



## The Joint Effects of Customer and Competitor Orientation on Marketing Performance: A Case of an Industry Leading Firm in Turkey

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### Abstract

The study was conducted in an industry leading company to examine the two dimensions of market orientation (customer orientation and competitor orientation) from the perspective of its sales employees and customers and to explain their relationship with marketing performance. The research data were collected from company's sales group field employees on the firm side and company's sales dealer employees on the consumer side. With the research, it was aimed to measure the differences, changes and relations between regions, years, and parties (employee-customer) based on three-year measurements carried out in 7 geographical regions (18 provinces) throughout the country at the scale of an industry-leading company. The first finding points to the significant relationship between marketing performance and customer orientation. The second finding reveals that the firm tends towards customer-oriented behaviors in macroeconomic growth periods and towards competitor-oriented behaviors in recession periods. Another important finding is that the analysis at the level of geographical regions indicates that there are significant differences between regions, but it is understood that this difference is caused by a small number of provinces. In this context, it is possible to say that the country market reflects similar orientation trends in general.

### Keywords

Market Orientation, Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, Marketing Performance

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## Introduction

Marketing has significant effects on the strategic orientations and performance outcomes of the business (Cacciolatti and Lee, 2016). The field of marketing, like other disciplines (economics, strategic management, organizational behavior, operations management, etc.), plays an important role in the development and implementation of business strategy by uniquely promoting the potential to gain competitive advantage. In this respect, it plays an important role in the processes of determining both business-level strategies and corporate-level strategies (Hunt and Lambe, 2000). Companies, regardless of whether they are a follower or a market leader, need to be able to develop competitive marketing strategies that will position themselves against their competitors in the most effective way and adapt this quickly to the ever-changing competitive environment (Kotler et al. 1999). Because the continuity of business life is achieved per the success of competitive strategies. Competitive strategies are also shaped by the contribution of functions. The determination of marketing activities on business performance is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the marketing function. This indicator expresses the contribution of marketing to competition (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007).

Supporting competitive strategies with market-oriented instruments makes the strategies more effective. Market orientation can help explain performance differences between firms. Because customer orientation and competitor orientation are part of the strategic orientation of the business. The strategic orientation reflects the broad set of strategic choices applied in the pursuit of sustainable superior performance. In order to achieve superior performance, a predisposition for conducting harmonious activities is required (Sorensen, 2009). According to Dev et al. (2009), market orientation provides a suitable cultural environment for creating value and higher performance. Thus, both more value is created for customers and better performance can be obtained continuously.

While a customer-oriented company focuses more on its customers to create high-value, the competitor-oriented company primarily focuses more on the activities of competitors (Deshpande et al. 1993; Day, 1994). For this, it monitors competitor movements and market shares and develops strategies to counter them. Customer-oriented companies are better placed to spot new opportunities and develop long-term strategies. These companies can determine the importance of customer needs more accurately by observing the change in demands. In the development process, companies have been product-oriented in the first stage, customer-oriented only in the second stage, and only competitor-oriented in the third stage. Today's companies need to be both customer-oriented and competitor-oriented, ie market-oriented (Kotler et al. 1999). Market orientation can balance both approaches with appropriate coordination mechanisms (Kotler et al. 2005).

Dimensions of market orientation and marketing performance are among the frequently used strategic marketing concepts. However, very little is known about the variations in which these concepts should be combined to achieve high performance. There are common beliefs that market orientation is an important predictor of business performance, and these are also supported by the literature (Frösen et al. 2016). This situation indicates that more effort is required to understand the concepts.

Market orientation is an important determinant of marketing performance. It can be said that the market orientation level of an organization has a significant effect on its marketing performance. However, market orientation as an antecedent seems to be largely ignored by international marketing literature. The reason for this is that market orientation is considered a proven indicator of enhanced performance in the local context (Julian, 2010). The effect of being close to both customers and competitors on market orientation and marketing performance indicators thus becomes evident.

## Literature Review

### Dimensions of Market Orientation

The market is the place where products are sold and earned in return. It consists of all potential customers who are willing and empowered to make changes to meet wants and needs. A real market is created when the wants and needs of potential customers are supported by their purchasing power (Hollensen, 2015).

Market orientation includes coordinated activities to meet the demands of all potential customers. The main motivation is not to produce and sell, but to identify and meet demands (Brassington and Pettitt, 2013). This understanding is most clearly demonstrated by the studies of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990). According to them, market orientation concerns not only the marketing function but the whole organization. Because all business functions are responsible for collecting, disseminating, and responding to market information. For this reason, all functions and processes must have the awareness of creating superior customer value (Ekber and Ahmadov, 2017).

According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), market orientation consists of three components. These are; *i*) intelligence generation, *ii*) sharing the information gathered (intelligence dissemination), and *iii*) feeling responsiveness to the demands of the market. Gathering information is the beginning of being market-oriented and is about identifying factors that influence the needs and preferences of the market. Therefore, it is more of a concept than customer demand. Information sharing is the sharing of collected information between business functions. Responsibility, on the other hand, requires being sensitive to market information and being able to take action before

competitors to fulfill the requirements of this information. Thus, market orientation refers to the collection of market information for customer needs by the company, its dissemination throughout the enterprise, and its response as a whole business.

According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation consists of three behavioral components and two decision criteria. These are; *i*) customer orientation, *ii*) competitor orientation, *iii*) inter-functional coordination, *iv*) long-term focus, and *v*) profitability. Behavioral components and decision criteria are conceptually closely related. However, since the decision criteria are not very valid in practice, they may find limited use in measuring market orientation.

