

The Influences of Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Learning Orientations Towards Firm Performance of Malay Entrepreneurs in Perak

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Abstract

This study aims to uncover the relationship between entrepreneurship orientation, learning orientation and marketing orientation with firm performance among Malay entrepreneurs. A total of 240 questionnaires had been distributed to entrepreneurs in major districts in Perak, but only 150 questionnaires were analysed. The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The findings showed that learning orientation is less contribute to the firm's performance for the entrepreneurs in Perak as compared with marketing orientation and entrepreneurial orientation. The study also found that when marketing orientation increases, performance may also improve. Entrepreneurial orientation was seen to have a strong direct relationship to the firm's performance. Therefore, an increase on firms' learning orientation will reduce performance while increasing marketing orientation and entrepreneurial orientation, would increase the performance of the firms.

Keywords: *Learning orientation, entrepreneurship orientation, firm performance and market orientation.*

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial orientation is seen as closely related to strategy formulation. Scholarly research in entrepreneurial orientation has proliferated for more than 30 years. In general, entrepreneurial orientation refers to the practices and decision making activities of the organization that lead to new market entrance, however the matter is still vague (Lumpkin & Dess, 2016).

Besides Miller and Friesen (2008) described the firm's activities as entrepreneurial dimension. The firm can be seen as an entrepreneurial firm if it involves in product-market innovation, taking risk, proactive, and become the pioneer in product innovation. But only few studies been conducted in prove this.

Entrepreneurial orientation contributes to performance where both growth dimension and financial performance of the firm are measured (Wilklund, 2009). Therefore, risk taking, innovative and proactive traits enable small firms to be competitive than their counterparts. How does marketing orientation influence firm performance, specifically?

While extensive research has been done on entrepreneurial orientation, there appears to be limitations and knowledge gaps on entrepreneurial orientation from various aspects that needs further investigation. Most studies examine factors and inclination towards entrepreneurial orientation has use the firm or organization as the unit of analysis (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2012; Antoncic, 2007; Hornby *et al.*, 2012; Lyon, Lumpkin & Dess, 2010; Morris *et al.*, 2012; Morris & Kuratko, 2012; Zahra, 2005).

The present research examines Malay firm's entrepreneurial orientation as one of an entrepreneurial strategy that can contribute to competitive advantage for higher firm's performance (Hitt, *et al.*, 2013). This study is based on Miller's model (2003), Covin and Slevin (1989), and (Lumpkin & Dess, 2006). The dimension of entrepreneurial orientation construct is based on studies by Dess, *et al.*, (2007), Shane, Venkatraman, and McMillan (2008), Miller (2010) and Covin and Covin (2000).

This research focuses on five dimensions of the firm's entrepreneurial orientation that is innovativeness, proactiveness, risk taking, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness (Lumpkin & Dess, 2006). While several researchers have addressed innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk taking in their research (*e.g.*, Kresier *et al.*, 2002a; Lumpkin and Dess, 2011; and Wilklund, 2008a), there has not been in depth research on autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness dimensions towards entrepreneurial orientation.

In the Malaysian context, inclusive evidence of entrepreneurial orientation using Lumpkin and Dess (2006) dimension has not been thoroughly conducted (*e.g.*, Hashim, 2010b; Mohd Jan, 2006). There also appears to be mixed results of the association between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance (Covin & Slevin, 2001; Zahra & Covin, 2005). Wilklund (2008a) found significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance, while Covin and Slevin (2001) discovered a weak relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

Researchers like Kreiser *et al.*, (2002a), and Lumpkin and Dess (2001) argued that entrepreneurial orientation concept can not be regarded as comprising a single dimension. This is because entrepreneurial orientation contains process implementation, practices and decision making activities that explain various meanings between each dimensions and its relationship with other variables.

In addition, previous research also examined the effect of external environment as moderating factor towards entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance (Brown & Kirchoff, 2007; Covin & Slevin, 2001; Kreiser *et al.*, 2002a; Miles *et al.*, 2010).

More over, the learning orientation relationship with firm business performance was seldom been examined before among Malay entrepreneurs that triggered the idea of conducting this study. Therefore the study is relevant, important and timely.

Thus this study attempts to determine if there is any significant relationship between marketing, entrepreneurship and learning orientations with performances of Malay firms in Perak.

