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# Causal Relationship of Market Orientation and Customer-Based Performance of Fashion Apparel Brands

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## Abstract

*This study was conducted to determine the impact of market orientation on the consumer-based performance of fashion apparel brands. The study also reveals the moderating effect of employee orientation on market orientation and consumer-based performance. The sample of 270 respondents of this study consists of managerial staff who have decisive power with regard to apparel brands in Pakistan. The findings of this study express that all three dimensions of market orientation have a significant and positive impact on the consumer-based performance of fashion apparel brands. Furthermore, the study finds no moderation between customer orientation and consumer-based performance, while for the remaining two dimensions, there is a positive moderation. The management of fashion apparel firms must give considerable importance to market orientation to enhance overall consumer-based performance. This study contributes valuable literature because it focuses on the fashion apparel industry, which is most important for very nearly everyone in the present era.*

**Key words:** market orientation, customer orientation, competitor orientation, interfunctional orientation, consumer-based performance, fashion apparel.

## Introduction

Market Orientation is an organisational culture that has a significant impact on an organisation in a market. It is a culture-type atmosphere in which companies work hard to create a good and impressive customer impact. It has had tremendous importance since the 1990s. MO and business performance are linked, which is necessary for achieving organisational goals. It helps in accelerating the evolution of an organization in the short (e.g., periodical performance) as well long term [1]. The impact of MO is judged by the innovational activity and performance of the company. Its significant impact and influence on a company are evaluated in terms of its innovational activity. Some verifiable studies have proved that there is an insignificant relationship between MO and company performance [2].

Many factors influence the overall progress of a firm. However, one of the main ones that have a massive impact on measuring a company's progress is customer-based performance: CBP. CBP estimates the company's presentation through customer feedback, such as regarding the quality of the service and concerns about the company's response [3]. CBP also takes note of the company's future planning and reflects the progress of the management in delivering the best quality, effort, and satisfaction to customers. This report and research looks at the effect of MO on different dimen-

sions like customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional orientation [4].

An organisation has its main pillars for enhancing its performance and progression and are responsible for employees achieving marvelous performance [5]. Employees care about the organisation's progress and its assessment by customers and try hard to synchronise their values and tasks with their employers. For achieving and executing MO in a firm, the company requires to develop employee orientation. To achieve satisfactory relations and good marketing capabilities, the combination of MO and EO is of significant effect. Many factors aid in implementing and maintaining the excellent atmosphere of MO in a company. However, fashion markets lack brand characteristics related to sales and do not emphasise how they position themselves in the market. This causes concern because brand management will help distinguish a business's offer from its competitors, particularly brand positioning, which has been increasingly studied in the recent literature. Apparel markets are extremely competitive, and differentiation between offers should be strong. Understanding the styles of brand positioning and possible antecedents becomes an essential academic and managerial task [6].

Till now, the discussion has been basically about internal resources which contribute towards company performance. CBP,

EO, and MO provide a basis for a resource-based view (RBV). RBV refers to an overview of visible and non-visible capabilities. These two pillars provide a basis for a company's progress, which gets boundaries for decisions and operations [7]. To implement MO in a company for making strategic decisions, the company has to make a strategy for implementing the rules of MO. For effectiveness and better performance, the firm has to implement MO and EO using available resources.

## Literature review

### Market Orientation towards customer-based performance

Market Orientation is implemented in a firm based on information gained from competitors and customer feedback. Its impact is not only on the marketing field but also on various fields linked with the organisation. The impact of MO is also mainly on marketing and customer-based services, which provide relevant information about customer feedback. The implementation of MO in a firm is needed to satisfy customers and provide satisfactory services to them. Loyalty plans are based on MO, which are provided to satisfy existing customers and achieve better execution of MO [8]. Implementing MO in a firm makes employees aware of customer needs: what is the essential requirement of the customer, how customer needs can be fulfilled, and what is the main product or service

that can satisfy the customer? [9] The implementation of MO in a firm can create such an atmosphere that can attract existing customers and assist in tempting the new ones toward the firm. A customer-based service is very demanding with respect to making an organisation more tempting for new customers. CBP enables the firm to make such a strategy that can maintain the positive image of the firm for customers. It also increases the firm's stability, performance, and customer satisfaction [10].