The three prominent elements in Kohler and Jaworski's (1990) definitions and the three prominent elements in Narver and Slater's (1990) definitions show similarities. Slater and Narver (1994) also pointed out that each of the components of market orientation emphasizes information collection, dissemination, and responsibility within itself, and therefore their definitions parallel those of Kohli and Jaworski (Ekber and Ahmadov, 2017). However, studies show that market orientation dimensions defined by Narver and Slater (1990) have stronger validity and reliability and can conceptualize the structure in terms of capturing the customer value (Hilman and Kaliappen, 2014). It is stated that the dimensions also provide information about the way the company tends to the market and the degree of orientation (Bigne et al. 2000).

Another element that stands out in the definitions is related to whether the market orientation is a culture or a process. While Narver and Slater (1990) defines market orientation as organizational culture, some researchers (Deshpande et al., 1993; Shapiro, 1998) led by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define it as behavioral processes. According to Narver et al. (1998), market orientation refers to a business culture in which all employees are constantly determined to create superior value for customers. Those who think it is a behavioral process argue that culture guides behaviors and that if there are gaps in the understanding of creating superior customer value, market-oriented behavior cannot exist on its own, and argue that customer-oriented activities are a symptom of the organizational culture. Indeed, if no culture is adopted, the assumption that the behaviors cannot be applied correctly or will cover a temporary period seems more plausible (Ekber and Ahmadov, 2017). The general acceptance reached today is that market orientation is not only an element of behavioral processes but also an element of culture that encompasses values and beliefs (Hurley and Hult, 1998).

Another approach to the multidimensionality of market orientation is that the concept is only about customers and developing customer-oriented strategies (Ruekert, 1992). Strategy processes are carried out by considering customer demands and developing specific strategies to meet them. This definition excludes competitors by evaluating the market orientation only from the perspective of the customer. Marketing means

creating satisfied customers, and perceiving the company as competitor-oriented can reduce customer satisfaction. Moreover, even if competitor focus is aimed at providing customers with better products than competitors, it may result in companies turning towards competitors rather than customers. In this context, adopting customer-oriented as a culture and considering competitor-oriented within activities may result in a more accurate market focus. In other words, a customer-oriented culture is followed by a customer and competitor-oriented behaviors. Thus, customers will be satisfied when they know that competitor-oriented behaviors are the result of a customer-oriented culture, otherwise, they will have a negative perception (Ekber and Ahmadov, 2017).

Businesses prefer to be market-oriented due to their superior market and financial performance expectations. However, businesses have had limited success in developing such a culture. The main reason for this is their inability to have a market-oriented learning approach (Narver et al. 1998). Whereas, market knowledge is at the center of market orientation and requires the systematic collection and sharing of knowledge and their systematic use in strategy development and implementation stages. Thus, knowledge can be managed properly by creating superior customer value profitably and maintaining it (Stoelhors and van Raaij, 2004).

Those who do not include inter-functional coordination in market orientation, although it contributes to the successful execution of market focus, explain this situation by the fact that practical factors should not be included in the thinking. In researches on customers, it is seen that coordination between functions does not mean much for customers. In this context, the view that inter-functional coordination can only be considered as one of the antecedents required for successful execution of market-oriented behaviors comes to the fore (Ekber and Ahmadov, 2017). Hence, it is stated that inter-functional coordination can be considered as a mediator variable between behavioral and cultural perspectives (Alhakimi and Baharun, 2009).

On the other hand, while the business needs to focus more externally for customer oriented and competitor oriented, it is necessary to focus more internally for inter-functional coordination. This is a great challenge to be achieved. Because it is difficult to coordinate a salesperson who talks to a customer every day or can get information about a competitor, and employees who rarely meet with them and often see their colleagues, in line with common market goals (Fifield, 2007). For these reasons, the dimension of inter-functional coordination was excluded from the research.

Customer orientation and competitor orientation, which are two basic market orientation concepts, can provide a competitive advantage to businesses. In this context, businesses that analyze their customers and competitors well can gain a competitive advantage (Arlı, 2016). Marketing literature has largely focused on these two orientations. Businesses also turn to market orientation as a strategy to meet the

needs of customers, to increase their satisfaction and thus leave their competitors behind. (Hilman and Kaliappen, 2014).

### **Customer Orientation**

Customer focus is an activity that leads the business to understand the desires that customers express to obtain satisfactory products and services. Creating a superior value for customers requires an understanding of the entire value chain. Understanding customers, being determined to satisfy customers, and always monitoring customer needs and desires are features of customer focus (Adi et al., 2018).

Customer orientation is seeing the customer as the highest value. The two most fundamental principles of modern marketing thinking are customer value and customer satisfaction. The main indicator of the effectiveness of strategic applications in marketing activities is that the desire to satisfy the needs, expectations, and wishes of customers in the target market segment is accepted as the greatest value by all employees (Bulut et al. 2009).

Customer orientation is a set of belief that prioritizes the interests of the customer, without ignoring the interests of other stakeholders to create a profitable business in the long run (Deshpande et al. 1993). Customer orientation ensures that a firm understands its target buyers sufficiently and thus can continuously create superior value for them (Sorensen, 2009).

The importance of customer orientation in the marketing literature stems from its central role in achieving customer satisfaction and therefore organizational goals (Hollensen, 2015). Among the dimensions of market orientation, it is stated that only customer orientation has a direct positive effect on firm performance (Smirnova et al. 2012) and customer orientation contributes to business performance by first affecting market performance and thus determining financial performance (Zhu and Nakata, 2007).

### **Competitor Orientation**

A market-oriented organization should consider not only how well their products are suited to customer needs, but also how well they perform against their competitors and gather intelligence on competitors' abilities and strategies. This information is very important in understanding the market orientation levels and cultures of competitors (Alhakimi and Baharun, 2009). It also helps to understand competitor strategies, identify their strengths and weaknesses (Narver and Slater, 1990), and make sense of their decisions and activities (Day, 1994; Theodosiou et al. 2012).

