

A survey of market orientation research (1995–2008)

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 March 2009

Received in revised form 19 July 2010

Accepted 4 August 2010

Available online 13 October 2010

Keywords:

Market orientation

Application

Classification

Strategic management

Performance

ABSTRACT

Since 1990, market orientation (MO) has received considerable attention in the marketing literature. Little research so far provides preliminary and useful information to facilitate good understanding of MO. This study presents a comprehensive survey of extant marketing literature using keyword classification from 1995 to 2008. It serves as a tutorial and aims to help the beginner researcher or practitioner to have access to MO, including its definitions, applications and problem domains. Based on the scope of 514 MO articles, we find that the number of publications on MO has significantly increased since 2001 with steady growth in recent years. In addition, these selected articles are scattered across 153 journals and mostly published in 10 academic journals. The contribution of our paper is to provide a means (i.e., keyword index) to conceptualize and operationalize the coverage of MO. It provides a conceptual framework to organize this vast body of research. This study ends with some discussions and conclusions.

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1. Introduction

Given today's uncertain environment, adaptability and competitiveness are critical for the health of any organization. When an organization's market orientation (MO) produces value for customers that is rare and difficult to imitate (Narver, Slater, & MacLanahan, 2000), it can be a sustainable source of competitive advantage which will allow firms to outperform their less market-oriented competitors. This is particularly true for business-to-business (B2B) marketers. B2B relationships tend to be more enduring and B2B marketers tend to deal with smaller numbers of larger customers that are more expensive to replace. For B2B marketers the financial implications of losing any customer can be daunting. From a theoretical perspective, MO is not only a popular measurement scale for assessing the implementation of the marketing concept within an organization, but also a foundation of long-term collaboration among partners in a value-chain.

Throughout the 1990s, MO has received considerable attention in the marketing literature (e.g., Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994), and has continued to attract the

attention of researchers. Most of this stream of research has focused on the interaction between MO and business performance (e.g., Diamantopoulos & Hart, 1993; Day, 1994; Chang, Mehta, Chen, Polska, & Mazur, 1999; Sin, Tse, Heung, & Yim, 2005; Panigyrakis & Theodoridis, 2007) and the moderating effects of the environment on that relationship (e.g., Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Han, Kim, & Srivastava, 1998; Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Demirbag, Koh, Tatoglu, & Zaim, 2006; Laforet, 2008). Kohli and Jaworski (1990), drew on earlier work and established what seems to be an agreed upon definition of MO. Since then, little has been done to organize the considerable body of research on MO which now seems vast and confusing to the uninitiated.

In order to make the concept of MO more accessible, here we present a comprehensive survey of published research on MO from 1995 to 2008. Unlike a more traditional review which looks for specific key contributions and seminal pieces of literature, here we attempt to describe the totality of the research stream including its general health as a research stream and the various directions that it is moving in. We track the overall growth in MO research and present an analysis of publication outlets, problem domains and industry settings where the research was conducted. We take a close look at the impact of MO on performance as well as the moderators and mediators of that impact. We introduce a conceptual model of MO in order to organize the vast body of research on the topic. Our goal is to provide a sort of roadmap to those interested in gaining a better understanding of MO research.

The following section describes the methodology used in carrying out our survey. This is followed by an analysis of the overall growth,

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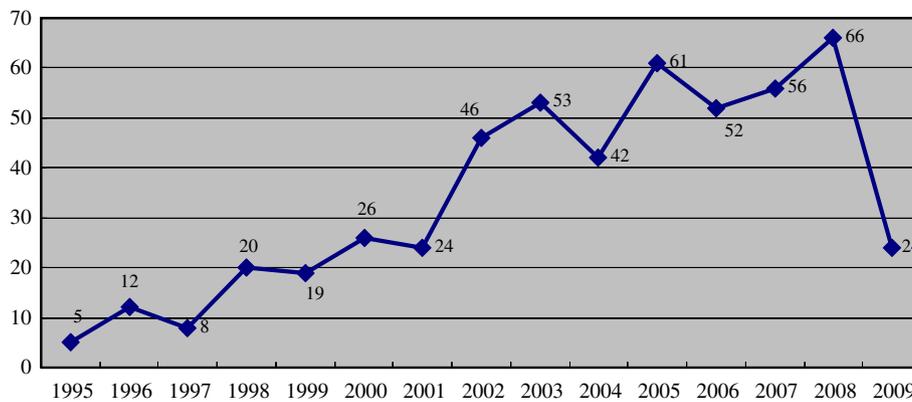


