptation is usually applied to standardization and globalization. The logic behind adaptation strategy is that consumers are not the same in different countries; therefore, certain products are required to meet their wants and needs. Consumers' preferences show their characteristic patterns in specific areas and markets. Environment, family and social institutions, commitments and relationships in a family, religious teachings, philosophy of the political system and other social effects are different among markets and lead to different marketing approaches in various countries. As a result, a firm cannot sell the same product in international markets and should suit the tastes and adapt to the preferences of new consumers (Powers & Loyka, 2010).

In fact, a marketing mix is a set of tools used by institutions to achieve their marketing goals in their target markets. McCarty divided these tools into four main categories. These four categories which are called the four Ps of marketing are as follows (Nazari, 2012):

- Product
- Price
- Place
- Promotion

2.4. Market Orientation

Cutler (2000) views market orientation as the final stage in the development of a commercial organization and believes that market trends have developed along the lines of developing different business trends.

Moreover, Liland (1996) considers market orientation a customer-centric strategy developed by coordinating cross-functional efforts to reach the long-term goal of organization (Taghavifard et. al., 2015).

2.5. Export Performance

1. The concept of performance is broad. The term refers to the state or quality of function. Neely et. al., (as cited in Safari et. al., 2015) have offered the most quoted definition of performance: “a process used to quantify the efficiency and effectiveness of past actions”. Based on this definition, performance is made up of two parts:
 - (a) *Efficiency*: It describes the way resources are used by a firm to offer products or services. In other words, efficiency refers to the relationship between the actual and desirable inputs which are combined to produce certain outputs.
 - (b) *Effectiveness*: It describes the extent to which an organization achieves its goals.

Furthermore, Boyatzis offered an interesting definition of effective performance. According to him, effective performance refers to achieving certain outcomes or having access to the certain and predetermined outcomes of a job (such as income) through taking some specific measurements in accordance with the policies, procedures and organizational environment. In other words, organizational performance refers to how missions, tasks, and organizational activities are performed and what results they will have.

2.6. Export

The term “export” refers to transfer of goods or sending them from one place to another whether inside or outside a country. In other words, export refers to working and having relationship with professional markets and market professionals outside a country’s borders. Exporting is the starting point of communicating with others and will result in having foreign exchange earnings. It helps us a lot to maintain a trade balance and economic equilibrium and an exporter refers to any real or legal person who exports goods and has a business card or a permit issued by the ministry of commerce (Sadeghi et. al., 2012).

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY

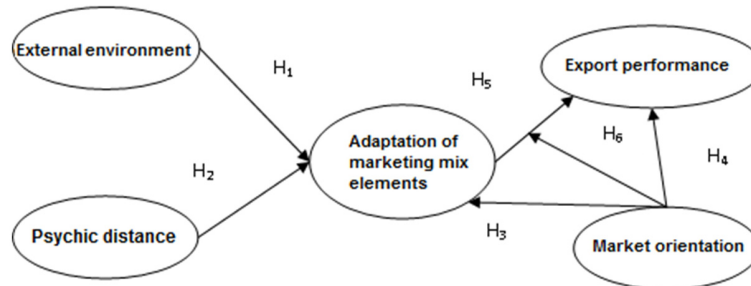


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the study
Resource: (Navaro Garcia & Arenas Gilltan, 2014)

4. METHODOLOGY

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of external environment and moderating role of market orientation on the performance of export enterprises. It is included in the category of causal research in terms of method and nature. Field method was used to collect the required data and evaluate the study hypotheses.

The data required for the present study was gathered through a questionnaire consisting of 19 questions pertinent to the impact of external environment and the moderating role of export market orientation on the performance of export enterprises. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: External environment has a positive impact on the adaptation of marketing mix.

Hypothesis 2: Psychic distance has a positive impact on the adaptation of marketing mix.

Hypothesis 3: Market orientation has a positive impact on the adaptation of marketing mix.

Hypothesis 4: Market orientation has a positive impact on export performance.

Hypothesis 5: Adaptation of marketing mix has a positive impact on export performance.

Hypothesis 6: Market orientation moderates the impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance.

Table 1
Research literature

<i>Questions of the questionnaire</i>	<i>References</i>	<i>Operational definition of variables</i>	<i>Variables</i>
9, 10, 11, 12	Cadogan et. al., (1999)	Investigation of market orientation variable affected by some factors such as developing an export strategy to gain competitive superiority based on our perception of foreign customers' needs, handling foreign customers' complaints regarding service quality, coherent and consistent performance of the firm and also export products standardization or adaptation based on customers' needs	Market orientation (Export market orientation)
16, 17, 18, 19	Morgan et. al., (2004)	Investigation of export performance variable is carried out under the influence of some factors such as company's export sales, export market share, company's reputation among foreign consumers and the extent to which foreign customers are loyal to the company.	Export performance
13, 14, 15	Theodosiou & Leonidou (2003)	Investigation of appropriate distribution infrastructures, adaptation of the type and quality of export products to the needs of foreign market and adaptation of the price of export products to foreign markets	Adaptation of marketing mix
1, 2, 3, 4	Kaleka & Berthon (2006)	Investigation of external environment variable affected by some factors such as technological change in industry, giving ideas in spite of technological changes, investigation of competition in industry and investigation of prices among competitors	External environment
5, 6, 7, 8	Sousa & Lages (2011)	Investigation of psychic distance under the influence of factors such as similarities and differences in purchasing power of customers in foreign countries and those in the exporting countries, investigation of the similarities and differences in the taste of consumers in foreign countries and those in the exporting country, investigation of similarities and differences in cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and traditions of consumers in foreign countries and those in the exporting country and study of differences and similarities in the rate of industrial and economic growth in the foreign and exporting countries	Psychic distance

