

Designing Export Performance Model based on Organizational Orientations

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Abstract

This study extends prior researches by exploring the effect of organizational orientations on export performance. Building on the already extensive literature, we developed a model of relationship. A total of 120 usable questionnaires were received from the Iranian food industry SMEs. The results indicated that entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and learning orientation positively impact export performance. Market orientation positively influences learning orientation. Furthermore, both market and learning orientation positively impact entrepreneurial orientation. Additionally, market orientation indirectly impacts export performance via entrepreneurial and learning performance. Learning orientation also indirectly impacts export performance via entrepreneurial orientation. Most empirical studies have been conducted in developed countries, rather than in developing countries. This is the first examination of the role of three organizational orientations in Iranian SMEs. This study is aimed at companies who wish to increase their performance. Managers can also enhance their chances of success by developing the different orientations.

Keywords

Entrepreneurial orientation, Export performance, Learning orientation, Market orientation.

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Introduction

Several studies were conducted regarding the factors that affect export performance. In each of these studies, the variables considered directly or indirectly affect export performance. Most of the basic researches were carried out in the field of exports for distinguishing exporters and non-exporters. As a result, they primarily consider the process of the company's internationalization. After that, the researchers of this paper examined the external factors that impact export such as incentive programmes. In the third phase, the researchers examined the factors relating to the behaviour of the companies that contribute to exports and its results. The fourth set of researchers studied the factors that have an impact on the effectiveness or success of export of companies (Ghilani Nia and Zahmatkesh, 2006). An important factor that influences performance is organizational orientation (market orientation, learning orientation and entrepreneurial orientation). Thus, the purpose of this paper was twofold. First, it aimed to integrate EO, MO and LO to explain how they can enhance export performance. The second objective was to present a conceptual model that depicted the proposed relationships among the constructs of interest in this paper. The first research question of this paper was: is there any relationship between MO, LO, EO and export performance? The second was: is the relationship between MO-export performance and LO-export performance mediated through the EO? The next section of this paper discusses, in detail, each of the constructs included. Following this, the proposed relationships are presented, along with the conceptual model. In the final section, discussion and conclusion are provided.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Market Orientation

Since the 1980s, market oriented research has been used as an effective strategy to influence the performance of companies. 'Market oriented' is a significant concept in marketing theory and a trend in market learning. In other words, it is based on the understanding of the market and using it for marketing activities. Thus, we can consider market orientation as a business philosophy that conducts competitive

strategies of organizations. Chirani and Roodsari (2009) noted that market orientation gained more attention than other types of marketing disciplines during the 1990s. This is because market orientations are defined as a company's ability to continuously learn about customers, competitors and environmental factors in existing and potential markets. Although many studies have been carried out regarding market orientation, the two views below are considered to be the most important.

Behavioural Perspective

Behavioural perspective focuses on organizational characteristics such as strategy, structure, processes and activities. We can find various definitions of the behavioural perspective of market orientation in market orientation literature. Kohli and Jaworski's (1990) defined market orientation as the creation of market insight across an organization. It focuses on current and future customer needs, the dissemination of this insight between the departments and the response of all the departments to it. The concept of market orientation directly focuses on the acquiring of information, dissemination of information and its process of application. It further focuses on its relationship with the identification and the effective service to customers' needs and wants.

Cultural Perspectives

The most significant study of this perspective is found in the work of Narver and Slater.

They put forward the idea that market orientation provides a cultural construct that focuses on satisfying the customers' needs and wants and trying to be better than their competitors. The cultural perspective of market orientation defines it as an organizational culture that includes values and norms. It continuously increases values and customer satisfaction.

Narver and Slater (1990) believe that market orientation promotes a cultural environment where customer satisfaction, service quality and maintaining the distinct needs of clients are top priorities. Market orientation is an organizational culture that includes behavioural components such as customer oriented, competitor oriented and coordination between functions. It emphasizes two criteria of decision

making: long-term focus and profit focus. Our study focuses on the behavioural perspective.

