Impact of Supplier Relations and Market Orientation on Firm Performance in Turkey

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Abstract

Developing strong relations with suppliers and adopting a customer-oriented and competitor-oriented approach are important aspects of enhancing firm performance, aiming to gain an advantage in its industry both in market and operational aspects. In addition, having ross-functional sharing of information within the firm provides benefits to enhance the relationship between suppliers and the firm. This study aimed to research whether the positive effects of the strong supplier relations and market orientation as customer-oriented and competitor-oriented on firm performance such as market and operational and whether the positive effects of the cross-functional sharing of information on notion of strong supplier relations. With the knowledge collected from existing literature, a comprehensive questionnaire was created, and delivered online. The study was analysed by 60 participants from different companies in Turkey with different industry under factor analysis, reliability analysis, regression analysis and independent T-test using SPSS tool to test hypotheses. Results support that the cross-functional sharing of information has a positive impact on notion of strong supplier relations and strong supplier relations and customer orientation have an impact on market performance. Finally, this study is intended to add to current literatures a detailed quantitative analysis and is aimed at offering insights into future studies on strong supplier relations and firm performance.

Keywords: Competitor orientation; cross-functional sharing of information; customer orientation; market performance; operational performance; strong supplier relations.

INTRODUCTION

In the current competitive landscape, businesses are constantly innovating and evolving to adapt to the demands of the market and ensure their survival. Firms engage in fierce competition and exert considerable effort to secure their place in the market, delivery life cycle, sales growth, and profitability. Therefore, only firms that adapt to the market orientation involving customer and competitor into all organizational levels and keep sustainable relations with the suppliers in order to respond to change quickly. There is also most important point that is cross-functional sharing of information about the customer to suppliers in order to increase the dimension of this relations. Within this background, customer and competitors need, and actions and suppliers' relations have come to the forefront. At this point firms need an understanding of marketing approach and importance of supplier relations that cause to increase performance indicators.

Strategic management categorizes firm performance into operational, relational, and financial types. Relational performance pertains to customer satisfaction and loyalty, while financial performance relates to income and sales, and operational performance involves various interconnected functions (Vallet-Bellmunt & Rivera, 2018). On the other hand, firm performance is impacted by firm's partners and supply chain members. If firms effectively handle relationships between suppliers and customers, they enhance their performance by boosting the value of their products and services to customers while cutting costs (Yumurtaci et al., 2019).

On much research like Hunt and Morgan (1995) one's, asserted that market orientation is comprised of both customers and competitors focuses. It is believed that market orientation involves systematically gathering data about customers and competitors, systematically analyzing this information to develop an understanding of the market, and methodically utilizing this information aids in guiding the identification, comprehension, formulation, selection, execution, and adaptation of strategies (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). If an organization adopts marketing concept in its action, it is called as a market-oriented organization (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Firms that are market-oriented prioritize meeting evolving customer preferences for products and services by offering superior quality products and services, aiming to attract targeted customers and convert them into end users (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Concept of marketing involves prioritizing customer focus, ensuring coordinated marketing efforts, and finally achieving profitability in it. Webster (1988) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) concurred in their studies that if top management fails to prioritize responsiveness to customer needs, willingness to take risks for quick action, and tolerance for failures, it is unlikely that the organization is customer-oriented (Webster F. E., 1988); (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Competitor orientation predominantly concentrates on recognizing existing and potential competitors, comprehending the technologies they employ, and assessing whether they provide an appealing alternative to target customers (Zhou et al., 2009); (Narver & Slater, 1990). A company with a competitor-oriented approach typically gathers intelligence from its rivals, monitoring the advancements made by competing firms in order to develop products or marketing strategies that stand out from those of competitors. As a result, the firm tends to foster greater creativity and innovation compared to its rivals (Im & Workman Jr., 2004).