CBP has different parameters and branches that are linked with customer satisfaction. It has different capabilities and strategic plans that enable employees to make relationships with customers [6, 11]. To make progress in competitive plans, RBV relationships are more critical as they enable to make more customer-focused activities as well as form a good image and reputation of the firm in the market's eyes [12]. To satisfy customer needs, make them satisfied with the products, and develop more strategic plans, the implementation and evaluation of CBP in a firm are of great demand [13].

Strategic resources can enable a firm to make customer-based strategies by implementing MO in an organisation. A firm based on such strategies can aid logistical planning, enabling to improve its representation and progress. However, resources must be improved for the betterment of CBP. The theoretical foundations and constructs under consideration are now outlined in the following topic [14].

### **Multidimensionality of Market Orientation**

More research on MO has revealed some facts about the interconnection between MO and a firm's performance [15]. Multidimensionality comprises activities of market information acquisition and dissemination and the coordinated creation of customer value. While discussing the component-wise approach, all three components possible are considered: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional orientation. These can help to study the direct and indirect effects [16].

The first component is customer orientation, whose main focus is on dealing with customers i.e. putting forward customers' interests while considering them as the company's main asset [3, 17]. It helps

in maintaining admirable relationships with customers. Customer orientation enables the organisation to interpret the value chain of its customers and their advancement, which can help the firm create continuously satisfactory services for customers. Within the textile sector, the implementation of customer orientation has been revealed as having a significant influence on customers while developing a satisfactory, loyal, and positive sphere. This is one of the constituents that can make a contribution to CBP [18].

Competitor orientation is the second component that enables a firm to be ready for alternate suppliers. Competitor orientation enables a firm to develop competitive skills to satisfy customer needs, develop innovative skills among employees, and make strategic steps towards making progressive decisions. The primary purpose of implementing competitor orientation is to review the development of the firm by implementing competitive skills therein [10, 19].

The third principal component is inter-functional orientation, which involves all functions, such as production, human resource, and other resources within the organisation to create valuable products for customers and stakeholders. The implementation of MO also supports RBV as it makes effective use of all resources; it combines all the resources and employees to work in a mutual climate to serve the market and develop a customer-friendly service habitat [20], which affects the firm's service and product quality as well as the firm's perception regarding CBP.

H1a: Customer orientation has a significant impact on a firm's customer-based performance

H1b: Competitor orientation has a significant impact on a firm's customer-based performance

H1c: Interfunctional orientation has a significant impact on a firm's customer-based performance

### **Employee orientation**

Improving the firm's strategies is the most crucial step in implementing employee orientation. The company's main pillars for making progressive strategies are the employees who work in it [21]. The implementation of EO will prove an asset in accomplishing an employee-based environment in the firm and assist in the enforcement of such a climate

that can address the employee's interests, which can be an asset in the progressive steps of the organisation [22]. The main aim is to focus mainly on the interests of employees, to make a comfortable environment for them, and to appeal to them by focusing on their interests and skills. The main focus of all conceptualizations has mainly involved EO to help make customer interest-based employees who take an interest in providing quality-based products to customers and assist them in attracting the customers to the firm's strategic plans. Some researches are against the relation between EO and organisational performance. However, the foremost recent researches done by [23] have found a proper impact on the relationship of EO and firm progression.

Employees are the company's main focus because they are the only ones who can carry out the best plans. In addition, some researches have revealed that EO also helps in facilitating the efficacy of other components of MO, which plays a vital role in the customer service context as employees can provide the best service to customers. Satisfying customers is the primary motivation to provide the best quality of service to them [24]. The primary aim of implementing EO in a firm is to satisfy customer needs by providing the best quality products and services. Moreover, the implementation of EO is to consider the employee's interests, and the organisation makes the best employees by providing them with the best facilities. This not only improves the customer care climate but also helps the organisation make progressive steps. The strategies for the progress and development of the organisation are mainly dependent on the employees' work. The employees' objectives and strategies can continuously improve and create valuable services for customers [25].

