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Performance Implications of E-Marketing Orientation

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Abstract

Nowadays, electronic or Internet advanced tools are used to facilitate supporting services to firms' customers and suppliers. For achieving a higher value in operating activities, firms must emphasis on technological development to integrate customer needs and develop the capabilities for searching and acquiring information via e-Business related tools. In this vein, electronic marketing (e-Marketing) is regarded as a strategic weapon for firms to accomplish it. It not only includes the deployment of marketing activities in the Internet, but also includes using technology to support services for customers. Therefore, in the context of electronic marketing orientation (EMO), business emphasizes the use of new Internet technologies in the implementation of strategic marketing decisions and tactics to achieve increasing customer value and gain sustainable competitive advantage. Thus, the purpose of this present research tries to examine the casual effects among EMO, business performance, and customer relationship performance (the consequences of e-Marketing orientation). According to the empirical data collected from top-ranked companies in Taiwan, yielding 140 valid samples. Performance implications of EMO are examined. The findings indicated that EMO demonstrated an important role in explaining customer relationship performance, as well as business performance. Finally, meaningful findings and conclusions will be proposed and discussed.

Keywords: Electronic marketing, Electronic marketing orientation (EMO), Customer relationship performance, Business performance

Introduction

Technological innovations create an increasing sense of strategic deployment (Kim & Jae, 2007). Enterprises realize that they should integrate supply and demand of service providers and users by ICT and develop different types of application according to the scenarios they encountered. For operational activities with higher value, future business model should be based on electronic business process to reinforce corporate R&D and rapidly integrate market and customer demand and information searching and application capacity. When enterprises to be as an e-Business, they tend to encounter inconsistent data and process between new and old systems and inferior information quality. Therefore, how to effectively integrate application systems and processes will become the key issue for traditional enterprises to transform into e-business in order to increase operational value (Nakata & Zhu, 2006).

Electronic marketing (e-Marketing) is the extension of online marketing (Tsiotsou & Vlachopoulou, 2011). It is not simply concerned with the marketing activities on the Internet (Asikhia, 2009), it also included effectively adopts related IT and techniques to support business marketing for products or services (El-Gohary, 2010).

As a result, customer relation management (CRM), promotion, customer service, marketing research and planning are all included (Brodie et al., 2007). Generally speaking, several main sets of advantages are associated with e-Marketing. E-Marketing can lower cost by automation and electronic media; it can immediately respond to marketing personnel with right information; it also enhances data collection and analysis capacity; developing new market by customization and increases interaction with customers, etc. For firms, the value of e-Marketing is twofold. First, with e-Marketing, customers are closely connected with operational process in enterprises and directly acquire corporate resources (Trainor et al., 2011), such as Extranet, B2C and B2B. Since customers and product life cycle of enterprises are closely associated, customer demand and their opinions can immediately become the criteria in production, or the basis for quality improvement and R&D. Effective use and sharing of customer information and opinions are the important sources to develop and maintain positive customer relationship (Jayachandran et al., 2005). In addition, enterprises with better e-marketing capacities, the employees will develop activities and information in consistency. Then, the information can be integrated into customer database for marketers' usage, analysis, and simulation in order to approach customers' potential needs (Slater & Narver, 1999). With the enhancement of e-Marketing capacity, productivity and organizational efficiency can be increased (Kim & Jae, 2007), organizational innovation value will also be achieved (Trainor et al., 2011).

In order to respond to dynamic and technology-oriented business environment, the market competition behavior of organizations, namely e-Marketing orientation (hereafter EMO), is proposed. Traditionally, in academics, "orientation" is explained with the organizational principle and directly guides business activities and develops behavioral intention to guarantee organizational sustainability and performance (Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997). It is similar to the concept of market orientation, EMO should also include behavioral and cultural perspectives (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Naver & Slater, 1990). In other words, in e-Marketing oriented corporate culture, all organizational members are committed to create excellent value for customers and stakeholders and effectively provide information related to marketing organization development and market by electronic technology. Therefore, the purposes of this present research are trying to examine the casual effects among e-Marketing orientation, business performance, and customer relationship performance in order to provide further insights into performance implications of e-Marketing orientation toward customer relationship performance, as well as business performance.