Cross-functional sharing of information offers a novel approach to managing relationships with both suppliers and customers. A company typically procures from multiple suppliers and sells to numerous customers. To effectively manage these relationships, the company should adopt a cross-functional approach to relationship management (Lambert & Enz , 2017). Lambert and Cooper (2000) emphasized the critical role of a cross-functional approach in achieving successful supply chain management, highlighting the importance of marketing involvement (Lambert & Cooper, 2000). Managers and academics can benefit significantly from studies that shed light on how marketing department members contribute to the successful implementation of each SCM process. It delves into the benefits that companies gain when marketing representatives actively participate in cross-functional process teams and investigates the advantages that the marketing function receives from such involvement (Lambert & Enz, 2017).

Lambert and Cooper (2000) proposed that the regularity of sharing and updating interorganizational information within a company significantly influences the efficiency of relationships with suppliers. The company must foster a culture of internal information sharing among its various functional departments, and these departments should be open to sharing information with suppliers. Moreover, the type of information shared may vary depending on the functional sources involved. Therefore, the company should identify employees who can effectively collaborate with suppliers. Consequently, organizing diverse areas enhances the effectiveness of supplier relations (Lambert & Cooper, 2000). Efficient and prompt relationships and partnerships are regarded as crucial elements in the business realm for achieving profitability. Establishing strong relationships with trading partners is essential for ensuring effective operations within firms. Consequently, relationship management has become a vital aspect of supply chain management (Maqsood & Akintoye, 2002).

Suppliers play a critical role in the long-term success of a company. Therefore, it is important for the company to cultivate strong relationships with its key suppliers to achieve success within the organization. These relationships between suppliers and the company are typically built on a win-win basis, where both parties benefit. However, the company benefits from managing supplier relationships to establish this mutually beneficial structure (Lambert & Enz, 2017). Several researchers have emphasized the importance of inbound supplier relations on firm performance because of responding customers' needs in a timely manner. They also claimed that strong supplier relationships lead to just in time purchasing, and performance effectiveness and efficiency of the firms (Wisner, 2003). Strong supplier relations also enable to promote effective new product introduction of the company due to suppliers impact the product quality, product design, product development outcomes and product innovation (Wu & Wu, 2015).

The company prioritizing strong supplier relationships builds databases containing supplier information and utilizes these databases for managing supplier relations. Moreover, the company should be willing to internally share information with suppliers, as internal information sharing facilitates the establishment of strong supplier relationships. By maintaining and leveraging supplier information and sharing internal data with suppliers, the company creates customer value through robust supplier relationships. Consequently, by generating customer value, the company achieves profitability, fosters customer loyalty, gains cost advantages, and enhances customer responsiveness (Martina & Grbac, 2003).

Research Objectives

This study aims to conduct and reveal the effects of market orientation in terms of customer-oriented and competitor-oriented, and strong supplier relations on firm performance which is diversified in market performance and operational performance in a subtle way. In additionally, its aim as well is also to conduct and reveal the effects of cross-functional sharing of information on the notion of strong supplier relations. It can be extracted from many sources that customer orientation and competitor orientation have a great impact on the firm performance and that strong supplier relations have a great impact on the firm performance as well. To sum up, the study's research objectives can be listed as below.

1. To identify the impact of market orientation on firm performance.
2. To identify the impact of strong supplier relations on firm performance.
3. To identify the impact of cross-functional sharing of information on the notion of strong supplier relations.

In accordance with the objectives of the thesis stated above, five chapters will be discussed below which are the literature review, theoretical model and hypotheses development, methodology and research design, findings and analysis, discussion, and conclusions.

Theoretical model

Market orientation is based on the company's opinion in order to produce product or service incompatible with customer needs. Just as, the supply chain management include the opinion which is to produce product/service and delivery them to be able to encounter customer expectation. The customer satisfaction constitutes the basis of the supply chain management as in market orientation. In this stage, the information flow about market orientation to supply chain is important for company to adopt and respond customer needs and wants. The most important thing of reaching strong market performance is to ensure the information flow with suppliers. That is why strong market performance can only be provided with strong supplier relations (Solmaz & Turkay, 2014).

