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## Marketing Competency and Market Orientation among Asean Tropical Fruit Producers

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Analysis through survey was done by focusing on the perceptions of managers in the tropical fruits companies. Data were collected from three countries namely Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. **Objective:** Analyses between market orientation and marketing competency in the tropical fruits industry were conducted by exploring the marketing activities and marketing issues faced by fruit producers. **Results:** The factor analyses of market orientation resulted in three factors contributing 60.47% of the total variance explained which are "competitor and customer orientation", "integrated business functions" and "business commitment". For market competency, two factors such as "market share and sales" and "marketing experience and knowledge" contributed 78.80% of the total variance explained. Integrated business function is positively related to one dimension of marketing competency, i.e. market share and sales. **Conclusion:** The study highlights the variable to marketing competency which is lacking empirically. For instance, integrated business functions contributed significantly to marketing competency in term of market share and sales of companies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The tropical fruits industry in Malaysia is still in its growth stage and the production of some fruits and exports is still comparatively small. However, demand for tropical fruits from the world markets is increasing. For instance, Malaysia is the market leader for fruits such as star fruit and tropical fruits like pomelo, dragon fruit and pineapple also possess substantial potential (Tih, Azhar and Mohd Fauzi, 2008).

The key issue in Malaysia is the small and scattered supply of fruit production. This issue can be tackled by effectively rearrange and consolidate the fruit supply. In order to do so, a more understanding of the marketing practices of tropical fruits producers and exporters among our close competitors need to be assessed particularly what happens in the farms right until it reaches the target market. The countries are selected based on their important roles in the tropical fruit business in Asean region.

### Research Objectives:

This paper examines the market orientation and the marketing practices in relation to marketing competency in the selected Asean tropical fruit organizations. Thus, this study embarks on the following objectives:

- i. To identify the relationship between market orientation and marketing competency among tropical fruits organizations.
- ii. To identify the level of marketing activities perform by the tropical fruits organizations.
- iii. To determine the range of problem faced by tropical fruits organizations.

With the improvement in agricultural development, tropical fruits are potentially produced with significant influence of the seasonality effect; therefore, it enables better control of supply and channel management. As it is now, Malaysia has abundance supply of these fruits and the government is trying to increase the volume of exports particularly to the European countries. In order to successfully penetrate the European market, the Malaysian fruit exporters need to learn from their counterparts in other tropical countries that have successfully marketed their fruits in Europe such as Thailand and Indonesia. The marketing practices of the producers and

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exporters in terms of fruit growing, harvesting, grading, packaging, storing and exporting need to be carefully examined.

Prior research of marketing orientation has focused on market orientation construct development, antecedents to market orientation, and the impact of market orientation on a firm's performance (Kirca, *et al.*, 2005; Pelham, 2000). Although some researchers have related firms' competencies in their research, there is still lack attention given to the relationship between market orientation and marketing competency (Prasad, Ramamurthy and Naidu, 2001).

#### **Literature review:**

##### **Tropical Fruits Industry:**

The major tropical fruit exporters from Asia are Malaysia, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, China, Taiwan and the Philippines (Datamonitor, 2008). Europe remains the main market for tropical fruit, with France a major importer and Netherlands as Europe's hub for imported tropical fruit.

Different types of tropical fruits that are commonly available include star fruits, dragon fruits, papaya, pineapple, mango, pomelo, rambutan, mangosteen, durian, jackfruit, longan, water melon, and honey dew. Traditionally agriculture, forestry, and fishing were the main sectors of the Malaysian, Thailand, and Indonesia (Datamonitor, 2008). Indonesia is one of the largest producer and consumer of agriculture products in continent and has been an agriculture intensive country. Agriculture represents:

- 8.5% of Malaysian GDP
- 11.4% of Thailand GDP
- 13% of Indonesia GDP

##### **Marketing Competency:**

The literature offers various definitions of competency depending from which perspective. In the field of strategy, there are two major paradigms used to explain competencies: the competitive forces view (Porter, 1985) and the resource based view (Newbert, S. L., 2007; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). Marketing competency refers to an assessment of how well or poorly firms perform marketing related activities compared with their competitors (Miles & Snow, 1978; Julien and Ramangalahy, 2003).