Theoretical background

E-Marketing orientation

It is noted that the main focus of marketing orientation is to confirm customers' needs and expectations and follow customer-centered thought of "belief and value sharing" (Deshpandé & Webster, 1989). Marketing orientation can be treated as the enterprises' basic attitude toward marketing activities and it is criterion of corporate behavior (Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1999). With clear definition of marketing orientation, enterprises can effectively design the action to collect information of customers and competitors. The information is exchanged among departments to create customer value (Kobylanski & Szulc, 2011). Although market orientation is important to treat satisfaction with customers' needs as cultural philosophy of enterprises, it is still insufficient (Elliot, 1987). Thus, firms should establish strategy regarding marketing orientation and strengthen corporate capacity to satisfy customers.

Nowadays, in development of marketing orientation, with the interaction between external competitive environment and internal performance stress, organizations encounter significant challenge in corporate operations. In addition, in academic area, it lacks the common consensus on electronic marketing orientation (e-Marketing orientation, EMO) dimensions. Therefore, in order to respond to dynamic and technology-oriented business environment, the market competition behavior of organizations, e-Marketing orientation (EMO), is proposed by this present research:

e-Marketing Orientation (EMO) can be treated as a kind of organizational culture. It focuses on use of new technology (internet related technology) to construct strategic marketing and decision making to increase customer value and acquire continuous competitive advantages. Upon the cultural background, e-Marketing is not simply the responsibility of marketing department. It is the principle adopted and followed by employees in organization and it guides all corporate activities to lead to positive marketing behavior.

Based on the previous literature review, marketing orientation is important for firms to compete in the complex competitive environment. However, it lacks the common consensus on its dimensions. The following studies mostly suggested that it should include cultural philosophy and behavior (Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1997, 1999; Kobylanski & Szulc, 2011). As to dimensions of e-Marketing orientation, currently, although related studies in the topic are emerging, they are still at the stage of conceptual development. As dimensions of e-Marketing orientation, it lacks the precise definition and measurement in strategic orientation and there can be abused in research findings (Levenburg, 2005). As a result, drawing on the concept of market orientation, Shaltoni and West (2010) integrated cultural perspective of Narver and Slater (1990) and behavioral perspective of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) to elaborate e-Marketing orientation. The dimensions and items that Shaltoni and West (2010) proposed (some are based on market orientation and some are self-developed) have influenced about the content and conceptualization of e-Marketing orientation. However, their scales overlook the most important concept of e-Marketing orientation, namely IT application and integration. Therefore, it is necessary to further elaborate IT integration and construct nomological validity to measure dimensions of EMO. In this vein, given the important issue for electronic marketing orientation, Chen and Huang's (2016) research tried to develop an EMO scale. Following the rigor procedure for scale development, reliability, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmation factor analysis are used to validate the instrument. According to the empirical data collected from companies in Taiwan, finally, a revision containing 14 items for measuring EMO is generated. The measurement scale contains of 3 sub-constructs, namely philosophy, e-marketing initiation, and system implementation and integration. This rigorous two-stage scale development step is to provide good reliability and validity for this measurement scales.

Research methodology

Hypothesis Development

(1) The Effect of e-Marketing orientation on business performance

Previous study has identified marketing-related characteristics (e.g., marketing capability) as contributor of firm performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Meanwhile, because of the advantages of e-Marketing, namely the increasing flexibility of execution of traditional marketing activities, effectively practices promotion, enhances communication efficiency among enterprises, customers and suppliers, improving marketing and operational process, entering new market, adopting direct marketing on customers and immediately, and effectively responds to customers' opinions, e-Marketing can not only leads to lower marketing cost (Min et al., 2002; Nezamabad, 2011), but also increases customers' satisfaction and enhances operational performance of enterprises in order to create competitive advantages (Asgharizadeh et al., 2010).