LEARNING ORIENTATION

Learning can be categorized into two types that is formal and informal learning which mutually affects and influence with each other (Lans *et. al.*, 2004). Mitchell, et al.,(2007) pointed out that learning involves internal and external factors related to situational environment, products, and opportunities, resulting in revenue.

Individual behavior of the entrepreneur is seen as influencing entrepreneur's learning. Rae (2010) develops organization learning theory, evolution dynamic theory, and its influence in small industries. Thus, the learning process will influence the entrepreneurial behavior. One of the important aspects that need to be developed in the learning process for an entrepreneur is concerned with the entrepreneurial development. In this regard, Rae and Carswell (2010) posit that entrepreneurial behaviors that need to be developed are the confidence level for success, high motivation, concrete goals, knowing the potential knowledge, and personality and social relationship during the learning process. In terms of entrepreneur's knowledge, Mitchell (2007) and Popta (2012) assert that there are two elements which influence learning that is internal and external elements. The internal element consists of natural or inborn traits of the entrepreneur while external traits refer to individual experience with the environmental factors. Popta (2012) states that learning based on individual experience such as convergent knowledge refers to knowledge based on active trial from conceptual abstract.

MARKETING ORIENTATION

According to Sin *et al.*, (2015), globalization has enabled firms to adopt strategies from a global perspective to enter the foreign market. Kumar and Subramanian (2010) assert that the difference in market environment of various countries can influence the types of strategy to be developed and adopted by firms for better performance. Frishammar and Horte (2007) found a positive relationship between market orientation and new product development of the firm. Market orientation is the process of meeting customer's need through continuous assessment of the changing customer's need (Frishammar & Horte, 2007). Market orientation dimensions as posit by Baker and Sinkula (2009) contains customer orientation, competitors orientation, and coordination among departments.

A customer orientation approach combine with entrepreneurial orientation enables competitive advantage of the firm and in turn ensures continuous business with the customers as well (Dawes, 2010). Moreover, satisfied customers tend to continue doing business activities with the firm and invites their colleagues as well (Im, *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, firms are able to generate higher revenues when more customers purchase their products. Higher sales and profit will definitely strengthen the firm's profit and open up new opportunities for business growth and development (Noble *et al.*, 2012). In order to ensure stability in the market, firms need to be aware of competitors' business activities and move ahead than their competitors.

With respect to competitors' orientation, firms need to respond quickly to competitors' activities. A firm that emphasized on competitors orientation usually capitalize on top management on the matters concerning the strength and weaknesses of their competitors. Of importance, an appropriate competitors strategy requires the firm to acquire competitive advantage in terms of their target customers.

The third dimension is the coordination among departments which requires all members of the organization to understand both the customers' needs and the market environment (Homburg *et al.*, 2007). In this dimension, it is necessary to have an efficient customer sharing information

among all the departments. All employees are able to access information in the market through cooperation and information sharing (Stam & Elfring, 2008). Indeed, coordination among departments or individuals who tend to be satisfied with their tasks in turn enables better performance of the firm (Ayup & Kong, 2010).

ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION

Initially, entrepreneurial orientation concept has emerged on research focusing on corporate entrepreneurship, centered on huge corporation, in particular. However, recent development on entrepreneurial orientation has emphasized on small and medium business organizations.

Considerable research on entrepreneurial orientation seems to highlight strategic components at the firm level which enable business performance forecasting. The concern is to examine the relationship between the firm and the market, the involvement level of the firm for sustainability, and innovation (Dana, 2011).

Wang (2008) describe entrepreneurial orientation as a combination of processes, practices, and decision for new entry of the market. An enterprise is a company which involves in product-market innovation, taking risk of new venture, a pioneer in proactive innovation, and able to be competitive in the market (Marino *et al.*, 2012).

In addition, Lumpkin and Dess (2016) further strengthen the entrepreneurial orientation concept by introducing five dimensions : innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness, autonomy, and competitive aggressiveness. The innovativeness dimension refers the tendency to support novelty, new ideas, and creative process and experiment (Atuahene-Gima, & Ko, 2011). Innovative practice include an effort to invent new technology, new process and new product (Lukas & Ferrel, 2010; Renko, et al., 2009).