Prasad, Ramamurthy, and Naidu (2001) said that marketing competency is a distinctive competency referring to an assessment of how well firms perform specific marketing-related activities compared to their competitors Selnes (1992) stated that profitability objectives in marketing in most companies are stated in terms of sales or volume. Thus, marketing competency is viewed as profitability performance of products and customers.

Stoner (1987) said distinctive competencies are skills, activities, or capabilities that a business is uniquely good at in comparison of others. Thus, marketing competency can be considered distinctive competency as a strategic approach for tropical fruits organizations in order to gain competitive advantage. Knowledge, skills, and experience were the most often noted distinctive competence. In this study, the marketing competency is the marketing experience and knowledge of the employees as well as the objective measures of performance, such as market share and sales.

##### **Market Orientation:**

According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), market orientation is categorized in term of three dimensions consisting of generation of market information, information dissemination, and organization-wide responsiveness. Narver and Slater (1990) defined market orientation as an organizational culture that creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value effectively and efficiently for buyer and, thus, continuous performance for the organization. They stated that market orientation refers to the firm's commitment to the creation and delivery of superior value to customers and co-ordinate activities and processes to achieve this purpose.

Market orientation is concerned primarily with the development of market understanding throughout an organization (Hooley, Saunders and Piercy, 2004). Moreover, market orientation consists of customer orientation, competitor orientation, interfunctional co-ordination, organizational culture, and long-term profit focus. Companies that are market oriented, emphasize on meeting the needs and creating value for the customer, and the importance of information within the organization (Laferty and Hult, 2001). Barney (1991) suggested that market orientation is not imitable due to the requirement that may be beyond the capabilities of many firms. To be market oriented firms, companies follow specific and identifiable routines and processes. However, Guo (2002) argued that future research should focus on the mechanisms by which market orientation leads to performance.

Market orientation emerges as a significant antecedent of performance and is recognized to contribute to long-term success (Despande and Farley, 1999; Grewal and Tansuhaj, 2001). Similarly, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) proposed that the effective implementation of market orientation results in a superior competitive

advantage. Market orientation empirically is associated with superior performance and thus, benefits the organization (Hult and Ketchen, 2001). Slater and Narver (1994) reported a positive relationship of the three components of market orientation on assets, sales growth, and new product success relative to the competitors in the market served.

In conclusion, studies have shown that a firm's market orientation is an organizational capability that impacts organizational performance, including marketing competency. Furthermore, in general, a positive relationship between market orientation and business performance in different types of markets has been found in several empirical studies. Implicitly, these investigations assume that those firms that have practice market orientation are better than their competitors in term of performance (Prasad *et al.*, 2001). However, according to them, none of the previous studies has explicitly focused on marketing competency as performance measures.

### Methodology:

A survey was conducted among the selected managers from tropical fruits companies in Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, through self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the managers after they have been contacted and give consent to participate in the survey. Each survey package included a personalized letter outlining the overall purpose of the study, a survey questionnaire, and a postage-paid enveloped (if involved mail). A six-point Likert scale is used labeled as follows: (1) "strongly disagree", (2) "moderately disagree", (3) "disagree", (4) "agree", (5) "moderately agree", (6) "strongly agree". The questionnaire was pre-tested with academics and graduate students until no significant ambiguities were reported, suggesting evidence of content validity. Respondent would take about fifteen minutes to answer the questionnaire.

Altogether, 76 completed questionnaires were collected. However, 75 completed questionnaires were analyzed for the study purposes, as one questionnaire was excluded from the analysis as it contained more than 25% missing value. Then, the data were analyzed using the SPSS procedures.