Enhancement of corporate competitiveness by marketing strategy application and marketing capacity development has been discussed by previous studies (e.g., Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1997; Capon et al., 1990; Day, 1994; Hunger & Wheelen, 2001; Leonidou et al., 2002). A good e-Marketing is based on clear execution project and strategy designed by enterprises through measuring related organizational resources. As to cultural and behavioral dimensions, information collected by IT in e-Marketing project can increase organizational knowledge and capacity in order to effectively support e-Marketing activities. Therefore, enterprises can be in advantageous position and create organizational value (Asikhia 2009; Prasad et al., 2001; Shaltoni & West, 2010). Thus, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: e-Marketing orientation of the company will positively influence business performance

(2) Effect of e-Marketing orientation on customer relationship performance

As mentioned above, the e-Marketing orientation of a firm are reflected in its ability to differentiate products and services from competitors by applying Internet technologies (Shaltoni & West, 2010), thus enabling the firm to attract and retain its customers. Ordanini and Rubera (2010) reported that Internet resources exhibit an indirect effect on performance mediated by customer orientation. Brodie et al. (2007) also indicated that the adoption of e-marketing is positively associated with marketing performance and specifically on customer acquisition and retention. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. e-Marketing orientation of the company will positively influence customer relationship performance

(3) Effect of customer relationship performance on business performance

In an alignment of IS and business strategy research, Chan et al. (1997) proposed the IS effectiveness acted as an intermediary variable that impacting positively in turn upon business performance. In addition, from a marketing perspective, a number of studies have reported the close link between marketing and performance in terms of sales growth, return on assets (ROA), market share, and overall competitiveness (Tracey & Tan, 2001). Because superior marketing activities satisfies customer needs by introducing them new products and processes, the high success rate of service programs and meeting corporate profit objectives leads to improved business performance. In the research context of CRM, researchers have called for more studies in understanding the link between CRM processes and firm performance (Vorhies et al., 2011). For example, Anderson et al. (1994) found that marketing performance, as measured by customer satisfaction, positively affects financial performance, as measured by return on investment. Hooper et al. (2010), in their study of medium-large New Zealand companies, hypothesized that “the stronger the marketing performance, the stronger the business performance” and found that marketing performance, measuring by customer satisfaction, retention, loyalty, return in marketing investment, efficiency of marketing promotions, and overall marketing performance positively influenced business performance, measuring by net profits, ROI, revenue growth, sales growth, and market share gains. Because high levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty can drive to increased revenues via cross-selling and positively word-of-mouth communications which also lead to firm profitability (Hogan et al., 2002). In addition, customers who are satisfied and stay with a specific firm, higher market share can be gained and lower costs incurred by encouraging customer repeat purchase behavior and lower levels of customer complains (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). Accordingly, we argue that higher growth and profitability of a firm are the consequences from high customer satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the following hypothesis is also proposed.

H3. Customer relationship performance of the company will positively influence business performance.

The Measurement Items

In this study, a 7-point Likert scale was used, anchored from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” ranging from 1 to 7 points, respectively. A higher score corresponded to a stronger agree for that construct. The items for measuring e-Marketing orientation measurement items were adapted from Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Shaltoni and West (2010). Customer relationship performance was adapted from Rust et al. (2002) and Trainor et al. (2011). The measurement items for business performance was derived from Venkatraman’s (1989) instrument and measured from a multi-dimensional perspective.

Sampling and Data Collection

We used cross-sectional as our research strategy. For collecting the empirical data, mailed survey research in a time frame is employed. Mailing lists are excerpted from “Common Wealth Magazine” database in Taiwan. The reason we chose the top companies in each industry was that they are the best performing companies in Taiwan. We were interested in finding out the prevalence of strategic alignment in successful companies. Totally, 1222 questionnaires were distributed to companies. Overall, a total of 142 surveys had been returned, of which 2 were incomplete, yielding 140 valid samples. As a result, the gross response rate was about 11.46%.