To be able to anticipate the strategic moves of competitors and to learn about the market situations in order to differentiate, strengthens the strategic decisions to be

taken. For this reason, companies attach importance to obtaining information about their competitors as well as their customers to maintain their competitive advantage. In this context, competitor orientation can be used as an important tool to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of competitors in the short term, to identify potential competitors in the medium term, and to question all kinds of activities and values of competitors in the long term. Thus, it becomes possible to anticipate the capabilities and strategies that competitors can develop and to develop preventive mechanisms against these threats (Bulut et al. 2009).

Competitor-oriented companies evaluate their competitors in detail and use this information to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and high performance. Therefore, competitor-oriented companies need to develop an understanding and awareness of their competitors' market knowledge and marketing strategies. Competitor orientation helps the business to study competitor strategies and to finalize its own competitive strategy accordingly (Hilman and Kaliappen, 2014).

Competitor orientation requires companies to understand the long-term capabilities and strategies of their current and potential competitors, as well as their short-term strengths and weaknesses. An effective strategy in market orientation requires not only consideration of customers but also of competitor strategies. An unbalanced focus on competitors is also undesirable because too much interest in competition can make customers forget. Basically, customer orientation and competitor orientation are interrelated dimensions and integral is also a unity in the concept of market orientation. Therefore, sales people must gather information about competitors and discuss with company leaders about how competitors are developing their strategies (Adi et al., 2018).

### **Market Orientation and Performance**

Market orientation is considered as the heart of modern marketing management and marketing strategies. It is known that market orientation affects the performance of the company and has a positive effect on profitability. In this context, it can be said that an enterprise that increases its market orientation will increase its market performance (Narver and Slater, 1990).

There are many studies in the literature about the direct effects of being market-oriented on performance and competitive advantage. According to these studies, market-oriented companies can identify market requirements and changes accurately and quickly, and respond quickly and appropriately to demand and gain a competitive advantage. In this regard, it is thought that small and medium-sized companies are more advantageous for reasons such as being closer to the customer, being less formal, and the demands reaching the decision mechanisms more directly due to less hierarchy (Keskin, 2006).

The relationship between market orientation and business performance can be defined as the ability to understand and satisfy customers' wants and needs to create a sustainable competitive advantage. In other words, companies that know what their customers' current and future needs and wishes are, can develop long-term strategies that will enable them to take advantage of opportunities by strengthening their weaknesses and further developing their strengths, and create superior value for their customers and stakeholders by minimizing potential and current competitor threats. This path is a strategic way to create a sustainable competitive advantage (Julian et al.2014).

Market performance is related to the extent to which the market is focused (Ambler et al. 2001). The literature shows that a market-oriented culture indirectly affects financial performance through market performance, and this relationship is stronger in dynamic markets. It is known that market-oriented behaviors also have a significant positive effect on market performance (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). Its effects on business performance are also confirmed by numerous studies. However, there are a limited number of studies on the effects of market orientation on marketing performance (Eusebio et al. 2006; Julian et al. 2014; Frösen et al. 2016). This small number of studies document the positive effects of market orientation on performance (Sorensen, 2009; Pleshko and Cronin, 1997). Besides, the results show that offering more value to customers than competitors both improves market and marketing performance. This effect indicates that it is possible to positively affect the business performance through financial performance with the right marketing instruments.

A market-oriented company is in a good position to define the competition and to reach competitive advantages by using its resources and capabilities. Market orientation provides a strong competitive advantage because it requires a lot of time to implement and it is difficult to imitate. For this reason, this competitive feature of market-oriented businesses can act as a guide for companies seeking a rise in the market (Bigne et al. 2000).

Customer orientation works better in highly developed economies where competitor orientation offers little advantage. While it is possible to talk about a strong interaction between good local business conditions and customer focus, it can be said that under the same conditions, competitor orientation is weaker. Moreover, in a resource-rich market environment, customer focus provides stronger performance than competitiveness. But as resources become scarce, being competitor orientation becomes a must. Thus, a customer-oriented firm can expect better performance in developed markets characterized by good local business conditions, a high level of resource availability, and highly demanding customers. On the other hand, a competitor-oriented firm can expect better performance than customer-oriented in less developed markets characterized by poor local business conditions and lack of resources, in which there are no favorable



conditions for customer orientation. Competitor orientation can support the firm in gaining access to resources, complying with legal restrictions, and building useful links with other businesses and parties in local markets. In markets where these advantages are readily available, competitor orientation will not work well, as the costs to be paid for such efforts will exceed the benefits (Dev et al. 2009).

Marketing performance is related to the processes and results of marketing activities (Hacıoğlu, 2012). Performance evaluation generally includes decisions and actions towards customers and competitors. However, since the effects of these decisions and actions do not appear immediately and they are too open to internal/external effects, cause-and-effect linkages are interrupted in many cases. This is an important challenge for performance measurement (Clark, 2004).

The literature differs in the definition of the concept of marketing performance (Lamberti and Noci, 2010). For example, researchers define this concept in different ways such as; *i*) the ability to convert marketing inputs to marketing outputs (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007), *ii*) the ability to attract and retain profitable customers (Kotler et al., 2005; O'Sullivan and Abela, 2007), *iii*) the ability to create and maintain strategic alignment with non-marketing functions and all supply chain partners (Day, 1994; Srivastava et al. 1998), and *iv*) the ability to generate market knowledge, disseminate it to the whole organization and create a customer-oriented culture (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Day, 1994). Although there is no common opinion on this issue, the general acceptance is that marketing performance contains a multi-dimensional structure. Financial and non-financial criteria are used together in the measurement of marketing performance. Although the use of non-financial measures has become widespread over time, financial measures are still preferred more. Profit, sales, and cash flow are financial criteria that have been used frequently for a long time to evaluate marketing performance. Criteria such as market share and satisfaction are among the non-financial measures (Ambler et al. 2004; Ghiadi et al. 2020). All these dimensions also point to the relationship between marketing activities and business performance (Clark and Ambler, 2001).

