



# Investigating the Effect of Strategic Orientations on Manager Oriented External Social Capital Case Study: Hygiene and Cellulose Industry

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**Abstract:** *Strategy influences characteristics of organization such as structure, resources, customers, or suppliers. Manager-oriented social capital can be one of the important resources of an organization and without it, other resources will not be effective. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effect of strategic orientations on manager-oriented external social capital. The sample of this study consisted of 140 active companies in hygiene and cellulose products that were selected according to the companies in 22<sup>nd</sup> Tehran International Exhibition. The construct validity of the questionnaire was investigated by exploratory factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha was used to investigate reliability. For data analysis, descriptive and inferential statistics as well as SPSS and Smart PLS2.M3 were used. The findings showed that there is a significant positive relationship between strategic orientations and manager-oriented social capital. In other words, the effects of strategic orientations in formation and utilization of manager-oriented social capital are different. Environmental uncertainty and competition intensity as moderators were investigated. The moderating effect of competition intensity was confirmed regarding the effect of strategic orientation of competitors on manager-oriented social capital. Also, the effect of environmental uncertainty as moderator was confirmed on above relationships in learning and customer orientations.*

**Keywords:** *manager-oriented social capital, strategic orientations, competition intensity, environmental uncertainty*

## INTRODUCTION

Completion and intensity of competition are among the serious challenges of organizations. Creation of competitive advantage to preserve and increase market share is necessary. To overcome this challenge, organizations should become strategic oriented. In order to create competitive advantage, strategy forces organizations to choose this orientation. For this purpose, an organization utilizes its resources consistent with its strategic orientation. Strategic orientation is a uniform concept of entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, and marketing. The selected strategy in organization influences many structural and content aspects. The resources of organizations are always influenced by strategies. Resources and the degree of their importance are always taken into consideration by strategy. Undoubtedly, social capital influences other resources and leads to their effectiveness. Considering resource-oriented perspective about companies as well as corporate network theory and social capital theory, it can be said that companies have to form and manage corporate networks, especially those coalitions that provide valuable knowledge and information (Acquaah Moses, 2007). Lack of awareness of the effect of the selected strategy on social capital leads to inefficiency of social capital and decreases the possibility for success. Numerous studies have been conducted

on components of organization, but only few studies are conducted on the effect of strategic orientations on manager-oriented external social capital. For optimal utilization and identifying the application of social capital regarding the selected strategy, it is necessary to investigate the effect of various strategic orientations of manager-oriented social capital. By understanding the effect of orientations on manager-oriented external social capital, managers can be more careful about the investments, because competitive environment does not provide much space for mistakes. In this regard, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of strategic orientations on manager-oriented external social capital and how moderators of competition intensity and environmental uncertainty influence this relationship.

## **2. Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

### **2.1. Strategic Orientations**

Learning orientation consists of activities by organizations to create and use knowledge in order to increase competitive advantage. This issue consists of business and sharing information about the needs of customers, changes in market, activities of competitors, and development of technologies to create new products that are superior to competitors. In entrepreneurial orientation, organization aims to create innovation in activities and processes to achieve competitive advantage. Entrepreneurial orientation shows the interest of organization to dominate new markets and innovation in existing markets. Innovation can be emerged in different forms such as innovation in process and methods, products or services (Acquaah M, 2007). Customer's orientation emphasizes full understanding of customers' needs; therefore, companies can continuously create values. Also, competitor orientation consists of ability to understand and analyze the activities of other competitors. In the present study, strategic orientations of learning, customers, entrepreneurship, and competitors are investigated.

### **2.2. Manager-Oriented External Social Capital**

Managers can have efficient performance by creating networks inside and outside the organization and in this way, they can control the vital resources of the organization and cause efficient results. Networks and making relationships in business environment are not new concepts and have technical terms in some cultures. For example, in China, this network and making relationships are known as Gunxi. Inter-organizational networks and their effect on different aspects of organization are very important in competitive advantage. Social capital theory states that external networks of the company significantly influence the performance of companies with respect to the interaction of companies with different sectors to obtain resources and overcome internal weaknesses. Therefore, integrated social capital in the relationships that a company has with other business activist is an important factor in organizational business cycle.