The proactive dimension refers to complete posture, forecast and respond to the future market needs and wants (Matsuno *et al.*, 2012). Proactive firm can become the pioneer in meeting customers' needs and compete effectively in the market (Anand *et al.*, 2009).

Further, the risk taking dimension refers to the desire to engage in high risk project but may not get expected return on its investment (Tajeddini *et al.*, 2016). Firms need to be prepared to invest in uncertain situation and strive to build its strength during the risky business period. This will benefit the firm in the long run (Madsen,2007).

Autonomy is also an important dimension that need to be emphasised in the entrepreneurial orientation (Lumpkin *et al.*, 2009). Employees need to be supported so that they are able to develop new ideas which can be useful to the firm (Monsen & Boss, 2009). Firms may experience failure if autonomy is not given careful attention.

The fifth dimension that is competitive aggressiveness refers to the intense effort of the firm to challenge its competitors and become the industry leader (Ho & Chung-Shing, 2008). An aggressive strategy to compete with the competitors include price reduction for substitute products (Malaviya & Sternthal, 2009).

Furthermore, firm can be competitive through creative process both from external resources and combination of resources that can support competitive market position (Madsen, 2017).

FIRM PERFORMANCE

Firm performance is influenced by many factors that such as employee’s behavior, innovation, creativity and attitude in the workplace. It has become a challenge task for managers to sustain a positive and proactive workplace atmosphere in this turbulent environment (Krist, 2009).

Firm performance and market orientation is seen as having a positive relationship. Market orientation, an aspect of strategic management can enhance success of the firm (Kreiser *et al.*, 2012).

Besides that Cadogan *et al.*, (2009) works proved that marketing orientation had a positive relationship with business firm performance. Nevertheless too much of marketing orientation actually may hamper business performance (Ward *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, they recommended that management task should not be focused too much on marketing but rather to optimize the efforts when the firms’ given the chance.

In the case of entrepreneurship orientation, the firm used marketing orientation as a strategy formulating process to achieve organizational goals, vision and competitive advantage (Schmude, 2017). The entrepreneurship orientation influence on firms’ performance need a tactfull analysis in order to understand the natural relationship between both.

The literature and problem statements above provide a very strong foundation and underlying theory on which the research framework was developed.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

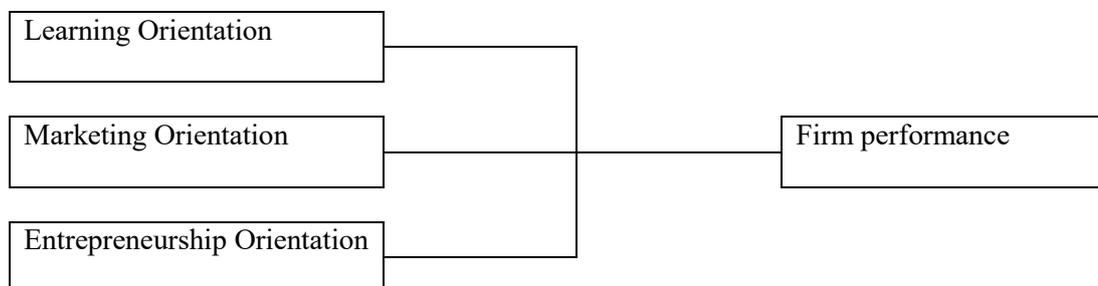


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

HYPOTHESIS

From the above framework, these hypothesis were developed;

- Ho1 - There is no significance relationship between learning orientation and firm performance.
- Ho2 - There is no significance relationship between market orientation and firm performance.
- Ho3 - There is no significance relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.
- Ho4 - There is no significance contribution of learning orientation, market orientation, and entrepreneurial orientation toward firm performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data was collected by distributing a set of 23 item structured questionnaires to 240 Malays entrepreneurs all over Perak using systematic sampling random method. The total population of entrepreneurs registered with Perak Malay Chamber of Commerce were 2400 but only 240 were reachable and only 150 responded. The data was sorted out and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical method. The reliability and validity of the instruments were tested and found to be acceptable as the overall Cronbach alpha was .78 (Nunnally, 1976).