5. DATA COLLECTION

5.1. Description of Demographic Data

The results demonstrate that the sample size of the study consists of 84.5% men and 12.3% women of whom 15.5%, 39.3%, 30.6% and 10.5% have less than 5, 5 to ten, 10 to 15 and more than 50 years of work experience, respectively. The frequency distribution table shows that 13.7%, 20.1%, 50.7% and 13.7% of the respondents have high school diploma, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, Master's degree or doctorate degree, respectively.

5.2. Investigation of Fitting Measurement Model after Modification

In this section, the model fit has been investigated based on the collected data. Moreover, seven indices; i.e. Chi-square/degree of freedom, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Root Mean Square Residual, comparative fit, Incremental Fit, goodness of fit, and adjusted goodness of fit have been studied.

Table 2
Results of fitting measurement model after modification

<i>CMIN/DF</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>RMR</i>	<i>IFI</i>	<i>CFI</i>	<i>GFI</i>	<i>AGFI</i>	<i>Fit index</i>
Less than 3	Less than 0.08	Less than 0.08	More than 0.9	More than 0.8	More than 0.8	More than 0.8	Standard rate
1/837	0/062	0/052	0/905	0/902	0/889	0/850	Research rate

In this study, Chi-square/degree of freedom is 1.837 which is confirmed because it is less than the standard rate; i.e. 3 (Lai et. al., 2009).

Table 3
Investigation of directions in the structural model without moderator

<i>Result</i>	<i>Standard coefficient</i>	<i>Significance level</i>	<i>Critical value</i>	<i>Direction</i>
Positive and significant impact	0/946	0/000	3/553	External environment (EE) → Marketing mix adaptation (MA)
Positive and significant impact	0/595	0/005	2/836	Psychic distance (PD) → Marketing mix adaptation (MA)
Positive and significant impact	0/322	0/016	2/407	Market orientation (MO) → Marketing mix adaptation (MA)
Positive and significant impact	0/715	0/000	3/415	Market orientation (MO) → export performance
Positive and significant impact	0/234	0/039	2/067	Marketing mix adaptation (MA) → export performance (EP)

Regarding the investigated model (Figure 1), five directions between the model variables were studied. The moderating role of market orientation was not included in this model. Accordingly, the results demonstrated that in the first three directions, the three independent variables; i.e. external environment (EE), Psychic distance (PD), and Market orientation (MO) have a positive and significant impact on the dependent variable of marketing mix adaptation. Moreover, the results showed that market orientation (MO) variable has a positive and significant impact on the dependent variable of export performance (EP)

in direction four. Regarding the fifth direction, we found that the dependent variable of marketing mix adaptation (MA) has a positive and significant impact on export performance.

5.3. Hypothesis Testing

5.3.1. Testing the First Hypothesis

Researcher's claim: External environment has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: External environment does not have a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

H₁: External environment has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Table 4
Testing the first hypothesis

<i>Significance level</i>	<i>Standard coefficient</i>	<i>Critical rate</i>	<i>Variable type</i>	<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Variable type</i>	<i>Effective variable</i>
0/000	0/549	7/953	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Marketing mix adaptation	Exogenous latent (independent)	External environment

Regarding this hypothesis, the impact of external environment on marketing mix adaptation was investigated. We found that this hypothesis is significant because the significance level is 0.000; i.e. less than the error (0.05). Moreover, the critical value is 7.953 and is not within the meaningless interval (+1/96 to -1.96). Therefore, it is evident that this hypothesis is significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that external environment has a significant impact on marketing mix adaptation. On the other hand, since the standard coefficient related to the direction between these two variables is positive (0.549), we conclude that external environment has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation. Thus, this hypothesis is accepted.

5.3.2. Testing the Second Hypothesis

Researcher's claim: psychic distance has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: Psychic distance does not have a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

H₁: Psychic distance has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Table 5
Testing the second hypothesis

<i>Significance level</i>	<i>Standard coefficient</i>	<i>Critical value</i>	<i>Variable type</i>	<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Variable type</i>	<i>Effective variable</i>
0/067	0/129	1/834	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Marketing mix adaptation	Exogenous latent (independent)	Psychic distance

Regarding this hypothesis, the impact of psychic distance on marketing mix adaptation was investigated. Due to the fact that the significance level in this hypothesis is 0.067 and more than the error (0.05) and the critical value is 1.834 and is within the meaningless interval (+1.96 and -1.96), it can be concluded that this

hypothesis is not significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that psychic distance does not have a significant impact on marketing mix adaptation. Therefore, this hypothesis is rejected.