### **2.3. Uncertainty**

From the perspective of realists, environmental uncertainty is an inseparable feature of organizations. Some organizations create certainty through different ways such as innovation and creativity. Investigating the effect of environmental conditions on business strategies showed that environmental uncertainty has a direct effect on business and creative marketing strategies. Also, uncertainty in external environment is effective. In turbulence, social relationships are emerged as important and strategic approach that lead organizations to safe resources of interaction with uncertain environment. Since social relationships adjust changes by interpersonal social mechanisms, the manager may use his own relationships, because when they are connected to each other, the organization can potentially deal with the undetermined effects and survive.

## **2.4. Intensity of Competition**

Globalization, technological developments, easy access to information, reverse engineering, and similar cases increase competition. This is one of the most challenging issues for managers. Intensity of competition is the level of competition between competitors (Auh & Menguc, 2005). Intensity of competition points to a degree of competition that activists deal with it. Dimensions of high competition intensity consist of war price, many advertisements, various offers, improved services, and more deals (Porter, 1980). Therefore, entrepreneurs look for their own benefits to increase the effectiveness of their ideas (McMilia, 1990).

## **3. Development of Assumptions**

### **3.1. Learning Orientation and Manager-Oriented Social Capital**

Those organizations that successfully transfer knowledge from an organization to another organization, have higher efficiency compared to those organizations that lack these capability. Social capital is a form of capital that facilitates access to information in order to promote performance and suitable use of external opportunities. Also, social capital promotes learning by factors such as trust, participation, and cooperation between members; therefore, it promotes innovative performance of the organization. One of the important leaning foundations is to obtain vital information in order to promote performance and use environmental opportunities. Therefore, the first research hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Strategic learning has greater effects on manager-based external social capital

### **3.2. Entrepreneurial Orientation and Manager-Oriented Social Capital**

Entrepreneurial networks provide access to a source that the person cannot have access to it. In recent studies, scientists have concluded that entrepreneurs should draw a particular pattern of social capital based on its dimensions. They found out that managing inconsistent environment in transient economy is possible through personal networks, because the connections between networks provide easy access to information and helps to find new customers, suppliers and investors (Acquaah M, 2007). Also, they conducted another study on social capital of entrepreneurs and performance of small companies and showed the positive relationship between social capital and entrepreneurship and concluded that the effect of connections was weaker than structural gap while network diversity had the largest effect. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Strategic entrepreneurship has greater effects on manager-oriented external social capital

### **3.3. Customer-Oriented Strategic Orientation and Manager-Oriented Social Capital**

Networks can include customers and other identities in order to create value. Creation of network with customers leads to understanding the needs of customers and this increases loyalty. Also, this relationship increases the cost of handling customers (Alvani A, 2008). They claimed that there is a positive relationship between social capital and customer loyalty in service-oriented organizations. Therefore, those managers who are involved in social groups to attract customers are more successful than the managers lack this connections. Activities inside the network of managers help to attract new customers as well as the development of relationships with the existing customers. To create competitive advantage, relationship with the customers is very important. Therefore, the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Customer's strategic orientation has greater effects on manager-oriented social capital

### **3.4. Orientation of Competitors and Manager-Oriented social capital**

Competitors consist of people or organizations that provide products or alternative services potentially and actually. Of course, creation of network and relationship with competitors leads to decreased risk and more control over the market. According to Porter's five competitive forces, more severe reaction can be implemented on newcomers and prevent their entrance or decrease haggling. Moreover, by creating networks, competitors can be more successful in exchanging information, pricing strategies, and learning from each other. Those managers engaged with social groups get more information compared to competitors and this helps them in decision-making. However, this should be implemented based on ethics framework. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

H4: Competitors' strategic orientation has greater effects on manager-oriented external social capital

### **3.5. Secondary Hypotheses**

Hypotheses 5, 6, 7, and 8 state that the competition intensity of strategic orientations (learning, entrepreneurship, customer, competitors) affects manager-oriented social capital.

Hypotheses 9, 10, 11, and 12 state that uncertainty on the strategic orientations (learning, entrepreneurship, customer, competitors) affects manager-oriented social capital.

H13: Life of organization functions as control variable on manager-oriented social capital.