Learning Orientation

The learning organization is largely concerned with scientists, managers, leaders of organizations and companies. With this, individuals and organizations acquire new learning to organize them into a learning organization. The organizational learning issue was raised in the 1970s. The process of individuals learning within an organization is called organizational learning (Rahnavard, 2000). Organizational learning is used for describing certain kinds of activities that are used in organizations. Organizational learning is the process of knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory that adapt to changing conditions. Learning organization is an organization where learning is considered as a permanent need of employees. Thus, the emphasis is on learning about how to learn: how to acquire and distribute new knowledge, how to create and produce newly acquired knowledge and information and how to manifest this knowledge in behaviour and performance (Ghahremani, 2005).

A company can collect and use the knowledge that is based on organizational learning. Learning orientation examines three components: commitment to learning, shared vision and open mindedness (Sinkula *et al.*, 1997). Commitment to learning highlights the importance of an organization to encourage a learning culture. Committed learning organizations value the need to understand the cause and effects of their performance (Calantone *et al.*, 2002). Open mindedness is associated with knowledge. Companies which are open minded re-evaluate their long-term assumptions and beliefs. This is an organizational value that leads the efforts to avoid forgetting (Sinkula *et al.*, 1997). Shared vision is the centralization of learning that develops commitment, energy and purpose among members. An organization with a learning orientation strategy creates an environment for learning and encourages learning.

Entrepreneurship Orientation

The concept of entrepreneurship closely relates to the encouragement of new opportunities in an innovative, very risky and proactive way.

Entrepreneurship orientation is defined as an entrepreneurship in organizational level (Lee *et al.*, 2001).

McDougall and Oviatt (2000) defined entrepreneurship as the ability of managers to take risks, be innovative and more proactive.

Lumpkin and Dess (1996, 2001) defined entrepreneurial orientation as processes and activities that are used by entrepreneurs who decide to enter new markets or support entrepreneurial opportunities. For over two decades, researchers have examined various aspects of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship includes a proactive encouragement of new opportunities, risk taking and innovation (Fredric Kropp *et al.*, 2006).

The Relationship between Market Orientation and Export Performance

Many scholars have focused their studies on the influence of market orientation on consistent performance (Deshpande and Farley, 1998, 2000; Deshpande *et al.*, 2000; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Fredric Kropp *et al.*, 2006). Some studies state the negative relationship between market orientation and performance, whilst others do not believe there is a correlation between the two. The majority of studies demonstrate that market orientation is positively associated with organizational performance, as research continues to show (Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1999; Deng & Dart, 1994; Leticia Santos-Vijande *et al.*, 2005; Boohene *et al.*, 2012). Some new researches about the relationship between market orientation and performance are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. New researches about the relationship between market orientation and performance.

Authors	Result
Boohene <i>et al.</i> , 2012	Positive relationship between market orientation and financial performance
Huhtala <i>et al.</i> , 2011	Positive relationship between market orientation and business performance via mediated role of innovation capability
Murry <i>et al.</i> , 2011	Positive relationship between market orientation and financial, strategic and product performance
Singh & Mahmood, 2012	Positive relationship between export market orientation and export performance
Miocevic & Crnjak Caranovich, 2012	Positive relationship between export market orientation behaviour and export performance
Cadogan <i>et al.</i> , 2009	Positive relationship between export market orientation behaviour and export performance
Gudlaugsson & Schalk, 2009	Positive effect of market orientation on business performance
Vijande <i>et al.</i> , 2005	Market orientation has an impact on performance

Taking into account the above literature, we can say:

H₁: Market orientation is positively associated with export performance.

The Relationship between Learning Orientation and Export Performance

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between learning orientation and organizational performance (Slater and Narver, 1994; Hurley & Hult, 1998; Leticia Santos-Vijande, 2005).

Many studies regarding learning orientation and export performance have been carried out. Feedback from customers, competitors and channels have been used to develop competency (Sinkula *et al.*, 1997). As Calantone *et al.* (2002) suggest, adopting just one strategy alone will not result in higher profits. One of the most important characteristics of learning oriented firms is fostering an environment where change and adjustments can be made. Learning oriented firms are even willing to question their well-operated organization systems. These views and strategies result in a better performance. Some new researches regarding the effect of learning orientation on performance are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. New researches about relationship between learning orientation and performance

Author	Result
Ismazlm 2011	Learning orientation has a positive direct effect on export performance
Frananz-Mesa and Alegre-Vidal, 2013	Organizational learning capability has a positive direct effect on export intensity
Li and Li, 2010	Learning orientation has an indirect effect on export performance via knowledge management
Wang, 2008	Learning orientation has a positive effect on firm performance
Calanantone <i>et al.</i> , 2002	Learning orientation has an impact on performance
Aragon-Correra <i>et al.</i> , 2007	Learning orientation and performance are directly related

With this in mind, it can be stated that:

H₂: Learning orientation is positively associated with export performance.