5.3.3. Testing the Third Hypothesis

Researcher’s claim: Market orientation has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: Market orientation does not have a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

H₁: Market orientation has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation.

Table 6
Testing the third hypothesis

Significance level	Standard coefficient	Critical value	Variable type	Dependent variable	Variable type	Effective variable
0/009	0/162	2/594	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Marketing mix adaptation	Exogenous latent (independent)	Market orientation

The impact of market orientation on marketing mix adaptation has been investigated in this hypothesis. With regard to the fact that the significance level in this hypothesis is 0.009 and less than 0.05 and the critical value is 2.594 and it is not within the meaningless interval (+1.96 to -1.96), it can be concluded that this hypothesis is significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that market orientation has a significant impact on marketing mix adaptation. On the other hand, since the standard coefficient of the direction between these two variables is positive (0.162), it can be concluded that market orientation has a positive impact on marketing mix adaptation; therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

5.3.4. Testing the Fourth Hypothesis

Researcher’s claim: Market orientation has a positive impact on export performance.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: Market orientation does not have a positive impact on export performance.

H₁: Market orientation has a positive impact on export performance.

Table 7
Testing the fourth hypothesis

Significance level	Standard coefficient	Critical value	Variable type	Dependent variable	Variable type	Effective variable
0/000	0/371	6/242	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Export performance	Exogenous latent (independent)	Market orientation

The impact of market orientation on export performance has been investigated in this hypothesis. With regard to the fact that the significance level in this study is 0.000 and less than the error (0.05) and the critical value is 6.242 and it is not within the meaningless interval (+1.96 to -1.96), we can conclude that this hypothesis is significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that market orientation has a significant impact on export performance. On the other hand, the standard coefficient of the direction between these two

variables is positive (0.371). It indicates that market orientation has a positive impact on export performance; therefore, this hypothesis is accepted.

5.3.5. Testing the Fifth Hypothesis

Researcher's claim: Marketing mix adaptation has a positive impact on export performance.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: Marketing mix adaptation does not have a positive impact on export performance.

H₁: Marketing mix adaptation has a positive impact on export performance.

Table 8
Testing the fifth hypothesis

Significance level	Standard coefficient	Critical value	Variable type	Dependent variable	Variable type	Effective variable
0/000	0/285	4/989	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Export performance	Endogenous latent (dependent)	Marketing mix adaptation

The impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance has been studied in this hypothesis. Since the significance level in this hypothesis is 0.000 and less than the error (0.05), and the critical value is 4.989 and is not within the meaningless interval (+1.96 to -1.96), this hypothesis is significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that marketing mix adaptation has a significant impact on export performance. On the other hand, since the standard coefficient of the direction between these two variables is positive (0.285), we can conclude that marketing mix adaptation has a positive impact on export performance and this hypothesis is accepted.

5.3.6. Testing the Sixth Hypothesis

Researcher's claim: Market orientation moderates the impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance.

Statistical hypotheses:

H₀: Market orientation does not moderate the impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance.

H₁: Market orientation moderates the impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance.

Table 9
Testing the sixth hypothesis

<i>Export performance → market orientation × marketing mix adaptation</i>						
Significance level	Standard coefficient	Critical value	Moderator variable	Endogenous latent (dependent) variable	Endogenous latent (dependent) variable	
0/002	0/173	3/068	Market orientation	Export performance	Marketing mix adaptation	

Since the significance level in this hypothesis is 0.002 and less than the error (0.05), and the critical value is 3.068 and it is not within the meaningless interval (+1.96 to -1.96), it can be concluded

that this hypothesis is significant; i.e. it can be claimed by 95% that market orientation moderates the impact of marketing mix adaptation on export performance. On the other hand, since the standard coefficient is positive (0.173), we can conclude that the positive relationship between marketing mix adaptation and export performance strengthens as the moderator variable of market orientation increases. Therefore, it is evident that market orientation has a positive moderating role and this hypothesis is confirmed.

6. CONCLUSION

According to the results of this study, the exporting companies in turbulent environments need foreign markets to adapt marketing program with the purpose of achieving export performance in highly competitive and faraway markets. Since the technology used in industry is changing increasingly, the managers and presidents of companies should attempt to change the quality of products based on the market and customers' wants and needs by purchasing new technologies and updating production technologies so that they can improve the performance of their companies in domestic and foreign markets by offering high-quality products with good distribution and at reasonable prices and can retain their domestic and foreign customers. Moreover, technological evolution makes it possible to put many ideas into practice. Companies should try to not only retain their existing customers but also attract new ones by creativity and innovation in their products to be able to compete well with their competitors and consider competitive prices for their products. Therefore, they can achieve their aim in market competition. Furthermore, companies should pay attention to the needs of customers in developing strategies and they should regularly measure customer satisfaction. Moreover, they should always resolve customer complaints dynamically and pay a lot of attention to things such as after-sales service.

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