Productive communication and coordination among employees are obligatory for the generation and promulgation of information to customers and are an asset in providing services to them. Employees must be aware of their responsibilities and their work regarding organisation needs [26]. The organization must be able to provide a brief of its needs and values. Therefore, productive and effective communication is essential for awareness among employees of different organisation values. There must be some conference-type meetings in every firm for employees to make them aware

of the progress and losses of the organisation. This makes them more drawn towards the company's progress, and consequently they will be more aimed at providing the best services to customers. The company must keep a team of employees demonstrating communication and coordination the best and implement EO to make customer services satisfactory and address employees' interests. The implementation of EO provides an employee-centered working climate through strategic training and engagement activities that can assist employees in learning about available resources and their availability, which can be delivered to customers according to demand [27]. This can also make employees think about customer needs and enable to make strategic planning and ideas for creating the best customer-service climate. EO and the components of MO can produce more productive and practical effects on a firm's performance.

H2a: Employee orientation positively moderates the impact of customer orientation and the firm's customer-based performance

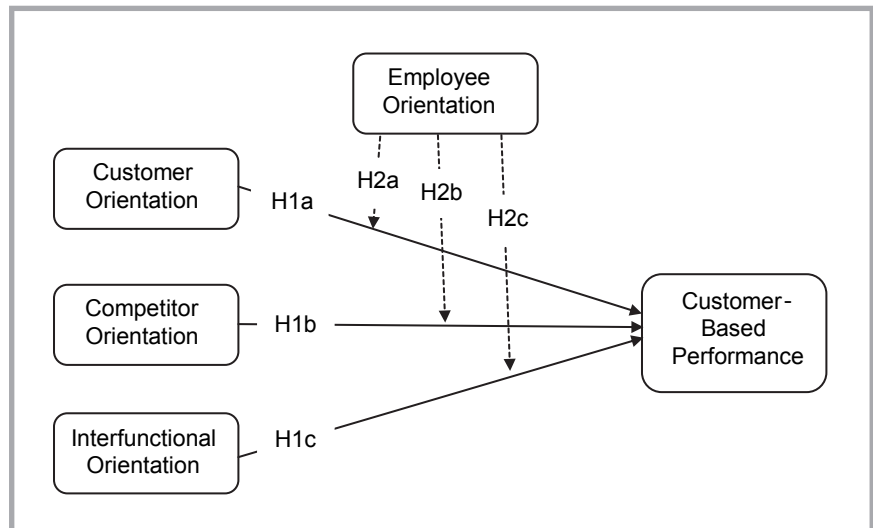
H2b: Employee orientation positively moderates the impact of competitor orientation and the firm's customer-based performance

H2c: Employee orientation positively moderates the impact of inter-functional orientation and the firm's customer-based performance (see *Figure 1*)

## Methodology

### Data collection and sample size

The study sample includes a sales manager, brand manager, general marketing manager, product manager, and vice president of different apparel brands. Also, we included respondents who were working for a brand that had more than 150 employees. The average experience of respondents in brand management was eight years, and their experience in the current firm was six years on average. Considering the sample size in this study, we used a generally accepted and common formula throughout which is focused on a definite population, as previously used by [28]. Furthermore, to improve the generalisability of the findings, 300 questionnaires were given to the target sample between February and April 2020. Some questionnaires were sent through e-mail, some through a courier service, and the remaining were



*Figure 1. Conceptual framework.*

distributed by visiting the offices of the target managers. Afterwards, we received back 275 filled questionnaires, and after detailed scrutiny, we found five questionnaires unclear, which were excluded from the final sample. Our final sample size was 270, ready for analysis, and the response rate was 90%.

### Questionnaire and measurements

Before drawing up all questionnaire items, we undertook a detailed literature review. We then developed a questionnaire adopting items from the studies reviewed. A total of 27 items were adopted in the final questionnaire, divided into five sections. We presented the questionnaire to the target respondents and gave them the choice of answering on a five-point likert scale from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree).

Market orientation (CR, MO = 0.832, CO = 0.934 and IO = 0.864) was measured by fifteen items which were adapted from [13]. EO (CR = 0.838) was measured with four items previously used by [29]. Consumer-based performance (CR = 0.899) was measured with the help of eight items adopted from [30-32].

### Data analysis and results

The measurement model and structural model were assessed by following a 2-step approach using Smart PLS 3.3.2 [23]. The motivation of this investigation was to predict customer based performance, for which PLS is the most appropriate statistical tool [34]. Also, method bias was estimated through common variance using the individual factor method.