The Relationship between Market Orientation and Learning Orientation

Farrell and Oczkowski (2002) reviewed existing literature regarding

the relationship between market orientation and learning orientation which suggested three models. The first model showed that organizational learning is the foundation of market orientation and improves organizational performance (Santos, *et al.*, 2005). The second model showed that, in order to improve performance, market orientation has priority over learning orientation (Farrell, 2000; Slater & Narver, 1995).

The final model stated that both concepts of market orientation and learning orientation have a direct relationship with organizational performance (Baker & Sinkula, 1999).

The main objective of research regarding learning orientation and market orientation is to explore how the successful acquisition of knowledge can assist organizations in understanding their customers' needs and improve their performance (Deshpandé *et al.*, 1993; Slater & Narver, 1995).

These concepts are not similar. Firstly, organizational learning impacts on creation and uses a broad range of knowledge, not just market-based knowledge (Farrell, 2000).

Market orientation is reflected in the acquisition of knowledge and implies the processing of market information (Baker & Sinkula, 1999).

Learning organizations are characterized by their use of internal and external resources. However, market orientation focuses on customers and competitors, outside of company boundaries (Jiménez-Jiménez and Cegarra-Navarro, 2007).

Market orientation acquires information about current and latent customer needs. It also predicts what competitors are doing to increase customers' value.

Jiménez-Jiménez and Cegarra-Navarro (2007) noted that all acquired knowledge of market orientation can be organizational knowledge. However, this cannot be said for the reverse. Intelligent generation and dissemination are two sub-variables of market orientation which can impact knowledge production. Other new studies regarding the relationship between market orientation and learning orientation are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. New researches about relationship between market orientation and learning orientation

Author	Result
Keskin, 2006	Market orientation has a positive impact on learning orientation
Eris and Ozmen, 2012	Market orientation has a positive impact on learning orientation
Chien-Huang, 2008	Market orientation is positively associated with learning orientation
Rupčić, 2006	Market orientation has a positive relationship with learning orientation

Taking Table 3 into consideration, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₃: Market orientation is positively associated with learning orientation.

Relationship between Market Orientation and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation (Grant *et al.*, 2006; Grinstein, 2005). They found a positive relationship between MO and EO. Taking this into account, we can say:

H₄: Market orientation is positively associated with entrepreneurial orientation.

Relationship between Learning Orientation and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Hurley and Hult (1998) designed a model that defines the relationship between learning orientation and innovation. This view is in accordance with Perez-Bustamante (1999). He suggested that innovation is a result of learning orientation. These concerns support the relationship between innovation and learning orientation. Additionally, recent studies show that there is a significant relationship between learning orientation and innovation. A firm with an EO must learn to innovate and act ahead of their competitors. Thus, a firm's LO is antecedent to an EO and may shape the actions that firms take (Pitt and Wolff). According to the above:

H₅: Learning orientation is positively associated with entrepreneurial orientation.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Export Performance

Some research has found a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance (Covin *et al.*, 2006; Ezirim and Maclyton, 2010). Such studies argue that EO helps firms to be more efficient in their activities, notice customer needs and be better than their competitors. As a result, it has competitive advantages and increases performance. Table 4 shows new researches about the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance.

Table 4. New researches about relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance

Author	Result
Pirrala, 2012	Entrepreneurial orientation has a positive relationship with firm performance
Rauch <i>et al.</i> , 2009	There is a positive direct effect between EO and organizational performance
Patel, D Souza, 2009	EO has a direct effect on export performance
Mahmood and Htanafi, 2013	EO and performance are positively associated with each other
Jalali, 2012	EO has a direct relationship with export performance

With this, we can say:

H₆: Entrepreneurial orientation is positively associated with export performance.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model

Combing the study of similar patterns with the results of previous research, the conceptual model for this study consisted of six hypotheses. Figure 1 shows their formulation.