### Analysis and results:

#### Respondents' Profile:

The profile of respondents is shown in Table 1. The data was collected through contact and consent approach; however the response rate was low if based on the list of tropical fruits organization due to incomplete addresses and contact numbers. Overall, the samples were from Malaysia (30 respondents), Thailand (25 respondents), and Indonesia (20 respondents). From the analysis, most of the companies are independently owned (88%) and the companies performed several roles in the tropical fruits industry such producers (50.7%), exporters (53.3%), traders (41.3%) and wholesalers (36%). In addition, most of the companies have been in existence for more than 10 years (66.7%) and 56.7% of them employed more than 20 staff.

**Table 1:** Company's Profiles (N = 75).

Company Characteristics	Freq	Company Characteristics	Freq
<i>Respondents' Country:</i>		<i>Staff w Mktg Experienced:</i>	
- Malaysia	30	- 0 – 20%	51
- Thailand	25	- 21 – 40%	11
- Indonesia	20	- 41 – 60%	6
		- 61 – 80%	4
		- 81 – 100%	3
<i>Role in Fruits Distribution:</i>	38	<i>Age of Company:</i>	
- Producer	40	- Less than 5 years	9
- Exporter	27	- 5 – 9 years	16
- Wholesaler	19	- 10 – 14 years	14
- Retailer	31	- 15 – 24 years	20
- Trader		- 25 years & above	16
<i>Structure of Business:</i>		<i>Number of Employees:</i>	24
- Independent-owned	66	- Less than 5	10
- Subsidiary of local co	5	- 6 – 10	12
- Subsidiary of foreign co	2	- 11 – 25	11
- JV with local co	2	- 26 – 50	18
- JV with foreign co	1	- Over 50	
- Government Agency	2		

#### Exploratory Factor Analysis:

A factor analysis on the 14 items of market orientation construct resulted in three factors that have eigen values more than one. These three factors contributed 60.47% of to total variance explained in which the first factor contributed 25.65% to the total variance. The measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) is 0.74 and Bartlett's test of Sphericity is significant (Chi-square = 452.955,  $p < 0.001$ ) which indicate that the items related to market orientation are appropriate for factor analysis. The factor loadings of the items in the three factors are between

0.487 and 0.852. As shown in Table 2, the three factors are labeled as follows: competitor and customer orientation, integrated business functions, and business commitment.

**Table 2:** Factors for Market Orientation

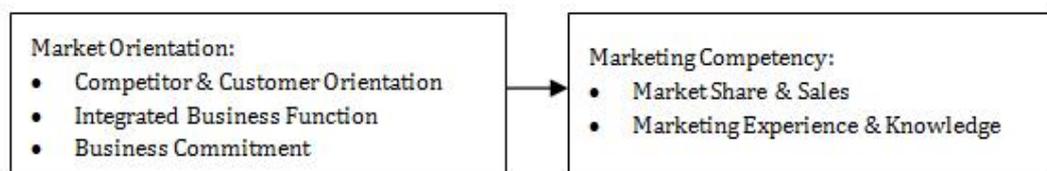
Variables	F1	F2	F3
Factor 1 – Competitor & Customer Orientation			
Discusses competitor strategies	0.85		
Business units share resources	0.81		
Target opportunities for competitive advantage	0.79		
Close attention to after sales service	0.77		
Objective driven by customer satisfaction	0.69		
Salespeople share competitor's information			
Factor 2 – Integrated Business Functions			
Integrated business functions		0.79	
Comp advantage understanding customer needs		0.72	
Communicate customer information		0.69	
Frequently measures customer satisfaction		0.66	
Factor 3 – Business Commitment			0.77
Monitor & assess commitment			0.71
Create value for customers			0.65
Respond to competitive actions			0.52
Business strategies driven by customer value			
Eigenvalues	3.59	2.69	2.20
Percentage of Variance	25.65	19.23	15.60

A factor analysis on the five items of marketing competency construct resulted in two factors that have Eigen values more than one. These two factors contributed 78.80% of total variance explained in which the first factor contributed 49.47% to the total variance. The measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) is 0.69 and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (Chi-square = 247.178,  $p < 0.001$ ) which indicate that the items related to market orientation are appropriate for factor analysis. The factors are labeled as market share and sales, and marketing knowledge and experience. Table 3 shows the two factors, items in each factor and its loadings.