Marketing performance aims to establish a three-dimensional structure consisting of marketing performance, effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability. Effectiveness, meaning “*doing the right things*”, shows the extent to which organizational goals and objectives have been achieved. Efficiency shows the relationship between performance results and the inputs they need and is related to “*doing things right*”. Adaptability refers to the firm’s ability to react to environmental changes. In this context, marketing performance consists of customer impact, market impact, financial impact, and impact on firm value. Through these sequential effects, marketing strategies and actions affect the firm’s assets and position, financial position in the short term and its value and

position in financial markets in the long term. It is assumed that this approach describes an overall marketing performance process and targets that are applicable to a certain extent for all firms regardless of the sector (Frösen et al. 2013).

According to the limited number of studies in the field in domestic and foreign literature, there is a statistically significant relationship between customer orientation, competitor orientation and marketing performance (Eusebio et al. 2006; Arlı, 2016). Focusing on competitors in a market where a customer-first strategy has a higher return, or similarly, focusing on customers in markets where competitive-priority strategies have higher returns decreases performance (Dev et al. 2009). On the other hand, the fact that market orientation is not related to low-cost strategies shows that when a firm's goal is to compete on a low cost basis, market orientation cannot be an ideal culture. This understanding means that market orientation cannot be a suitable culture for a defender type of organization whose core competence is operational efficiency (Menguc et al. 2007).

## Methodology

### Purpose and Scope

The study aims to examine the customer-oriented and competitor-oriented approaches of a company that has been leading its sector for many years and to determine their relationship with marketing performance. In the literature, no theoretical or empirical study reflects the market orientation dimensions of a firm *i)* nationwide, *ii)* based on years, and *iii)* from an employee-customer perspective. In this context, surveys were conducted with the regional directorates of the company for three consecutive years (2017, 2018, and 2019) in seven geographical regions (18 provinces) in Turkey. In this context, it is evaluated that the results to be achieved can be meaningful for all companies.

### The Sample

The sample of this research consists of the company's sales personnel and dealers across the country. In the study, company personnel is referred to as "employees" and dealers as "customers". A total of 648 survey data were used in the analysis. The surveys are evenly distributed according to years and the number of employees and customers. 7-point Likert scale was used in rating (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree).

### Measure and Data Collection

Data collection tool is a questionnaire form created by scanning the existing literature in detail, in the same content but two different formats. In the survey, the participants were asked six questions about the measurement of the customer orientation (CUSTO),

seven questions about the measurement of the competitor orientation (COMPO), and five questions about the measurement of the marketing performance (MP). The studies of Narver and Slater (1990), Homburg and Pflesser (2000), Sorensen (2009), and Hilman and Kaliappen (2014) were used in the preparation of customer and competitor orientations. In the preparation of marketing performance statements, Pelham (1997), Ambler et al. (2001), Gronholdt and Martensen (2006), and O’Sullivan et al. (2009) studies were used. In measuring marketing performance; increase in sales, profitability in sales, increase in the number of customers, and decrease in marketing cost items are used. The questions prepared were evaluated by two academicians and a company manager, and the comprehensibility of the questions was checked by conducting a pilot application with 5 people in two regional directorates. Participants stated that they did not have any problems in understanding the expression and content. The process was completed by sending the questionnaires to the relevant people via e-mail and collecting the completed questionnaires. There were 218 responses to 230 questionnaires sent in 2017, 223 to 240 questionnaires sent in 2018, and 221 to 240 questionnaires sent in 2019. 14 questionnaires were not evaluated due to missing data entries. Thanks to the fact that regional managers notified both their employees and sales dealers in advance and regularly sent reminder mails, a high participation rate was achieved. While determining the sales dealers, annual sales figures and their working time with the company were taken into account. Data collection was carried out in the last quarter of each year.

The questions directed to the employees and the questions directed to the customers in the survey are the same in terms of content but different in terms of form. For example, the question posed to employees; “*We aim unconditional customer satisfaction*”, the question posed to customers; it has been transformed into “*the firm attaches great importance to our satisfaction*”. Thus, it was ensured that the answers were suitable for comparative analysis.

### Research Model and Hypotheses

The model of the research was established to examine the relationship between the firm’s understanding of customer focus and competitor focus and marketing performance in order to achieve the desired goals (Figure 1).

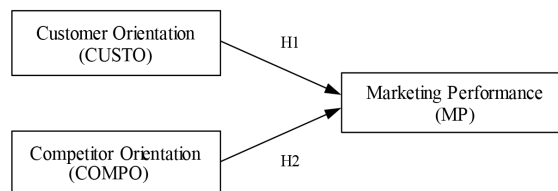


Figure 1. Research model

The research model was examined in line with two hypotheses. These;

H1: There is a positive relationship between customer orientation and marketing performance.

H2: There is a positive relationship between competitor orientation and marketing performance.

### **Data Analysis**

Exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation modeling were used in the analyses. IBM SPSS 25 was used for exploratory factor analysis and IBM AMOS 24 for confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

#### **Exploratory Factor Analysis**

Exploratory Factor Analysis is a powerful and multivariate statistical technique whose purpose is to define the basic structure between variables (Hair et al. 2014). In the exploratory factor analysis, first KMO values indicating whether the sample is suitable for testing were calculated. A KMO value of less than 0.50 indicates that the sample is unacceptable for factor analysis, the value of between 0.70-0.80 is middling appropriate, and a value of between 0.80-0.90 is meritorious appropriate (Kaiser, 1974). Calculated KMO values showed that the data could be factored at a medium-good level, while Bartlett's Sphericity Test values showed that the data were suitable for factor analysis ( $p < 0.05$ ).