Fig. 1. The distribution of MO articles by years.

publication outlets, problem domains and industry settings employed in MO research. Based on these analyses we then present a conceptual model capturing the relationships between the domains of MO research. This is followed by a discussion of some of the limitations of our research as well as directions for further research and some brief conclusions.

2. Research methodology

In order to identify a comprehensive list of articles for inclusion in our survey we utilized a simple keyword search of available online journal databases. The following five online journal databases were searched with the major keyword phrase, “market orientation” on Feb 15, 2009 to provide a complete bibliography of the academic literature on MO:

- Scopus;
- Science Direct;
- Emerald Fulltext;
- SAGE;
- Taylor & Francis.

We started with approximately 800 articles based on the descriptor ‘market orientation’. The full text of each article was reviewed to eliminate those articles that were not actually related to MO. The selection criteria were as follows.

- ◆ Only those articles that had been published in *Marketing, Business and Management*, and *Economics Journals* were selected, as these were the most appropriate outlets for MO research and the focus of the survey.
- ◆ Conference papers, master and doctoral dissertation, textbooks and unpublished working papers were excluded, as academics and practitioners alike most often use journals to acquire information and disseminate new findings. In general, journals represent the highest level of research (Nord & Nord, 1995).
- ◆ Articles with no significant keywords were neglected.
- ◆ While considerable discussion of MO occurs in the popular practitioner oriented press, no attempt was made to include these in the analysis.

3. Classification and analysis

After filtering these original articles, we selected 514 articles for intensive analyses by year of publication, published journal, keyword index and applied industries.

3.1. The growth of MO research

The distribution of articles published by year is shown in Fig. 1. Research output in MO has increased significantly since 2001. This

situation is not consistent with Vargo and Lusch (2004) who found that MO peaks around 2000. There was a slight drop in 2001, but only twice in the period studied did the raw number of articles increase two years in a row. As can be seen in the figure, the overall growth trend is strong and steady. In the first five years (1995–1999) there were only 64 publications (12.43% of the total), with the total publications of the next five years (2000–2004) accounting for approximately 200 articles (37.08% of the total). In the most recent four-year period (2005–2008), 45.72% of the fourteen-year total were published. In other words, there has been a steady growth in MO research since 1995. While the number of articles in Table 1 appears to diminish in 2009, it only represents articles published in the first 46 days of that year.

3.2. Publication outlets

These 514 articles on MO were published in a total of 153 different journals. The top ten journals in terms of frequency of publication accounted for 46.6% of the total. Table 1 includes a listing of these top ten as well as the frequency of MO articles for each year included in the study. While we located articles in many different disciplines, all of the top ten journals would clearly be classified as marketing specific journals except the *Journal of Business Research* (27 articles, 5.25% of total).

Of these top ten MO journals, two (including this publication and the *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*) are publications which specifically deal with B2B marketing. Just these two publications represent almost 10% (51 out of 514) of the total articles published on MO indicating that, at least in the editors' views, MO is of particular interest to B2B marketers. In addition to these two journals, only The *Journal of Business Research*, the *Journal of Global Marketing* and the *Journal of Service Marketing* are based in the United States. The other five of the top ten Journals are all European based publications. Of the publications in the top ten journals, the European journals lead the U.S. journals by a 55% to 45% margin. Forty seven percent (51 out of 108) of the articles in U.S. journals were in the B2B oriented publications.

We also found that only three out of the 10 journals could be tracked by science citation index (SCI), and/or the social science citation index (SSCI).⁴ Therefore, it seems that researchers should not emphasize SSCI/SCI at the expense of other non-SSCI/SCI journals as it would likely narrow the scope of their research and increase the risk of missing articles.

⁴ *Industrial Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Business Research*, and the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*.

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