H14: Size of organization functions as control variable on manager-oriented social capital

## **4. Conceptual Model of the Study**

The conceptual model of the study that is taken from theoretical foundations is according to Fig.1. Also, according to what was said, the effects of strategic orientations (learning, entrepreneurship, customer, competitors) as independent variables, dynamic environmental factors (environmental uncertainty, intensity of competition) as moderator variables, and organizational characteristics (life of organization, size of organization) as control variables will be investigated on manager-oriented social capital as dependent variables in this study.

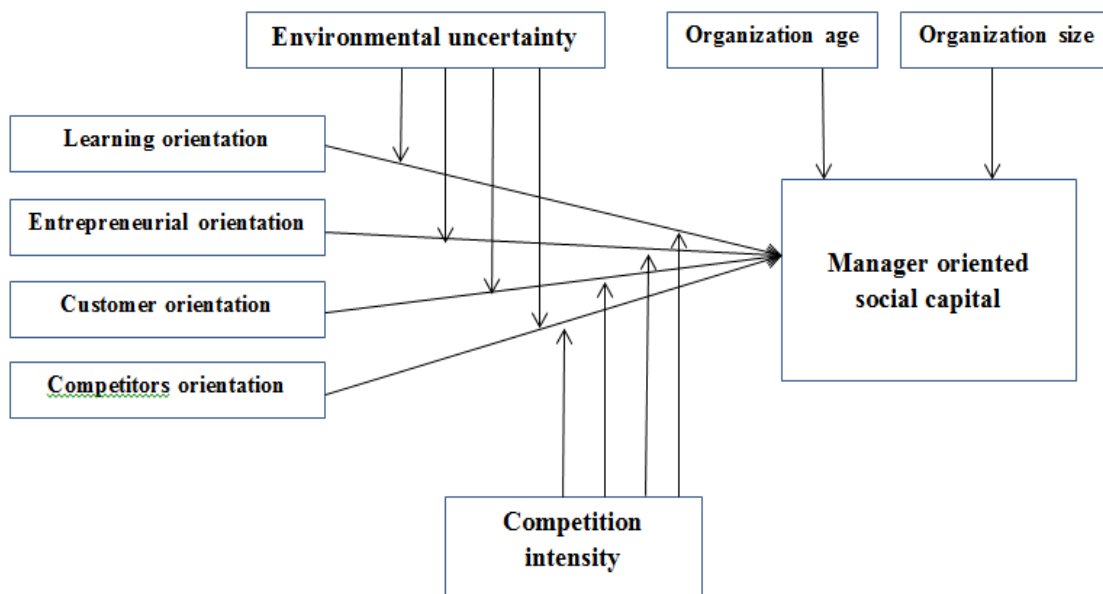


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study

### 5. Methodology

This study is a cross-sectional, applied, descriptive, and inductive study in terms of time, results, purpose, and logic, respectively. According to the great numbers of companies in hygiene and cellulose context, the sample of this study included active companies in this context that were selected according to the companies in 22<sup>nd</sup> Tehran International Exhibition. This exhibition was held in 2015 in Tehran International Permanent Fairground. In this exhibition, 237 companies participated and the required subjects were 145 according to Cochran’s sample size formula with the accuracy of 5% and confidence level of 95%. After distribution of 200 questionnaires, 154 of them were completed and finally, 140 cases could be used. To examine the uniqueness of model, Cronbach’s alpha and Dillon-Goldstein were used. Cronbach’s alpha is one of the well-known methods to investigate the reliability that its values are acceptable above 0.7.

Table 1. Convergent validity, composite reliability, and Cronbach’s alpha

	Variables	AVE	CR	Cronbach’s alpha
Learning orientation	LO	0/57	0/77	0/81
Entrepreneur orientation	EO	0/58	0/81	0/74
Customer orientation	CO	0/78	0/88	0/72
Competitors orientation	COO	0/64	0/70	0/85
Intensity of	CI	0/59	0/74	0/73

competition				
Environmental uncertainty	EU	Only had one construct and does not need investigation		
Social capital orientation of managers	SC	0/74	0/77	0/79

In order to describe findings, frequency charts and tables will be used. Also, Smart PLA has been used to analyze inferential statistics.