In the analyses, the condition that the factor loadings should be greater than 0.50 was taken into consideration. According to Kline (1994), factor loads of 0.30 and below can be ignored, values between 0.30-0.60 are moderately high, and 0.60 and above are high loads. Calculated values indicate a high level (except one loading) factor analysis. As a result of the exploratory factor analysis, it was seen that all scales are one-dimensional. The expression on the MP scale was removed from the scale due to cross-loading. The results of the exploratory factor analysis carried out are presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Exploratory Factor Analysis*

Scale	Items	KMO	p	EV	%	$\alpha$	$\lambda$
Customer Orientation	Determining the wants and needs of the customer	0,832	<0,001	3,1	51,3	0,807	0,776
	Paying attention to the customer's thoughts						0,757
	Unconditional customer satisfaction targeting						0,742
	Measuring customer satisfaction regularly						0,741
	Continuous improvement of product and service quality						0,644
Regular customer visits	0,620						
Competitor Orientation	Keeping track of competitors	0,792	<0,001	3,6	51,4	0,833	0,797
	Keeping track of competitor products						0,784
	Differentiation in product / service compared to competitors						0,767
	Effective response to competitors' non-price competition						0,759
	Effective response to price competition of competitors						0,699
	Being more customer focused than competitors						0,611
Providing better products / services than competitors	0,564						
Marketing Performance	Decrease in marketing costs	0,805	<0,001	3,1	77,3	0,898	0,908
	Increase in the number of customers						0,906
	Increase in sales						0,874
	Profitability in sales						0,826

KMO: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin, p: significance, EV: eigenvalue, %: explained variance,  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's alpha,  $\lambda$ : factor loading

Cronbach's coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) is the most widely used measure for testing inter-item reliability (Jonsson, 2000). While values between 0.60-0.70 of the coefficient indicate the acceptable sub-region (Hair et al. 2014), the total variance explained is expected to be greater than 50% (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017). Calculated Cronbach's alphas show that scales are reliable and scales measured accurately.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is used to test whether the observed variables form a latent variable or whether the relationships defined between the latent variables exist (Hoyle, 1995). It is a powerful tool to better understand the structure of the data, and also can be used to simplify analyses of a large set of variables (Hair et al. 2014).

It was conducted with Confirmatory factor analysis to determine whether the proposed model was statistically significant or not, and within this scope, the goodness-of-fit indexes were calculated. The goodness-of-fit criteria preferred to evaluate market orientation and marketing performance model fit in the literature (Keskin, 2006; Limankrisna and Yoserizal, 2016; Rosmayani et al. 2016) and acceptable levels are seen in Table 2.

Table 2

*Goodness-of-fit criteria*

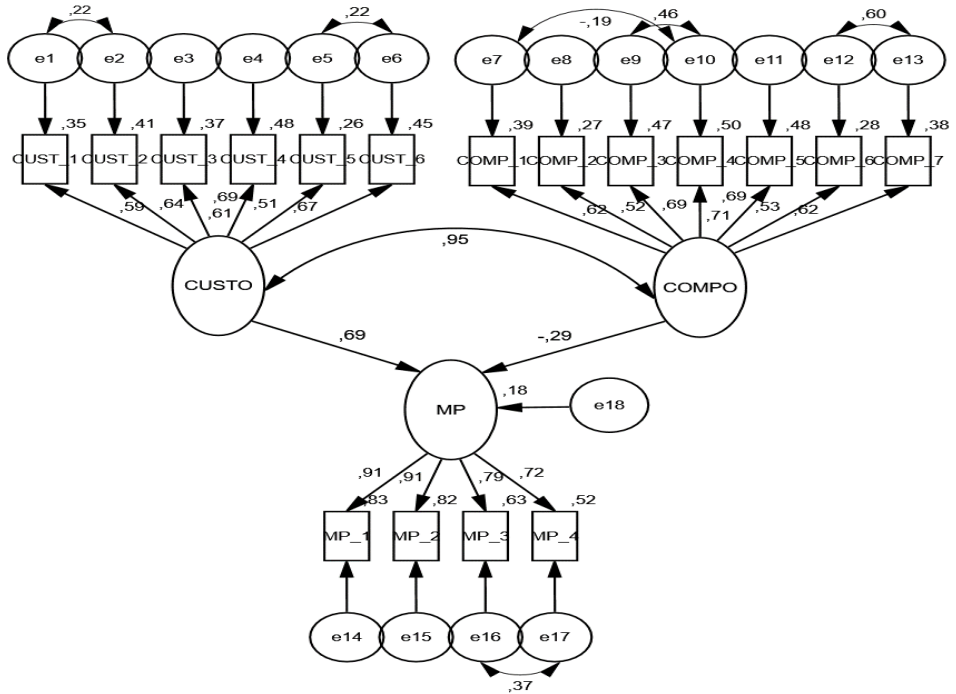
Goodness-of-fit index*			CUSTO	COMPO	MP
<i>Acceptable</i>	————→	<i>Good</i>			
<5	$\chi^2/sd$	<2	3,703	2,566	0,030
<0,08	RMSEA	<0,05	0,065	0,049	0,000
>0,90	GFI	>0,95	0,987	0,987	1,000
>0,90	AGFI	>0,95	0,961	0,968	1,000
>0,90	CFI	>0,95	0,981	0,990	1,000
>0,90	NFI	>0,95	0,975	0,984	1,000
>0,95	RFI	>0,98	0,946	0,970	1,000
>0,95	IFI	>0,98	0,982	0,990	1,000

\* Sources: Çapık (2014), Tan et al. (2007), Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003)

The most important determinant used in evaluating statistical significance in confirmatory factor analysis is the  $\chi^2$  value. For model significance, the  $\chi^2$  value is expected to be low and the p significance level is expected to be greater than 0.05. However, because the value of  $\chi^2$  increases as the sample size increases, when working with large samples the value of  $\chi^2 / sd$  corrected with degrees of freedom (df) (Büyükkelik et al. 2014). This value, which should be between 0-5, was found to be 3.703 for CUSTO, 2.566 for COMPO, and 0.030 for MP. The indexes show that an acceptable level of compliance is achieved, so the models are statistically valid.

### Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a technique that allows separate relationships for each of a set of dependent variables. In its simplest sense, structural equation modeling provides the appropriate and most efficient estimation technique for a series of separate multiple regression equations estimated simultaneously. It is characterized by two basic components: i) the structural model and ii) the measurement model (Hair et al. 2014). The observed variables and the error values of these variables, the standardized regression weights between the unobserved variables and the observed variables, and the correlations between the unobservable variables are seen in the structural equation model Figure 2.



CMIN=309,409; DF=110; CMIN/DF=2,813; p=,000; RMSEA=,053; CFI=,963; GFI=,943; AGFI=,921

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

Two hypotheses of the research were tested in the structural model. The results obtained from the model show that the model is compatible, the goodness-of-fit indexes ( $CMIN=309,409$ ,  $DF=110$ ,  $CMIN/DF=2,813$ ,  $GFI=0.943$ ,  $AGFI=0.921$ ,  $CFI=0.963$ ,  $NFI=0.944$ ,  $RFI=0.931$ ,  $IFI=0.963$ ,  $RMSEA=0.053$ ) is observed to be within the desired limits. The path coefficient between CUSTO and MP was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta=0.687$ ,  $p=0.044$ ), so the H1 hypothesis was supported. The path coefficient between COMPO and MP is not found to be statistically significant ( $\beta=-0.288$ ,  $p=0.392$ ), so the H2 hypothesis is not supported. The measurement model and structural equation model results are seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Measurement Model and Structural Equation Model

Measurement Model	Scale/Items	β1	β2	S.E.	C.R.	P
Determining the wants and needs of the customer	<--- CUST_1	0,591	1			
Paying attention to the customer's thoughts	<--- CUST_2	0,638	1,055	0,07	14,482	<0,001
Unconditional customer satisfaction targeting	<--- CUST_3	0,606	1,034	0,08	12,251	<0,001
Measuring customer satisfaction regularly	<--- CUST_4	0,691	1,252	0,09	13,426	<0,001
Continuous improvement of product and service quality	<--- CUST_5	0,505	0,746	0,07	10,605	<0,001
Regular customer visits	<--- CUST_6	0,671	1,088	0,08	13,147	<0,001
Keeping track of competitors	<--- COMP_1	0,621	1			
Keeping track of competitor products	<--- COMP_2	0,522	0,832	0,07	11,285	<0,001
Differentiation in product / service compared to competitors	<--- COMP_3	0,685	1,121	0,08	13,889	<0,001
Effective response to competitors' non-price competition	<--- COMP_4	0,709	1,211	0,09	13,182	<0,001
Effective response to price competition of competitors	<--- COMP_5	0,690	1,194	0,09	14,021	<0,001
Being more customer focused than competitors	<--- COMP_6	0,528	1,010	0,09	11,368	<0,001
Providing better products / services than competitors	<--- COMP_7	0,618	1,207	0,09	12,919	<0,001
Decrease in marketing costs	<--- MP_1	0,721	1			
Increase in the number of customers	<--- MP_2	0,792	1,076	0,04	24,501	<0,001
Increase in sales	<--- MP_3	0,908	1,156	0,05	22,159	<0,001
Profitability in sales	<--- MP_4	0,913	1,207	0,05	22,225	<0,001
Structural Equation Model						
MP	<--- CUSTO	0,687	0,976	0,49	2,012	0,044
MP	<--- COMPO	-0,29	-0,423	0,49	-0,856	0,392

Findings

In the interpretation of the findings, GDP (Gross Domestic Product) data announced by TÜİK (Turkish Statistical Institute) were taken into consideration (Figure 3). According to this; the first (2017) and the second (2018) measurements were made during the period of economic growth, and the third (2019) measurement during the period of recession. Since the measurements are made in the last quarters, it can be said that it mostly measures the developments in the first three quarters.

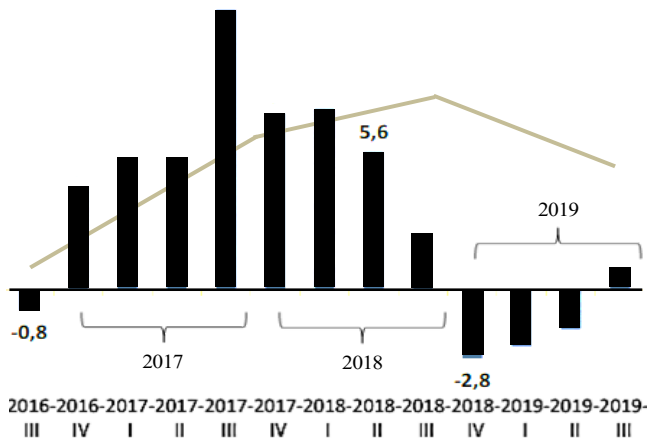


Figure 3. Turkey GDP Annual Growth Rates (www.tradingeconomics.com/turkey/gdp-growth-annual)



In the light of these evaluations, employee (P) and customer (C) evaluation averages for the 2017 growth period and 2019 recession period are shown in Figure 4. In the figure, it can be seen from the perspective of both employees and customers that while CUSTO and MP values decreased from 2017 to 2019, COMPO values increased. This result shows that customer-oriented approaches are prominent in the growth period and that the marketing performance was high, in the recession period, the competitive focus was high and the marketing performance was low. Results, Dev et al. (2009) can be evaluated as the verification of the results reached by an industry leader firm.