Data analysis and results

Sample Characteristics

The characteristics of the samples are described as follows. Largest number of respondents is from manufacturing industry, representing 57.1% of the responding companies. Most of companies have 100 to 499 employees (37.9%). Approximately 60% of the respondents have experiences more than 6 years.

The largest proportion (47.2%) had an undergraduate degree. The age of the participants ranged from 21 to 51 and above, with the largest percentage (39.8%) in the 31 to 41 category. About 75% of the respondents were male.

Hypothesis Testing

SPSS version 18 and the Structural Equation Modeling of confirmation factor analysis with LISREL were used to verify the reliability and validity of our research model. Model estimation was performed using the maximum likelihood fit function.

CFA involves analysis of the measurement model, which demonstrated that the measurement model had a sufficient level of validity and reliability (Fornell & Lacker, 1981) for further model examination.

In the estimated measurement model, items that demonstrate cross load, poor loadings and poor reliability were dropped and the model was re-estimated. This was done to ensure that data are a good fit with the measurement. We used the value of 0.5 as the threshold for factor loading assessment (Hair et al., 2006). As a result, all items demonstrate perfect loadings to explain its underlying construct, showing that the data are a good fit with the measurement model. Furthermore, the values of individual item reliability and composite reliability of the constructs are tested and demonstrated they are all adequate. Variance extracted estimates, as discussed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), were also used to assess the average variance extracted for all constructs, suggesting that a value of 0.5 or larger is adequate. The values of AVE for all constructs are ranging from 0.74 to 0.92 demonstrating a reasonable degree of convergent validity. Finally, discriminant validity was assessed by the variance extracted test proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The results of the variance extracted tests show that discriminant validity is supported, since each squared correlation is less than both applicable variance extracted estimates.

The test results of the structure are summarized in Figure 1. Overall, all of the 3 paths exhibited significance at the $p < 0.05$ level providing strong support for the proposed model of EMO on customer relationship and business performance. The results showed that, business performance can be predicted by customer relationship performance and EMO, explaining 58% of the business performance variance. The path from customer relationship performance ($\gamma = 0.76, p < 0.001$) is stronger than that of EMO ($\beta = 0.48, p < 0.001$) Thus, H1 and H2 are supported. Additionally, consistent with H2, EMO has significant direct effects on customer relationship performance ($\beta = 0.83, p < 0.001$) with a variance explanation of 69%. Thus, H2 is also supported as expected.