### 6. Research Findings

The results of descriptive statistics show that 71% of respondents were males and 39% were females. In addition, 66.4% had BA, 16.4% had AD, 10% had MA, 5.5% had diploma, and 1.8% had Ph.D. Also, regarding number, 69.1% of employees were under 50, 24.5% were between 50 and 150, and 6.4% were more than 150. In terms of job title, 59.1% were marketing manager, 18.2% were CEO, 15.5% were members of Board of Directors, 3.6% were production managers, and 3.6% were research and development managers. In terms of nature, 76.4% were productive and 23.6% were service-oriented. In this study, all constructs are reflective. About coefficient and significance of paths, a table was prepared. It should be noted that in bilateral approach, the following values were considered: 1.64 for significance with 10% error, 1.96 for 5% error, 2.52 for 1% error, and 3.32 for 0.1% error.

Table 2. Outputs for path coefficient and significance level

Impact type	Path	Hypotheses	Significance	Path coefficient
<b>Independent on dependent</b>	LO → MSCO	H1	3/83****	0/15
	EO → MSCO	H2	3/66****	0/16
	CO → MSCO	H3	4/42****	0/18
	COO → MSCO	H4	2/62***	0/11
	CI → MSCO		5/15****	0/21
	EU → MSCO		3/79****	0/13
<b>Moderator</b>	LO*CI → MSCO	H5	1/42	-0/08
	EO*CI → MSCO	H6	0/81	-0/13
	CO*CI → MSCO	H7	0/82	-0/07
	COO*CI → MSCO	H8	1/85*	0/25
	LO*EU → MSCO	H9	2/30**	0/07
	EO*EU → MSCO	H10	0/55	0/04
	CO*EU → MSCO	H11	2/26**	-0/17
COO*EU → MSCO	H12	0/46	-0/04	

As can be Table (2), strategic	Control	FA5→ MSCO		8/68****	-0/16	seen in among
		FA20→ MSCO		0/91	-0/06	
		FZ50→ MSCO		2/52***	-0/14	
		FZ150→ MSCO		0/79	-0/04	

orientations, learning orientation with the significance of 4.42 and path coefficient of 0.18 has the greatest effect on social capital and intensity of competition with the coefficient of 0.25 has the greatest effect on the relationship between strategic orientation of competitors and manager-oriented social capital. Also, environmental uncertainty with the coefficient of 0.07 has the greatest effect on the relationship between strategic learning orientation and manager-oriented capital.

### 7. Conclusion and Suggestions

According to the first hypothesis, companies with customer orientation have more emphasis on manager-oriented external social capital. According to the results, path coefficient of strategic learning orientation on social capital shows that there is a significant and direct relationship between two variables. According to the literature, management processes increase knowledge, because they help organizations in exchange resources, encouraging cooperative behaviors, and collective activities and these measures are a foundation to use knowledge management in organizations. Therefore, it is recommended that managers should manage knowledge in organization and in this regard, learning from customers and suppliers is highly emphasized. According to the second hypothesis, it can be seen that there is a direct relationship between strategic entrepreneurial orientation and social capital. Madadi (Azar A, 2012) conducted a study on the relationship between social capital and entrepreneurship in Mellat Bank cranches in Qazvin and showed that there is a significant and direct relationship between two variables. Also, in a study on 61 companies regarding the relationship between social capital and organizational performance, it was observed that there is a significant positive relationship between variables. Therefore, managers should have relationship with experts of industry to attract innovation ideas and should participate in conferences and exhibitions and decrease risks through participation and cooperation with investors as well as obtaining information. These measures will develop manager-oriented social capital.

The third hypothesis states that companies with customer orientations have greater effect on manager-oriented external social capital. Path coefficient of customer strategic orientation on social capital shows that not only there is a direct relationship, but the emphasis of this orientation is more than other orientations. Social interactions regarding customers to attract them, especially in services, create competitive advantage. The result of study shows the greater effect on manager-oriented social capital in customer strategic orientation that is consistent with previous studies. In this industry, distribution channels as customers are very important. For this reason, customer orientations have large effects on manager-oriented social capital and managers can take advantage of these long-term relationships. For active companies in industry, it is recommended that they should strengthen their relationships with customers. In this regard, Henry et al. (2010) showed that there is a positive relationship between marketing strategy and Gunxi that confirms the result of our study. Industry managers should create management system that will lead to the creation of manager-oriented social capital. According to the fourth hypothesis, competitor orientation has greater effect on manager-oriented external social capital. The path coefficient of strategic orientation of competitors on social capital shows that despite the direct relationship, emphasis on social capital in this orientation is lower than other orientations. Intensity of competition in this industry has discouraged companies to create relationship with competitors and create different brands and relationship with competitors rarely occurs. It is recommended to the managers to use 360 degree method in obtaining information. However, in this process, moral issues should be taken into consideration. These measures help managers in creating social capital. The effect on intensity of competition on the relationship between learning orientation and social capital with the path coefficient of -0.8 and significance level of 1.42 was not confirmed. Intensity of