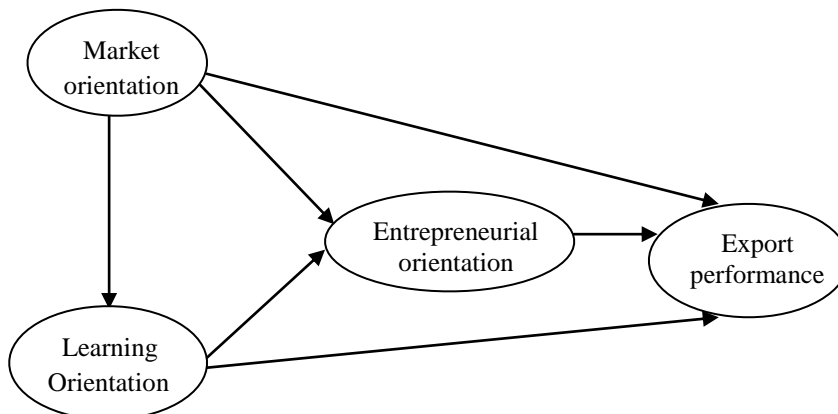


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

Methods

Sample

This study was a questionnaire survey that combined a statistical treatment. The sample was composed of firms that were registered as food SMEs in the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran. Firms with less than 100 employees were selected as SMEs, as defined by the Ministry of Commerce of Iran. We randomly selected 150 firms. We requested their participation in our research by means of letter, email or fax. A total of 120 usable questionnaires were received.

Measurement

For the measurement of market orientation, we used Kohli *et al.*, 1993 scale to assess the three behavioural components (intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and responsiveness). Learning orientation scales were adapted from Calantone *et al.*, 2002. We use three components of learning orientation (commitment to learning, shared vision and open mindedness).

To measure the entrepreneurial orientation of the firm, we used the scales developed by Covin and Slevin (1989) and Miller and Toulouse (1986). The three components used for measuring EO were named proactiveness, innovativeness and risk taking. Export performance was also measured by the items from the IMP Project Group survey. Items were measured on 5-point Likert scales.

Findings

Factor Analysis

A factor analysis was carried out to confirm the reliability of the scale. The single factor loading of items ranged from 0.701 to 0.844 (see Table 5). Coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for constructs ranged from 0.703 to 0.762. This indicated a moderate to strong level of internal consistency and was an important indication of reliability (Kuratko, Montagno and Hornsby, 1990).

Table 5. Item wording and results of factor analysis

Construct	Component	Indicator	Factor Loading
MARKET	Intelligence	- In our business unit, we conduct a lot of in-	0.772

Continue Table 5. Item wording and results of factor analysis

Construct	Component	Indicator	Factor Loading		
ORIENTATION (0.714)	generation	house market research.	0.710		
		-We talk with or survey individuals who can influence our customer's purchases.	0.732		
	Intelligence dissemination	-We collect industry information by informal means.	0.791		
		-In our business unit, intelligence on our competitors is generated independently by several departments	0.760		
		-We have interdepartmental meetings at least once a quarter to discuss market trends and developments.			
		- Marketing personnel in our business unit spends time discussing customers' future needs with other functional departments.	0.721		
		- Our business unit periodically circulates documents (e.g., reports, newsletters) that provide information on our customers.	0.801		
		- When something important happens to a major customer of market, the whole business unit knows about it within a short period of time.	0.719		
		- Data on customer satisfaction are disseminated at all levels in this business unit on a regular basis	0.794		
		- For one reason or another, we tend to ignore changes in our customer's product or service needs (R).	0.701		
		-We periodically review our product development efforts to ensure that they are in line with what customers want.	0.809		
		-Several departments get together periodically to plan a response to changes taking place in our business environment.	0.821		
		-If a major competitor were to launch an intensive campaign targeted at our customers, we would immediately implement a response.	0.799		
		-The activities of the different departments in this business unit are well coordinated.	0.786		
		- Customer complaints fall on deaf ears in this business unit (R).	0.774		
		-We are quick to respond to significant changes in our competitors' pricing structures.	0.718		
		- When we find out that customers are unhappy with the quality of our service, we immediately take corrective action.	0.811		
		- When we find that customers would like us to modify a product or service, the departments involved make concerted efforts to do so.	0.777		
		Learning orientation (0.703)	Commitment to learning	-Management basically agree that our organization's ability to learn is the key to our competitive advantage.	0.792
					0.771