**Table 3:** Factors for Market Competency.

Variables	F1	F2
Factor 1 – Market Share and Sales		
Satisfactory overall market share	0.95	
Satisfactory overall sales growth	0.93	
Satisfactory overall sales volume	0.93	
Factor 2 – Marketing Experience and Knowledge		
More experience employees enhance business success		0.93
More knowledgeable company enhance business success		0.91
Total Variance Explained	53.29	34.45
Eigenvalues	2.67	1.72

Based on the factor analysis for the main variables, the framework for this study has been revised. Figure 2 shows the revised framework consisting of three components of market orientation and two components of marketing competency. From the results of the factor analysis, some new variables have been created for the study.



**Fig. 1:** Conceptual Framework.

Five factors produced by the explanatory factor analyses were analyzed individually and each of them was treated as variable. Therefore, each of these variables was tested for reliability before considered in the subsequent analysis. Reliability of measures was estimated using the internal consistency approach. This study utilized Cronbach's coefficient alpha because of its popularity in the marketing literature. All scales except business commitment scales were found to exceed the minimum threshold of 0.7 suggested by Nunnally (1978). However, the reliability for business commitment which is 0.674 is still above acceptable level of 0.50 which is the minimum requirement according to Sekaran (2003). Pearson correlation is used to explore the strength of the

relationship between variables (Pallant, 2007). Table 4 provides a summary of the results from correlational analysis. The correlation values of  $\pm 0.5$  and above reflect strong correlations between two variables.

**Table 4:** Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, and Correlation Matrix (N= 75).

Construct	MOF1	MOF2	MOF3	MCF1	MCF2
Competitors and Customer Orientation (MOF1)	1.00				
Integrated Business Function (MOF2)	.22*	1.00			
Bus Commitment (MOF3)	.41**	.38**	1.00		
Market Share and Sales (MCF1)	-.03	.48**	.13	1.00	
Mktg Knowledge and Experience (MCF2)	.37**	.23*	.20*	.20*	1.00
Mean	4.16	4.74	5.05	4.06	4.40
Standard Deviation	1.14	0.92	0.83	1.05	1.24
Reliability (Alpha)	0.85	0.72	0.67	0.934	0.83

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed)

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable. The first dimension of marketing competency in term of market share and sales was regressed on the three factors of market orientation. Table 5 shows the regression of market share and sales on the five independent variables.

**Table 5:** Influence of Market Orientation on Market Share and Sales.

Independent variables	Standardized Beta	T value	Sig. p	Hypotheses
MO F1	-.251	-1.591	.116	H1a
MO F2	.380**	2.959	.004	H2a
MO F3	.030	.229	.819	H3a

$R^2 = 0.260$ , Adj.  $R^2 = 0.206$ , Sig.  $F = 001$

\*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$

\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$

There is significant and positive relationship between integrated business function and market share and sales ( $\beta = 0.380$ ). The adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.206, means that this model is predicting 20.6% of the variance in market share and sales. This indicates that the combination of these variables significantly ( $p < .001$ ) predicts the dependent variable. Integrated business functions are significantly related to marketing competency in term of market share and sales. Thus, 38.0% variation in market share and sales are contributed by integrated business function. This result is statistically significant at  $F(5, 69) = 4.841$   $p$  at the 0.001 level. Thus, hypothesis 2a was supported. The results also show that other market orientation dimensions, i.e. competitors and customer orientation, and business commitment are not significant which indicates that these variables do not contribute to the variance in the dependent variable.

The second dimension of marketing competency; marketing knowledge and experience was regressed on the three factors of market orientation. Table 6 shows the regression of marketing knowledge and experience on the three independent variables.