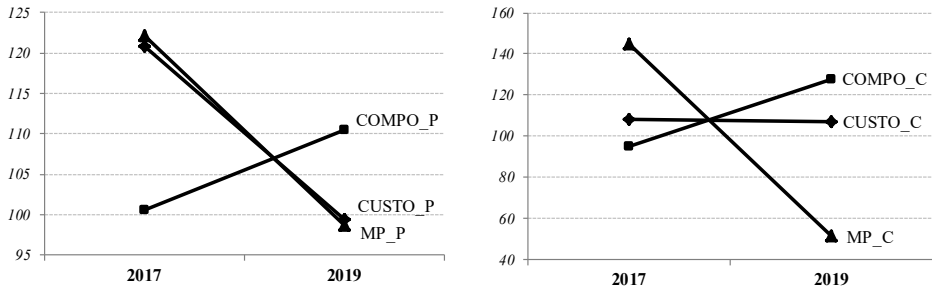


Figure 4. 2017 ve 2019 employee (P) ve customer (C) assessments

The Mann-Whitney U Test reveals that the dimensions of COMPO\_P and MP\_P from the employee perspective and the COMPO\_C and MP\_C dimensions from the customer perspective differ significantly between 2017 and 2019 (Table 4). Although both occurred in the direction of decrease, the difference in CUSTO\_P dimension ( $p=0.015$ ), which was found significant by the employees, was not found significant on the CUSTO\_C side ( $p=0.891$ ). This finding is extremely important as it shows that the customer-oriented approach of the industry-leading company does not contain a significant difference in the eyes of the customer between the periods of growth and recession. The difference in the focus of the competitor was not significant on the COMPO\_P side ( $p=0,266$ ), while it was significant on the COMPO\_C side ( $p<0,001$ ). This finding shows that although the firm thinks that there is no change in its understanding of competitor focus, the customer thinks the opposite, that is, the firm's tendency to focus on competitors has increased. The fact that the CUSTO\_C result has close averages during the growth and recession periods and does not contain significant differences reveals that the company is considered to be constantly customer-oriented in the eyes of the customer. Here, it would be appropriate to say that the company does not face danger in terms of the risks that may arise as a result of the client's more competitor-oriented evaluation of the company, which is noted in the literature.

There are significant differences in the MP dimension between the periods of macroeconomic growth and recession. Thus, this difference is significant at  $p<0.001$  level according to customer evaluation.

Table 4

Mann-Whitney U test results (2017-2019)

Test statistics*	CUSTO_P	CUSTO_C	COMPO_P	COMPO_C	MP_P	MP_C
Mann-Whitney U	4140,5	5464	4698,5	3834	4036	707,5
Wilcoxon W	13731,5	9119	7548,5	12349	13627	4362,5
Z	-2,425	-0,137	-1,112	-3,8	-2,658	-11,035
Sig. (2-tailed)	0,015	0,891	0,266	0,000	0,008	0,000

\* Grouping variable: Year

The second unit of analysis is the study of CUSTO, COMPO and MP relationships on the basis of 7 geographic regions and from employee-customer perspectives. In this context, while an increase or balance situation was observed in dimensions in 2017 and 2018, the decreases in all averages in 2019 are remarkable (Figure 5). Special emphasis should be placed on MP\_C here. Because the level of marketing performance achieved in 2017 is constantly decreasing in the following years. It is thought-provoking, especially in 2018, when there was growth. Whether this decrease in performance figures can be considered as a warning sign from the field about the state of the market is an issue that should be considered.