Building productive relationships with suppliers, centered on enhancing customer value, requires a comprehensive understanding of suppliers, customers, end-users, and competitors. However, possessing this knowledge alone is insufficient; successful supply chain management hinges on fostering a culture that promotes information sharing across various departments. This facilitates collaboration between different departments and suppliers. To encourage information sharing with suppliers, organizations need to cultivate a culture of internal information exchange across functional areas. Moreover, given the diversity of information shared with suppliers, companies engaged in cross-functional coordination should engage personnel from different functional areas who can collaborate effectively with suppliers, thus bolstering the relationship (Martina & Grbac, 2003). While market orientation involves gathering information regarding with customer and competitor, whereas supply chain management involves gathering information from suppliers and share the collected information with suppliers (Tan et al., 2015). The information sharing and trust are the most important constructs for strong supplier relations because strong supplier relations benefits from marketing information on new customers, product opportunities, or customer segments for its internal affairs (Jüttner & Christopher, 2013).

The core objective of Supply Chain Management (SCM) is to augment the value of products and services throughout the supply chain by enhancing customer service and quality while minimizing inventory carrying costs. The value created through a company's SCM initiatives closely aligns with its organizational strategy. Successful SCM implementation can result in reduced system inventories, a more flexible network of firms capable of swiftly adjusting to market fluctuations, and products better suited to meet customer demands. Consequently, firms pursuing differentiation, cost leadership, or rapid response strategies, either independently or in conjunction, can benefit from effective supply chain management (Wisner, 2003).

The market orientation includes the information collection about customer and competitor. These information collection on customer and competitor is shared with suppliers through interdepartmental dissemination of information. This interdepartmental dissemination facilitates the information usage between company and suppliers. At the end, the strong relationships between market orientation, supply chain management, and suppliers are provided. The strong relationship between supplier relations brings to trust, commitment, and cooperation as well as brings to significant impact on firm performance in terms of customer responsiveness, inventory management, and profitability (Martina & Grbac, 2003).

Supply chain management involves contact with supply chain members frequently, creating a supply chain communication compatibly, incorporating all supply chain members in companies' marketing plans, sales resources, processes, skills. For the reason why if companies get more interaction with suppliers about flow of materials and quality problems, they could enable better time-related operational performance with regards to speed and delivery precision (Tukamuhabwa, 2011). If a company has effective supply chain management with interaction with suppliers based on quality issues and material flows, then it leads to cost reduction, and speed deliveries (Karami et al., 2015).

Expanding on the perspectives of the authors mentioned earlier, Hunt and Morgan (1995) propose the concept of market orientation, which involves (1) systematically gathering data about customers and competitors, (2) methodically analyzing this data to develop a deep understanding of the market, and (3) systematically applying this understanding to guide the identification, comprehension, formulation, selection, implementation, and adjustment of strategies (Hunt & Morgan, 1995). Market-oriented firms prioritize understanding the changing preferences of customers for products and services in the marketplace. They aim to attract targeted customers by offering high-quality products and services that meet their demands, ultimately turning them into end users (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993).

The reasoning behind this is that adopting a market-oriented approach results in competitive benefits by swiftly addressing the demands of the market, outpacing competitors in doing so. Being responsive entails addressing customer concerns, anticipating shifts in market requirements, and preemptively reacting to anticipated competitor actions in a manner conducive to long-term profitability. Having the ability to respond to market dynamics and fulfill customer needs more effectively than rivals should establish the groundwork for success, leading to enhanced customer loyalty, expansion of the customer base, and greater profitability (Martina & Grbac, 2003). Unless a company is market-oriented in the supply chain, it would not determine end market demand due to the inconsistency of orders. In this situation, the poor market-oriented company incurs to additional costs because of unplanned raw materials, insufficient utilization and capacity, additional transportation cost, and inefficiency over time (Ashari et al., 2018). If a company implements market-oriented strategies across all its operations, it signifies that the company can produce goods and services that align with customer expectations more effectively than its competitors. It can be easily inferred that a company achieving this level of success demonstrates very strong marketing performance (Soekotjo et al., 2021). Because marketing performance is influenced by various factors like customer and competitor orientation aimed at satisfying customer needs, it plays a crucial role in the overall performance of the company. Conversely, given that marketing performance directly affects all aspects of the company's performance, it holds significant importance for the company's success (Najib et al., 2020).