FINDINGS

Majority of respondents were females 113 (75.3%), youth i.e, age below 40 years old 119 (79%), married 81 (54%), majoriti of them were SPM and STPM holders 75(50%) and had experience doing business for less than five years 57 (38%) and 43 (28.7%) of them had 11-15 years of experience doing businesses.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The analisis found that all the independent variables were correlated to dependent variables and there were significant relationships between learning, marketing and entrepreneurship orientaton with firms performance among the Malay entrepreneurs in Perak. Thus, all the null hypothesis were rejected. Table 1.1 below shows the details.

Table 1.1: Correlations between learning orientation, marketing orientation, entrepreneurship orientation and firms performance

		Learning orientation	Marketing orientation	Enterpreneur orientation
Firms performance	Pearson correlation	.193*	.390**	.612**
	Sig	.018	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

THE RESULT OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The mutiple regression analysis was conducted to answer research question that how much the learning, marketing and entrepreneurship orientation contributed to the dependent variables i.e. firms performance. In another words, how much was the independent variables explained the variance in the dependent variables. In table 1.2 below the statistical analysis found that $R^2 = .428$ meaning the independent variables or the predictors factors explained 42.8% of the variance in the firms performance. The remaining 57.2% were due to unidentified factors in the study. The model summary in table 1.2 below showed the details of the multiple regression analysis.

Table 1.2: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adj R square	Std error of the estimate
1	.645 ^a	.428	.416	.73480

a.Predictors: (constant), learning orientation, marketing orientation, entrepreneur orientation

b.Dependent variable:firms' performance

Table 4.8 below showed the coefficient of the regression analysis and thus formed the linear equation model of the study.

Table 1.3: coefficient table of linear multiple regression

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std error	Beta		
Constant	1.036	.355		2.920	.004
Learning	-.346	.138	-.259		.013
Marketing	.536	.147	.394	-2.504	.000
Enterpre	.438	.056	.056	3.654	.000

The linear equation of the model was thus formed below:

$$Y=a+b_1x_1+b_2x_2+b_3x_3 + \text{std error}$$

Therefore

$$\text{Firm Performance} = 1.036 - 0.346 (\text{learning})+ 0.536(\text{marketing}) + 0.438(\text{Entrepreneur}) + 0.355$$

Relationship between Learning orientation, Market orientation, and Entrepreneurship Orientation with Firm performance

Based on Pearson Correlation Test conducted on independent variables being examined, findings indicate that there are significant relationships between Learning Orientation and firm Performance.

The relationship between marketing orientation and Firm performance also indicates that there is a significant relationship based on this test. For Entrepreneurship orientation variables, the relationship was also found to be significant with firm performance. This means that, all the three variables being examined have significant relationships with dependent variables of Firm performance.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussion related to this research questions is to ensure that the research objective is achieved. This discussion is also to find out to what extent is Learning orientation, Market orientation and Entrepreneurship orientation giving impact towards business Firm performance besides ensuring the importance of each variables towards firm performance.

Lastly, the discussion is focusing on three independent variables that give impact to firm performance as a whole.

Learning orientation towards Firm performance

Based on research findings which is about Learning orientation and business Firm performance, it was found that there are significant relationships between both variables. Based on Pearson Correlation Test, significant relationships between Learning orientation and business Firm performance is at confident level value of 95%. According to this finding, it can be concluded that null H_0 1 hypothesis is rejected.

This study also suggests that Learning orientation contribute lesser to firm performance for entrepreneurs in Perak state as compared to Market orientation and Entrepreneurship orientation. This means learning is not so important or does not contribute much for enhancement of business performance among these entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs believe that many other factors that are more important and give impact towards their firm and business performance.

This scenario might be due to level of education of the entrepreneurs involved in this study who are majority consist of SPM or STPM holders only. As such, they believe that, high education level does not promise a good business performance. low education level also does not ensure dissatisfactory business performance according to them.

Furthermore, businesses in the Perak state involve local residents who think that business is a necessity to make end meets. Therefore, enhancement of business performance only depends on consumers' needs. Education of workers also increase cost of operation but not so much for increment of business profit.

Hence, learning orientation is not so important here because business performance is only for fulfilling needs and wants of residents supported by other sources from tourists. Due to this, learning is seen as not an important factor for enhancement of business performance.

The model developed from this study showed that Learning orientation have opposite relationship towards business firm performance. This means that, when learning orientation increases, business performance will decrease. When learning orientation decreases, business performance will increase.