**Table 6:** Influence of Market Orientation on Marketing Knowledge and Experience

Independent variables	Standardized Beta	T value	Sig. p	Hypotheses
MO F1	-.030	-.193	.847	H1b
MO F2	.130	1.028	.308	H2b
MO F3	.111	.853	.397	H3b

$R^2 = 0.278$ , Adj.  $R^2 = 0.226$ , Sig.  $F = 000$

\*\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.001$

\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$

\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$

The results show that market orientation dimensions, i.e. competitors and customer orientation, integrated business function, and business commitment are not significant which indicates that market orientation does not contribute to the variance in the dependent variable. The Durbin Watson test is carried out and shows there is no autocorrelation. Tolerance value, the variance inflation factor (VIF) and the condition index for all the independent variables indicate that multicollinearity does not exist (i.e. tolerance value  $> 0.10$  and VIF  $< 10$ ). Summary of the results from multiple regression is shown in Table 7.

**Table 7:** Summary of Hypotheses Testing.

Hypotheses	Description	Results	$\beta$ value
H1a	Competitors and customer orientation is positively related to market share and sales.	Rejected	-.251

H1b	Competitors and customer orientation is positively related to marketing knowledge and experience.	Rejected	-.030
H2a	Integrated business function is positively related to market share and sales.	Accepted	.380**
H2b	Integrated business function a is positively related to marketing knowledge and experience	Rejected	.130
H3a	Business commitment is positively related to market share and sales.	Rejected	.030
H3b	Business commitment is positively related to marketing knowledge and experience.	Rejected	.111

### Discussions:

Only one dimension of market orientation, i.e. integrated business function significantly relates to market competency. The study has shown that integrated business function (i.e. market orientation, Factor 1) has a strong positive relationship with market share and sales. Besides, business commitment has a strong positive relationship with market share and sales as well.

Furthermore, integrated business function is significantly related to market share and sales. This finding is in line with previous research that found market orientation to be significantly related to performance measures (e.g. Narver & Slater, 1990) and to sales growth (Slater & Narver, 1994). However, competitor and customer orientation is not significantly related to both dimensions of marketing competency. This is in line with previous research that found non-significant relationship between competitor and customer orientation and marketing competency (e.g. Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Though, previous research suggests that market orientation components to be equally important (Narver & Slater, 1990).

To what extent do tropical fruits organizations practice marketing activities areas? Most of the tropical fruits organization do practice marketing activities. They practice marketing activities in various level, from low level of practice to high level of practice. However, there are still tropical fruits organizations that do not practice marketing activities especially those activities that are seemed important to the organizations, such as maintaining relationship with buyers, utilising marketing promotion tools, and controlling supply chain.

However, there are organizations that put emphasis in practicing marketing activities, especially areas that are considered important to maintain company's effectiveness. For instance, maintaining relationship with personnel and growers, maintain good relationship with buyers, and integrating with growers or managing own orchards.

### Implications and Conclusions:

The results of this study would not only enhance the literature of marketing practices in the tropical fruit industry but also benefit the local fruit producers and exporters. It also helps policy makers and government agencies in setting the priority market segments in foreign markets and identifying areas that needs assistance for local suppliers in terms of supply restructuring, marketing practices and product development.

The research seeks to examine the influence of market orientation, market segmentation, and differentiation on marketing competency. The study contributes to highlight study of this variable to marketing competency which is lacking empirically. Theoretically, this research contributes to market orientation study by adding more empirical evidence on its literature especially on studying variable roles.

From a methodological perspective, since the data in this study were obtained from managers in the company would lead to bias in the data resulting from the level of the informants. It would be useful to obtain a broader sample of managers and perhaps even non-managers in the company in future studies. Furthermore, it would be interesting to compare perceptions of employees at different levels of management and account for differences in perception concerning the market orientation of the organization. Future research is needed to understand other possible predictors of marketing competency of tropical fruits industry. It is found that integrated business functions contributed significantly to marketing competency in term of market share and sales. Theoretically, this research contributes to market orientation and marketing competency literature by adding more empirical evidence.

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