Establishing strong customer relationships is advantageous for companies because satisfied customers are more likely to respond positively to the company's marketing efforts and are less inclined to switch to competitors. As a result, companies can reduce their sales cycles, cut service costs, and gain a competitive edge. Market-driven companies can also adapt more swiftly to changes in the market compared to their competitors, and they can ensure higher product availability through well-established channel relationships. Therefore, the ability to connect with the market is found to have a positive impact on various aspects of firm performance, including revenue growth, market share, and profitability (Ravichandran & Lertwongsatiem, 2005).

Hypotheses

H1 Cross-functional sharing of information positively affects the notion of strong supplier relationships.

H2 Strong supplier relationships positively affect the market performance.

H3 Customer orientation positively affects the market performance.

H4 Competitor orientation positively affects the market performance.

H5 Strong supplier relationships positively affect the operational performance.

H6 Customer orientation positively affects the operational performance.

H7 Competitor orientation positively affects the operational performance.

RESULTS

On this study is stated that cross-functional sharing of information would positively affect the notion of strong supplier relationships. Effective supply chain management relies on a culture that encourages comprehensive sharing of information among different departments about suppliers, customers, end users, and competitors. This fosters collaboration between various departments and suppliers in the firms. Additionally, companies involved in cross-functional coordination strengthen their relationships with suppliers by considering the diversity of information shared with them (Martina & Grbac, 2003).

On this study is stated that strong supplier relationships would positively affect the market performance. The value created by a company's efforts in supply chain management is closely in harmony with its overall organizational strategy. Effectively implementing supply chain management can result in reduced inventory levels, a more flexible network of businesses capable of quickly adjusting to market shifts, and products that are better suited to meet the demands of customers. Consequently, companies that aim for product differentiation, cost leadership, or rapid responsiveness, whether separately or in combination, can benefit from the effective management of their supply chains (Wisner, 2003).

On this study is stated that customer orientation would positively affect the market performance. A company adopting a customer-centric approach involves the participation of one or more departments in activities aimed at understanding both current and future customer needs and the factors that influence them. This understanding is then shared across various departments, and multiple departments collaborate on initiatives tailored to meet specific customer requirements (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). The main objective is to promote the establishment of a sustainable and profitable enterprise in the long run (Deshpande & Webster, 1993).

On this study is stated that competitor orientation would positively affect the market performance. Even if it is believed that embracing a competitor-focused approach to a firm's market share provides evidence that is associated with an increased market share (Sørensen, 2009), this study was not supported. On the Armstrong and Collopy (1996) research, they say that many business professors, students, and managers believe that embracing a competitor-focused approach is advantageous and leads to enhanced firm performance. However, businesses that prioritize competitors in their goals were discovered to be less profitable and faced a higher risk of failure compared to those whose primary focus was on profit maximization (Armstrong & Collopy, 1996).

On this study is stated that strong supplier relationships would positively affect the operational performance. Even if it is believed that supply chain management requires regular communication with members of the supply chain, establishing compatible communication within the supply chain, and integrating all supply chain members into the marketing plans, sales resources, processes, and skills of companies and this is why increased interaction with suppliers regarding the flow of materials and quality issues can lead to improved operational performance in terms of speed and delivery accuracy (Tukamuhabwa, 2011), this study was not supported.

On this study is stated that customer orientation would positively affect the operational performance. This hypothesis was not supported with the measures. Even if it is believed that adopting a customer orientation can enhance business performance and its rationale behind this is that customer-oriented organizations, which actively monitor and respond to customer needs and preferences, are better equipped to satisfy customers and consequently achieve higher levels of performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993), however, this study was not supported.