Continue Table 5. Item wording and results of factor analysis

Construct	Component	Indicator	Factor Loading	
Entrepreneurial orientation (0.762)	Shared vision	-The basic values of this organization include learning as the key to improvement.	0.774	
		-The sense around here is that employee learning is an investment, not an expense.	0.743	
		-Learning in my organization is seen as a key commodity necessary to guarantee organizational survival.		
		-There is a commonality of purpose in my organization.	0.813	
		-There is a total agreement on our organizational vision across all levels, functions and divisions.	0.844	
		-All employees are committed to the goals of this organization.	0.703	
		-Employees view themselves as partners in charting the direction of the organization.	0.710	
		Open mindedness	- We are not afraid to critically reflect on the shared assumptions we have made about our customers.	0.782
			- Personnel in this enterprise realize that the very way they perceive the marketplace must be continually questioned.	0.773
	Proactiveness	We normally initiate changes upon which our competitors react.	0.722	
		- We are very often the first to introduce new products/services.	0.731	
		- We normally try to avoid overt competition.	0.781	
	Innovativeness	-We normally take a very competitive oriented "beat the competitor" approach.	0.721	
		- We strongly emphasize R&D, technological leadership and innovation.	0.703	
		- We search for new practices all the time.	0.711	
		- We are among the first to implement innovative production processes.	0.780	
	Risk taking	-We actively observe and adopt the best practices in our sector.	0.701	
		-We have a strong tendency toward projects with low risk.	0.802	
		-We have a strong tendency towards projects with high risk.	0.733	
-In our business, fearless measures are needed to be successful.		0.780		
-In our business, it is better to explore it gradually to be successful.		0.745		
Export performance	- Export sales. During the past five years, how do you assess your export performance regarding the following	0.701		

Continue Table 5. Item wording and results of factor analysis

Construct	Component	Indicator	Factor Loading
ce (0.712)	share.	items?	0.708
	-Export profits.	- Export sales. Export market share. Export profits.	0.705

Statistical Analysis

We conducted a variable path analysis to test the various hypotheses formulated (Bentler, 1986). This allowed us to test the specified a priori model and the validity of relationships among variables, set within theoretical structures.

The method of estimation was a robust maximum likelihood with an asymptotic covariance matrix of the sample variances and covariances.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 15.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL) and LISREL 8.80 (Scientific Software International Inc., 2007). *P*- Values less than 0.05 were considered as significant.

Results

The goodness-of-fit values (Table 6) suggested that the research model is reasonably consistent with the data. To assess how these models represented the data, we used absolute fit indices such as the χ^2 statistic and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI). We also used incremental fit statistics such as the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). For both GFI and CFI, values > 0.95 constituted a good fit and values > 0.90 constituted an acceptable fit (Medsker, Williams & Holahan, 1994). For the RMSEA, it was suggested that values < 0.05 constituted a good fit, values in the 0.05 to 0.08 range indicated an acceptable fit. Furthermore, values in the 0.08 to 0.10 range were considered a marginal fit and values > 0.10 were a poor fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992).

Table 6. The fit indices of the models

χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI
87.94	48	0.080	0.91	0.90

The results of the parameter estimates of the measurement and structural models are shown in Figure 2. The hypotheses results are shown in Table 7.