competitions does not have significant effect on the relationship between learning orientation and social capital. Perhaps, still the importance of learning in this industry is not fully understood. In a study by Guthrie (1998), it was indicated that with increased competition, the importance of managerial relationships decreases. Also, the effect of competition intensity on social capital with the path coefficient of  $-0.13$  and significance level of  $0.81$  was not confirmed. The effect of competition intensity on the effect of customer orientation on social capital with the path coefficient of  $-0.72$  and significance level of  $0.82$  was not confirmed. The effect of competition intensity on the effect of competitor orientation on social capital with the path coefficient of  $0.25$  and significance level of  $1.85$  was confirmed. In a study by Mageret et al. (2009) on 2622 companies in Zimbabwe, it was shown that the intensity of competition has a positive effect on the relationship and in high intensity, it is possible to use inter-organizational relationships as complementary resources. According to the results of the study, it is recommended to the activist to use the relationship between suppliers and customers as competitive advantage in high intensity competition. The hypothesis of environmental uncertainty moderates the effect of learning strategic orientation on social capital of the manager and this was confirmed with the path coefficient of  $0.07$  and significance level of  $2.3$ . In these conditions, to decrease environmental uncertainty, it seems necessary to increase awareness level and this helps the managers to create relationship with activist and decrease uncertainty. In this condition, the relationships of managers as social capital in having access to scarce resources and managing environmental uncertainty lead to improved performance of the organization. The effect of environmental uncertainty on the effect of strategic entrepreneurship orientation on social capital with the path coefficient of  $0.04$  and significance level of  $0.55$  was not confirmed. In a study by Ebrahiminejad et al. (Bordbar GH et al., 2014) that investigated the effect of strategic entrepreneurial planning on the performance of organization as well as the moderating role of environmental uncertainty in food industry of Shiraz, it was indicated that environmental uncertainty does not have any effect on the relationship between strategic entrepreneurial planning and performance of organization. The role of environmental uncertainty with the path coefficient of  $-0.17$  and significance level of  $2.26$  was confirmed. Concentrating on customer needs, it will be possible to take advantage of confidence in decision-making. In a study by Raju et al. (2001) on the effect of environmental uncertainty on the relationship between marketing orientation and performance of organization, the effects on marketing orientation were confirmed that is consistent with the present study. The effect of environmental uncertainty on strategic orientation of competitors on social capital with the path coefficient of  $-0.04$  and significance level of  $0.46$  was not confirmed. Generally, it is recommended that managers should collect information from primary sources such as political and competent authorities. The role of organization's life as control variable in companies under 5 years with the path coefficient of  $-0.16$  and significance level of  $8.68$  was confirmed. Small companies need more information from the environment, because they have to create a network with activists of industry. Small companies need social capital advantages and relationships between managers in these companies are important. In a study on 61 small companies, it was shown that in small companies, there is a high correlation between entrepreneurship and social capital that confirms the results of this study. Also, the size of organization as control variable in companies with less than 50 employees with the path coefficient of  $-0.14$  and significance of  $2.52$  was confirmed. In a study on the role of networks in innovations and performance in small and medium-sized organizations, a significant relationship was observed between small companies, because small companies create and maintain real advantages of networks and utilize them during the development of the company. In this study, the effect of strategic orientations of organization on manager-oriented external social capital in hygiene and cellulose industry was investigated and the following are suggested to those who want to conduct similar studies:

- Investigating the effect of creating relationships with political authorities in decreasing environmental uncertainty.
- Investigating the effect of other strategic orientations (marketing, product) in manager-oriented social capital.



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