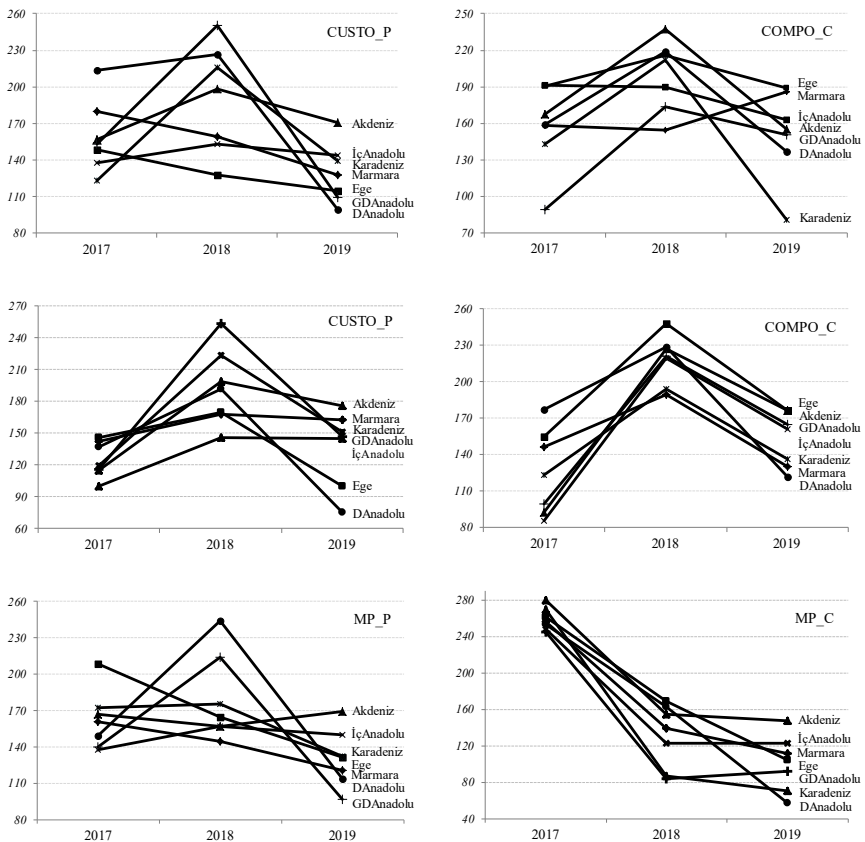


Figure 5. Employee (P) and customer (C) assessments by years and regions

Kruskal Wallis test results for the years 2017-2018-2019 indicate significant regional differences (Table 5). The results show that there is a significant difference between the regions in terms of employees in 2018 for CUSTO\_P ( $p=0.010$ ) and MP\_P ( $p=0.025$ ), and in 2019 for COMPO\_P ( $p=0.023$ ). In terms of customers, it shows that there are significant differences for CUSTO\_C ( $p=0.024$ ) in 2018 and for COMPO\_C ( $p=0.019$ ) in 2017. In the MP\_C dimension, there was no significant difference between regions for all three years. It can be thought that the positive growth figures of 2018, which were lower than the previous year, may be one of the reasons for the difference. In this context, it can be concluded that 2017 and 2019 are more balanced, and 2018, which is the transition period, is a relatively unstable year.

Table 5

*Kruskal Wallis Test results (seven geographical region)*

Test statistics*	CUSTO_P			CUSTO_C			COMPO_P			COMPO_C			MP_P			MP_C		
	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019	2017	2018	2019
Kruskal-Wallis H	7,37	16,86	6,34	8,40	14,57	7,30	3,38	10,82	14,71	15,19	8,31	10,63	4,43	14,50	8,05	4,31	10,75	9,69
Sig. (p)	0,29	0,01	0,39	0,21	0,02	0,29	0,76	0,09	0,02	0,02	0,22	0,10	0,62	0,03	0,23	0,64	0,10	0,14

\* Grouping variables: Geographical regions

When the regional results are evaluated together, it is seen that a harmonious structure can be maintained between employees and customers across the country during periods of growth and recession. Based on this, it is seen that a determined attitude can be achieved together as a company against macroeconomic realizations. This behavior indicates the existence of a management approach that is determined to implement the marketing strategy throughout the country. While measurements made in 18 provinces in 7 regions may be expected to reveal a more unstable structure, the fact that the differences stem from a limited number of provinces can be considered as an indicator of this harmony. Based on Sorensen's (2009) opinion that predisposition for creating the proper firm activities can create superior performance, it can be said that this harmony contributes positively to the performance of the industry leader.

## Conclusions and Implications

The results of the research have revealed valuable findings in terms of understanding the perspective and approach style of a company that has managed to be at the forefront of the competition as the industry leader for many years. The fact that the measurements coincided with the country's macroeconomic growth and recession periods made these evaluations more meaningful. The findings confirm the significant positive correlation of customer orientation with marketing performance. This result is highly consistent with the literature (Dev et al. 2009; Eusebio et al. 2006; Arlı, 2016; Zhu and Nakata, 2007; Nwokah, 2009; Mokhtaran and Komeilian, 2016). However, a similar relationship with competitor orientation could not be detected. Moreover, although there are studies

in the literature that find the relationship between competitor orientation and marketing performance positive (Runing et al., 2014; Sugiyarti, 2018; Julian, 2010; Eusebio et al. 2006), the number of studies in the opposite direction, that is, the number of studies similar to the findings obtained in this study, is also limited. (Lee et al. 2016). This point shows that the competitor-oriented approach may not emerge as an effective factor on performance in the industry-leading company as it does in others. This is a remarkable finding.

Although there is a positive relationship between growth and recession periods according to customer evaluation, the fact that this relationship is not meaningful shows that the marketing performance of the company may decrease despite displaying customer-oriented behaviors. Here, it has been determined that customer orientation cannot prevent performance decline under macroeconomic effects. However, maintaining customer orientation even in times of recession is meaningful as the customer-oriented behavior indicates strong cultural support of the firm. Due to the lack of long-term studies involving growth and recession periods in the literature, no study was found to confirm or deny this finding.

Another result reveals that the firm tends towards more customer-oriented behaviors during macroeconomic growth periods, and more towards competitor-oriented behaviors in times of recession. This result is in line with the findings Gao et al. (2007), Dev et al. (2009), and Theodosiou et al. (2012). The reason for this can be explained by the difficulties in accessing the necessary resources to survive in the recession periods, the more curious about what competitors are doing and therefore the need for more questioning. In this context, the study provides valuable insights with the findings obtained by industry leader especially on the growth and recession periods.

Finally, the harmony observed between regions and close evaluations is remarkable. This compliance may be due to the firm's marketing policies understanding and managing the customer demands and regional differences correctly. Similar findings are also expressed in Sorensen's (2009), Slatter and Narver (1994), Conduit and Mavondo (2001), Farrell and Oczkowski (2003), and Langerak (2003) studies. It can be said that this result is an issue that should be dwelled on sensitively, especially for companies that target sector leadership. This understanding can be evaluated as behavioral manifestations that are expected from an industry leader and derive their strength from the business culture based on walking together and in harmony with the goals. It is clear that customer and competitor-oriented approaches are strengthened by the strategic and cultural orientations of the business and the effect of these trends cannot be ignored due to their effects on marketing performance.

## Constraint and Recommendation

The research was conducted in an industry-leading company, between the company's sales group employees and their customers. This situation, which is based on a conscious choice but appears to be a constraint, will provide an advantage to compare the market-oriented behaviors and marketing performances of the industry-leading companies through researches with leading companies in different sectors. With this and similar advantages, the study is desired to present a different perspective to the field. Spreading the research over three years and coinciding with the periods of macroeconomic growth and recession makes the study unique. It will be possible to reach more valuable findings by conducting subsequent studies for other industry leaders.

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