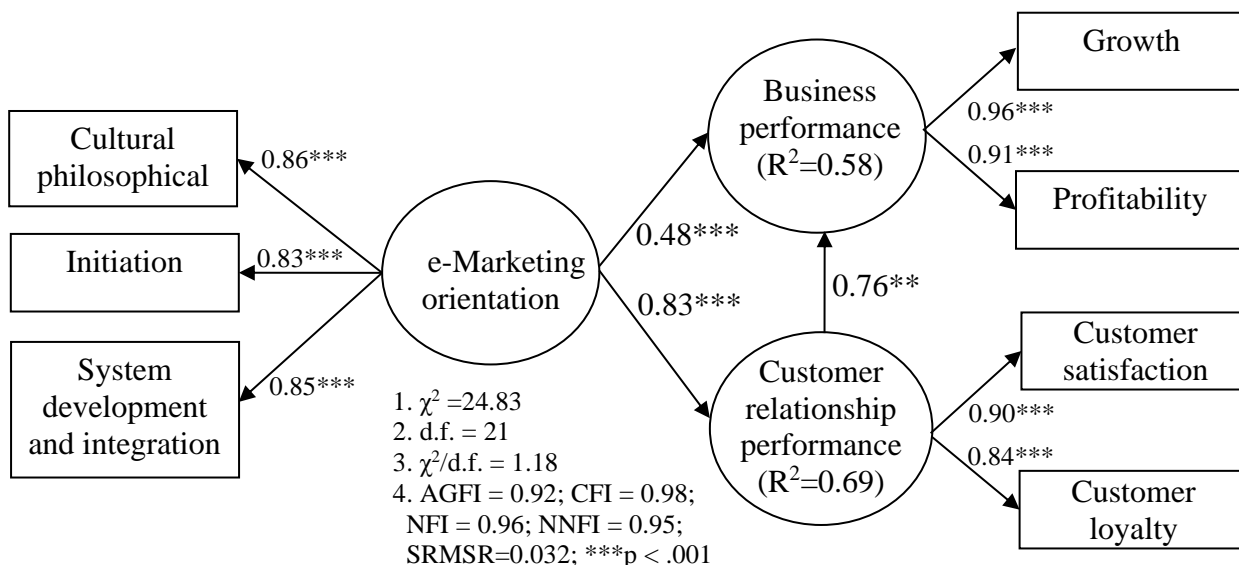


Figure 1. The result for testing e-Marketing orientation on performance

Conclusion and implications

Theoretical Implication

Past research on marketing orientation mostly focused on traditional marketing activities. Currently, with introduction and application of the Internet and IT in enterprises, some scholars start the research on e-Marketing. However, lots of them are theoretical basis that emphasized on the definition of e-Marketing orientation (e.g.,

Asgharizadeh et al., 2010; Chaffey, et al., 2006; Richardson, 2001) and explored specific concept of e-Marketing orientation (e.g., Shama, 2001) and developed the measurement items (e.g., Chen & Huang, 2016; Shaltoni & West, 2010; Tsiotsou and Vlachopoulou, 2009). Related studies include the consequences or antecedents of e-Marketing in a specific perspective or industry (e.g., Asikhia, 2009; Chailom, 2012; Trainor et al., 2011; Tsiotsou & Vlachopoulou, 2011), and empirical research on marketing management or e-commerce success (e.g., Chailom, 2012; El-Gohary, 2012; Eid & El-Gohary, 2012).

There is a paucity of literature discussing the formation and outcomes of e-Marketing orientation. At present, marketing has been regarded as one of the most important activity in organization, it is necessary to find how to apply IT and new technologies in implementing e-Marketing oriented practices and strategic planning.

Currently, many researchers, consultants and practice circle have developed some frameworks to explain and clarify relationship between marketing strategy and performance. However, in research on e-Marketing orientation, although it is recognized the importance of marketing activities in e-Marketing activities, the performance implications of EMO is not demonstrated by empirical research. According to El-Gohary (2010), he reviewed articles on e-Marketing published in journals from 2003 to 2010 and suggested that researchers should make more efforts on the related research. There is research gap regarding effect of e-Marketing orientation and adoption on performance. It is the new research field which should be valued and explored by researchers and industries. Therefore, since there should be tight relationships between EMO and customer relationship and business performance, we hope this study may be used as a basis to reinforce the research gap in the field.

Practical Implication

With rapid market change, operation of enterprises should respond to external environment. Besides maximum profits, they should recognize market demand and market mechanism to satisfy consumers in order to result in corporate profits and maintain sustainable competitive advantages. Hence, market oriented action is treated as the key for organizations to create prominent performance and for enterprises to pursue competitive advantages and create customer value. e-Marketing oriented measures allow enterprises to immediately recognize market demand and change. Besides, they can respond to various changes by employing appropriate marketing strategy. How to accomplish the goals by effective use of strategy and resources in highly competitive environment and satisfy consumers' needs is the important issue for enterprises. Based on most of studies, marketing orientation is the predisposing factor of enterprises' marketing oriented action or marketing capacity (Asikhia, 2009; Lu & Wang, 2011). As to marketing orientation in e-business, it is suggested that market oriented culture or behavior will expand e-Marketing orientation or capacity of enterprises and result in better corporate performance (Chailom, 2012; El-Gohary et al., 2008).

Accordingly, for organizations, when analyzing and planning marketing orientation and activities, they should plan and use resources to enhance and effectively execute marketing management (e.g., IT and the Internet application) in order to strengthen marketing activity and information quality they acquired as well as employee satisfaction. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate market orientation with strategic application of IT to form e-Marketing orientation in both holistic way and bivariate way to recognize their effects on performance, including customer relationship performance and business performance.

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