On this study is stated that competitor orientation would positively affect the operational performance. This hypothesis was not supported with the measures. This idea was not supported, even if it is believed that A firm with a focus on competitors typically gathers information about rivals by monitoring their activities, aiming to develop products or marketing strategies that stand out from those of competitor. As a result, the firm tends to foster greater creativity and innovation compared to its rivals (Im & Workman Jr., 2004). The competitor-oriented firms endeavor to monitor both the current strengths and weaknesses of their competitors, as well as their enduring capabilities and strategies, with the aim of identifying their own strengths and weaknesses (Narver & Slater, 1990),however, this study was not supported.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings are parallel with the Martina and Grbac (2003) research because of cross-functional sharing of information was directly related to strength of supplier relationships in that study. The used measures of cross-functional sharing of information to assess this effect is exactly the same, however measures of strong supplier relations are not exactly the same, but the used measures are similar with this study as working closely with suppliers, involving suppliers for changing plan of company. There was implemented survey, and also it includes broad sample of industries as manufacturer, wholesalers, and industrial service firms like in this study. However, this study's findings are contradicting with mediation effect of supplier and customer-oriented information through cross-functional sharing of information on strong supplier relations. This effect was not measured on this study. Cross-functional sharing of information was detected in scope of customer information flow directly within all organization level in the firm and its effect on the relations between suppliers. Also, Martina and Grbac's (2003) study was implemented in companies in Ohio, not Turkey (Martina & Grbac, 2003). This study's findings are parallel with the Teck-Yong Eng (2005) research because of cross-functional coordination in the supply chain is associated with increased supply chain responsiveness in that study. The used cross-functional sharing of information's measures to assess this effect is exactly the same because it was measured by six items adapted from Martina and Grbac (2003) as within this study. However, measures of strong supplier relations are not exactly the same, but the used measures are similar with this study as coordination with suppliers, information sharing among suppliers, and involving suppliers for company's product/service action plan. There was also survey implemented, however, contradicts with substantiate that organizational norm impact on both supply chain responsiveness and firm performance through cross-functional coordination as a mediator. Also, study was only implemented in high-tech firms and in U.K., not Turkey (Eng, 2005).

This study's findings are parallel with the Prakash J. Singh and Damien Power (2009) research because of strong supplier involvement positively affects firm performance in that study. The used strong supplier relation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same, but the used measures are similar with this study as stable relations with suppliers, cooperation with suppliers, and involving suppliers for developing new product and market performance's measures is similar with profit and market share. There was implemented survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only in manufacturing companies in Australia, not Turkey (Singh & Power, 2009) . This study's findings are parallel with the Martina and Grbac (2003) research because of strong supplier relationships was directly related to higher performance of the firm in that study. The used Strong supplier relation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same, but the used measures are similar with this study as working closely with suppliers, involving suppliers for changing plan of company and market performance's measures is similar with sales growth, profitability. There was implemented survey, and also it includes broad sample of industries as manufacturer, wholesalers, and industrial service firms like in this study. However, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented in companies in Ohio, not Turkey. Moreover, there was measured the market performance with also customer loyalty additionally apart from this study (Martina & Grbac, 2003).

This study's findings are parallel with the Melissa Liow Li Sa and et all (2019) research because of that customer orientation has a direct relationship with firm performance in that study. The used customer orientation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same but the used measures are similar with this study as regular measures of customer service, customer satisfaction, and market information and market performance's measures is similar with profitability. There was implemented survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only in small hotel proprietors in service industry in Malaysia, not Turkey (Sa et al., 2020). This study's findings are parallel with the Eksioglu and Tolunay (2020) research because of customer orientation positively and directly affects percentage of sales growth of firms in that study. The used customer orientation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same, but the used measures are similar with this study as customer satisfaction and market performance's measures is similar with sales and market share growth. There was implemented survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only in retail sector in Turkey and effects on market performance was evaluated as sales growth and market share separately. While there was positive impact on sales growth, there was not detected any positive impact on market share growth (Eksioğlu & Tolunay, 2020). This study's findings are parallel with the Martina and Grbac (2003) research because of responsiveness to customer's needs is directly related to performance of the firm in that study. The used customer orientation's measures to assess this effect is exactly the same, because that's study's measurement was used in this study as well and market performance's measures is similar with profitability and sales growth. There was implemented survey, and also it includes broad sample of industries as manufacturer, wholesalers, and industrial service firms like in this study. However, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented in companies in Ohio, not Turkey. While customer orientation has impact on profit performance of the firm, it has not impact on sales growth of the firm. Moreover, there was measured the market performance with also customer loyalty additionally apart from this study (Martina & Grbac, 2003).