It was measured through exploratory factor analysis by employing a single factor loading of all the items of latent construct. The variance described was 83%, showing the absence of a common method bias [35, 36]. Furthermore, the individual factor model was also examined using AMOS, which indicated the model fitness indicators as  $\chi^2 = 1568.15$ , DF = 893, CFI = 0.779, NFI = 0.659 and RMSEA = 0.110. According to [35], these indices confirm the earlier outcome that common method bias is not detected in the data. The non-response bias was verified through a t-test [37], where respondents with missing demographic values were considered non-respondents.

### Measurement model

Following the recommendations of [38], the confirmatory composite analysis (CCA) for assessing reflective constructs included a process that involves an assessment of the item loadings, composite reliability, AVE, discriminant validity, nomological validity, and predictive validity [39]. Furthermore, the measurement model was tested by calculating factor loadings, Cronbach's Alpha composite reliability (CR), and the average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs. Individual item reliabilities were measured through factor loadings on the corresponding latent constructs, as shown in *Table 1*. Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability are also two more indicators that are generally used in PLS-SEM for assessing the construct reliability of the measurement model, and for this study the findings of both indicators are greater than 0.7, which is an acceptable range, confirming

**Table 1.** Reliability and validity, description of measurements.

Constructs	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE	Skewness	Kurtosis
Competitor orientation	-0.7152258	0.162165	0.911	0.934	0.779	0.1482519	0.29544
Customer orientation	-1.4655913	2.246124	0.735	0.832	0.553	0.1482519	0.29544
Customer based performance	-1.1217901	0.372824	0.877	0.899	0.529	0.1482519	0.29544
Employee orientation	-0.5573792	-0.37331	0.838	0.883	0.656	0.1482519	0.29544
Interfunctional orientation	-1.2448598	1.158679	0.798	0.864	0.615	0.1482519	0.29544

**Table 2.** Discriminant validity (Fornell larker criterion).

	COO	CBP	CUO	EO	IO
COO	0.883				
CBP	0.543	0.727			
CUO	0.461	0.707	0.744		
EO	0.539	0.578	0.446	0.810	
IO	0.494	0.657	0.457	0.772	0.785

the composite reliability of the measurement model [40].

**Validity of the constructs**

In general, in smart PLS, the validity of the instruments is measured in two ways. We calculated the measurement model by assessing the convergent validity following [41] and by looking at the values of average variance extracted (> 0.5) and the composite reliability (> 0.7). As presented in **Table 1**, all the values exceeded the threshold suggested, and thus the convergent validity was confirmed.

In assessing the discriminant validity, the study followed the guidelines from [42]. The square root of the average variance extracted should be higher than the row and column values of the correlations. As shown in **Table 2**, all the values on the diagonal exceeded those of the row and column, thus confirming adequate discriminant validity.

**Structural model**

The structural model reflects the paths hypothesised in the research framework

and is assessed based on **R<sup>2</sup>**, **Q<sup>2</sup>**, and the significance of the paths. The goodness of the model is determined by the strength of the structural path as determined by the **R<sup>2</sup>** value for the dependent variable [43]. The value for **R<sup>2</sup>** should be equal to or over 0.1 [44]. The results are shown in **Table 3**, showing that the **R<sup>2</sup>** value is over 0.1, which confirms the predictive capability of the structural model. Furthermore, **Q<sup>2</sup>** establishes the predictive relevance of the endogenous constructs. The results show that **Q<sup>2</sup>** is 0.372 for the structural model, which establishes the predictive relevance (see **Table 3**). Also, the model fit was assessed using SRMR. The value for SRMR was 0.068, which is below the required value of 1.0, indicating a good model fit [41].

**Hypotheses testing results**

For calculating the standard error with T and P-values, the significance of the path coefficient Bootstrapping (1000 subsamples) was used, which provided direct evidence of the hypotheses being accepted or rejected. Direct effect analysis was performed to assess the relation between the latent constructs. The results indicate

a significant relationship between CUO and CBP ( $\beta = 0.533, t = 10.138, p < 0.01$ ), CO and CBP ( $\beta = 0.136, t = 2.859, p < 0.01$ ), and IO and CBP ( $\beta = 0.314, t = 4.048, p < 0.01$ ). Hence, it can be concluded that H1a, H1b, and H1c were supported by this study, as shown in **Table 3**.