Market Orientation and Firm performance

This study also indicated that there are significant relationship between marketing orientation and Business performance. Pearson Correlation Test showed that there is a significant relationship between business firm performance which is at confident level of 99%. It is concluded that null hypothesis H_0 2 is rejected.

Competition is seen as important among entrepreneurs in the process of increasing business performance. With the existence of competition, business performance is expected to increase. These entrepreneurs are very concerned with customer needs and product quality to compete so as to attract more customers. Feedbacks from consumers are also taken into consideration in making decision towards increment of business firm performance.

Information regarding strengths of competitors is also considered by the entrepreneurs in this Perak state to improve each business. In this effort, competitors' information will always be updated and considered so that business is not outdated and can always win customers heart. This matter helps to improve their business firm performance.

Marketing orientation was found to have a direct relationship with business performance. This can be seen from model development shown in coefficient table 1.3. This means that when competition increases, business performance also goes up. While decrease in competition will decrease firm business performance.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION AND FIRM PERFORMANCE

For a relationship between Entrepreneurship orientation and Firm performance, it was found that there is a significant result from this study. Pearson Correlation test showed that the significant relationship is at a rate of 99% confident level. It is concluded that the null hypothesis $H_0 3$ is rejected.

In this matter, Entrepreneurship orientation focuses on product and service development that are provided to customers. Additional product and service line are also considered to fulfill needs and wants of customers. This means that a business firm need to always be renewed and updated from time to time so as to retain them to be loyal.

Other than that, to ensure healthy competition among businessmen in that area, business performance will be enhanced when there is new successful innovation that succeed to attract customers. This matter explains that creativity and innovation among entrepreneurs are crucial in business performance.

Entrepreneurship orientation was found to have a direct and strong relationship towards firm business performance based on model being developed in this study. Enhancement of entrepreneurship orientation will increase business performance while decrease in entrepreneurship orientation will reduce business results.

LEARNING ORIENTATION, MARKET ORIENTATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP ORIENTATION TOWARDS FIRM PERFORMANCE

Multiple linear regression test conducted, found that Learning orientation, Market orientation dan Entrepreneurship orientation influence firm business performance at a rate of $r 42.8\%$. Balance of 57.2% cannot be speculated and this might be due to other factors not being examined in this study. All the three independent variables have significant relationships towards firm performance. As such, based on this result, it is concluded that null hypothesis $H_0 4$ is rejected.

Referring to the developed model, Learning orientation was found to have a reverse relationship towards firm performance while Competitors' evaluation has a direct relationship towards firm business performance. Entrepreneurship orientation was found to have a direct relationship with Firm business performance. Therefore, enhancement of Learning orientation will reduce firm performance while increment of Market orientation and Entrepreneurship orientation will improve firm business performance.

CONCLUSION

This study attempts to examine the effect on Firm business performance based on factors involved such as Entrepreneurship orientation, Market orientation and Entrepreneurship orientation. The findings of this study suggest that, Learning orientation, marketing orientation, and Entrepreneurship orientation have significant influence on firm business performance.

No doubt, these three factors only give 42.8% impact on Firm performance. This indicates that, factors being studied are less influential on business performance. Firm business performance need to depend on its status besides customers and promotion conducted.

Consequently, further research regarding this issue need to be carried out so that it can be a further guidance to entrepreneurs especially the Malays in their effort to enhance their present business performance so that it is in line with national development policy.

Besides that, the entrepreneurs need to think more openly to accept changes towards enhancing their business performance to penetrate international market.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study was conducted involving 150 entrepreneurs within only 10 districts in Perak state, thus it could not be generalized to all the entrepreneurs in Malasia as a whole. The entrepreneurs perception could only be taken into consideration based on the three diemnsions ie marketing, learning and enterpreneurship.

Therefore, it is recommended for future research to be conducted in all states in Malaysia to get a holistic picture and better generalization on the implication of entrepreneurs adopting the idea of marketing, learning and enterpreneurship orientation on the overall firm and business performance.

More variables could be added to the framework such as competitive advantage, technology orientation, customer or competitors evaluation and promotional strategies, to make it more comprehensive that probably yield a better result and implications.

In term of research methods and design, the next study could be conducted by not only using survey instrument or questionnaires but an interview method that could enhance the richness of the data despite more expensive.

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