This study's findings are parallel with the Eksioglu and Tolunay (2020) research because even if there was believed that competitor orientation has positively and directly affects percentage of sales and market share growth of firms in that study, it's partially supported due to while there was positive impact on sales growth, there was not detected any positive impact on market share growth. The used competitor orientation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same but the used measures are similar with this study as observing actions of existing and potential competitors, knowledgeable about their products and services and understanding their future activities and market performance's measures is similar with sales and market share growth. There was implemented survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only in retail sector in Turkey and effects on market performance was evaluated as sales growth and market share separately (Eksioğlu & Tolunay, 2020).

This study's findings are parallel with the Primo and Amundson (2002) research because even if there was believed that strong supplier relations is positively related to operational performance in scope of new product development in that study, it's not supported due to there was not found positive relations with new product development in terms of project speed and time-to-market objective. The used Strong supplier relationships' measure to assess this effect is not exactly the same but the used measures are similar with this study as involving suppliers into company action plan and providing communication with supplier in the company frequently and operational performance's measures is similar with project speed and time-to-market objective. However, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented testing propositions using secondary survey data instead of implementing survey directly to companies. There was also included product quality and project cost evaluated as operational performance indicators differently from this study (Primo & Amundson, 2002).

This study's findings are parallel with the Fu-Mei Chuang and et al. (2015) research because even if there was believed that customer orientation is positively related to operational performance in scope of new product creativity in that study, it's not supported due to there was not found positive relations with new product creativity. The used customer orientation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same but the used measures are similar with this study as taking high priority of customers' needs within firm and operational performance's measures is similar with new product creativity indicator. There was implemented survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only high-technology ventures in China, not Turkey (Chuang et al., 2015).

This study's findings are parallel with the Im and Workman (2004) research because even if there was believed that competitor orientation is positively related to operational performance in scope of new product creativity in that study, it's not supported due to there was not found positive relations with new product creativity. The used competitor orientation's measures to assess this effect is not exactly the same but the used measures are similar with this study as trying to know competitor strategies and discusses competitors' strengths and operational performance's measures is similar with new product creativity indicator. There was implemented cross-sectional survey, however, this study's findings are contradicting with study was implemented only high-technology manufacturing firms in U.S., not Turkey (Im & Workman Jr., 2004).

CONCLUSION

In this study, the cross-functional sharing of information on strong supplier relations and strong supplier relations and market orientation such as customer-oriented and competitor-oriented on firm performance such as market performance and operational performance were examined. A questionnaire was conducted with participants who work in a company in Turkey.

Results indicated that the firms with cross-functional sharing of information are playing big role to enhance strong supplier relations because of a willingness to share customer information, customer satisfaction and customer needs are sharing within organization cross-functionally. Moreover, strong supplier relations have a positive impact on market performance which was especially combined of sales growth and profit growth of the firm performance. It means the firms which have strong supplier relations along with greater trust throughout supply chain, more frequent contact with supply chain members and involving supply chain members in your firm's plans appeared to increase firms' sales and profit growths accordingly. In additionally, customer-oriented firms which have advantage to respond the customer needs and to determine satisfaction, opportunities and potential problems appeared to increase firms' sales and profits as well.

Contrary to the supported hypotheses in this study, it was found that a firm that tracks its competitors and takes action based on their strengths and weaknesses has no impact on marketing performance indicators such as sales growth, share, and profitability. Additionally, it was determined that neither strong supplier relationships nor customer orientation nor competitor orientation has an impact on operational performance indicators such as decreasing product/service delivery cycle time, entering a new market timely, responding to market demand change rapidly, and bringing new products/services to the market quickly.

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