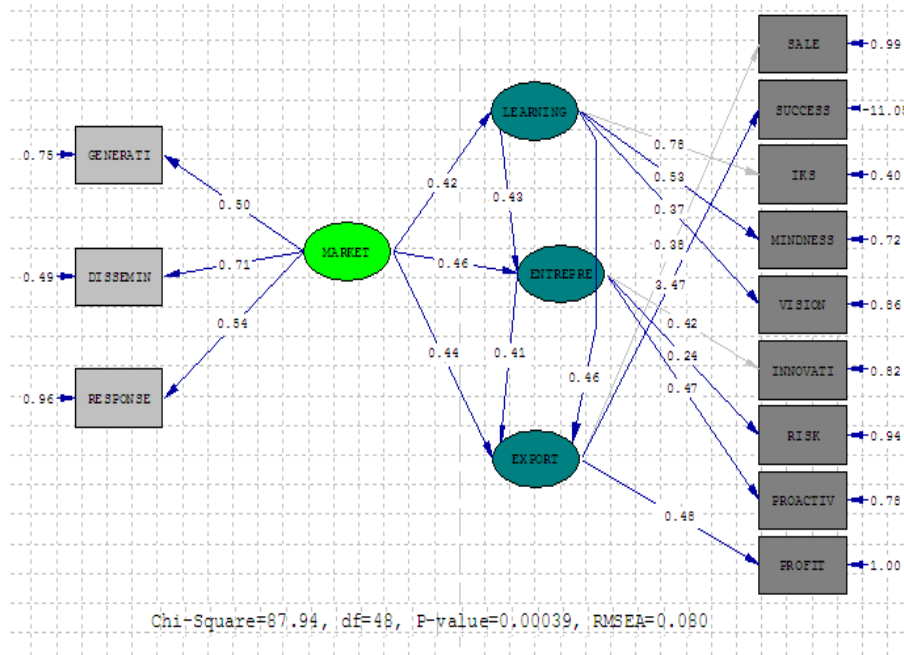


Fig. 2. The results of the parameter estimates of the measurement and structural model

Path Coefficients and the Results of Significance Tests

Table 7. Results of hypotheses.

Relationship	Coefficients	T value	Hypothesis Results
Market orientation->Entrepreneurial orientation	0.46	3,95	Accepted
Market orientation->Export performance	0.44	3.24	Accepted
Market orientation->Learning orientation	0.42	2.96	Accepted
Learning Orientation->Entrepreneurial orientation	0.43	3.18	Accepted
Entrepreneurial orientation->Export performance	0.41	2.80	Accepted
Learning orientation –>Export performance	0.46	3.56	Accepted

Discussion and Conclusion

Organizational orientations have been described as important factors

for a firm's success. Reviews of relevant literature showed that the majority of studies on organizational orientations and performance have been conducted in the West. However, any research carried out on this topic has been from Iran. In an effort to bridge this gap, as well as increase our understanding of this important topic, our paper investigated the relationship among organizational orientations and performance indicators of Iranian food industry firms. The results suggest that entrepreneurial (like: Pirrala, 2012; Rauch *et al.*, 2009), market (like: Boohene *et al.*, 2012; Huhtala *et al.*, 2011; Singh and Mahmood, 2012) and learning orientations (like: Ismazlm, 2011; Li and Li, 2010; Frananz-Mesa and Alegre-Vidal, 2013) positively relate to overall export performance. Results indicated that learning orientation has a greater impact on export performance. However, if organizations consider entrepreneurial orientation, they can improve the impact of learning and market orientation. Our results also suggested that market orientation and learning orientation can improve export performance via entrepreneurial orientation, as previously discussed by Perez-Bustamante (1999), Grant *et al.* (2006) and Grinstein (2005). With regard to organizational orientations in exporting, in order to enhance a firm's market, learning and entrepreneurial orientation appear to be worthwhile. If Iranian food industry firms are to be successful in exporting, their managers need to devote their efforts to develop higher levels of market, learning and entrepreneurial orientation. This greater level of commitment and effort may provide Iranian food industry firms with an additional opportunity to enhance their competitive advantages, as well as to achieve better export performances.

This study has some implications for managers and practitioners. It will help managers to better understand how to manage the entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and learning orientation in order to improve the performance. The success of MO and LO also lies in their fulfilment of the EO process. When managers want to pursue the performance by being innovative, risk taking and proactive, they should also concern the MO and LO departments.

Research Limitation

There are a number of possible limitations of this research that need to be considered. The first relates to the sample. The sample size was too small- only 120 firms satisfactorily completed the survey instrument.

The research was conducted in Iran, which is a developing country. As such, the results should be applied to developed countries with caution. There is a need to replicate this study in a developed country where the business environment is more stable. Cross-national studies should be conducted to compare the strength of the framework and assess its generalizability across varying business systems and organizational forms.

Future Research Directions

In conducting this study, we uncovered numerous questions that were beyond our scope. However, we would like to see them examined in future studies. Some of these aspects are offered below:

Firstly, even though a direct correlation between EO and export performance was found, we realized some moderators and mediators of the relationship. Future research should explore the complexity of the relationship between EO and export performance. Constructs, such as environmental dynamism, may shed additional light on the results found here.

Secondly, though the complementary effect of EO, MO and LO on export performance are shown here, these effects have contingent factors such as firm environment and organizational demographics.

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