**Moderation analysis**

Following Fassott et al. (2016) for assessing the moderating role of EO, two-stage continuous moderation analysis was performed. H2a was used to ascertain the moderating role of EO between CUO and CBP. Employee orientation was found to have an insignificant moderating role in the relationship between CUO and CBP ( $\beta = -0.010, t = 0.257, p = 0.798$ ). However, the results reveal (see **Figure 2.a**) that CUO fails to impact CBP at higher employee orientation. The results showed that at lower EO, CUO was found to have a stronger impact on CBP. The results also revealed the significant moderating role of EO in the relation between CO and CBP ( $\beta = 0.094, t = 2.020, p = 0.044$ ). However, the results indicate (see **Figure 2.b**) that there is a low impact of CO on CBP at low employee orientation. However, increasing EO improves the impact of CO on CBP. Furthermore, for H2c the results revealed that EO moderates the relationship between IO and CBP ( $\beta = -0.097, t = 2.032, p = 0.043$ ). However, the results show (see **Figure 2.c**) that at higher employee orientation IO fails to impact CBP. The results revealed

**Table 3.** Hypothesis testing results.

Hypotheses	Relationship	Beta	St. Dev	T Statistics	P Value	BCI LL	BCI UL	Accepted/rejected
Hypothesis 1a	CUO → CBP	0.533	0.053	10.138	0.000	0.426	0.629	Accepted
Hypothesis 1b	CO → CBP	0.136	0.05	2.859	0.004	0.039	0.234	Accepted
Hypothesis 1c	IO → CBP	0.314	0.078	4.048	0.000	0.158	0.462	Accepted
Hypothesis 2a	CUO * EO → CBP	-0.010	0.051	0.257	0.798	-0.114	0.085	Rejected
Hypothesis 2b	CO * EO → CBP	0.094	0.050	2.020	0.044	-0.018	0.184	Accepted
Hypothesis 2c	IO * EO → CBP	-0.097	0.048	2.032	0.043	-0.195	-0.001	Accepted
Endogenous construct		<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Q<sup>2</sup></b>					
CBP		0.694	0.372					

CUO = Customer Orientation; CO = Competitor Orientation, IO = Interfunctional Orientation; EO = Employee Orientation; CBP = Customer – Based Performance

that at lower EO, IO was found to have a stronger impact on CBP. Hence, 2b and 2c were supported, while 2a was not, as shown in *Table 3*.

## Discussion and conclusion

The above research and study shed light on the impact of MO on CBP by focusing on the relationships between the parameters of MO and CBP (H1a, b, c). The outcomes of our study are supported by previous work and reaffirm the significance of CBP as an essential element in estimating textile firms' efforts for the satisfaction of their customers [4, 9, 11]. The dimensions of MO (e.g., customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional orientation) are compatible with CBP and have a positive impact, just like other parameters that have an association with the performance of textile firms of Pakistan which are involved in manufacturing fashion apparels.

Secondly, the primary focus of the study is firms' artistic effect on their progress, shedding significant light on the moderating role of EO in MO performance relationships (H2a, b, c). The moderating effect of EO appears to have some productive effects on the relationships between the components of MO and CBP; EO does not seem to behave as a progenitor of CBP [14]. EO does not explain the impact of customer orientation on CBP, while it accelerates the process of converting competitor orientation into the visual performance of the firm [10, 17]. Some firms like those that deal in designing or the fashion industry have a significant impact on EO as it influences customer service. Exclusive dealing with customers is based on how the product is delivered to the customer [21]. Such firms require efficient dealing with customers as the company's performance is based on how products are delivered, how customers are treated, and how employees think and apply ideas for the firm's progress. Customer orientation is required by such firms that implement the parameters of EO to make the best customer-employee culture. Instead of implementing the parameters of EO, many firms focus on the multi-dimensional or hierarchical organisational structure, which hinders cross-divisional communication and coordination. Hence, they provide a negative impact on the culture of EO [22]. This can lessen the effect of EO on the relationship between

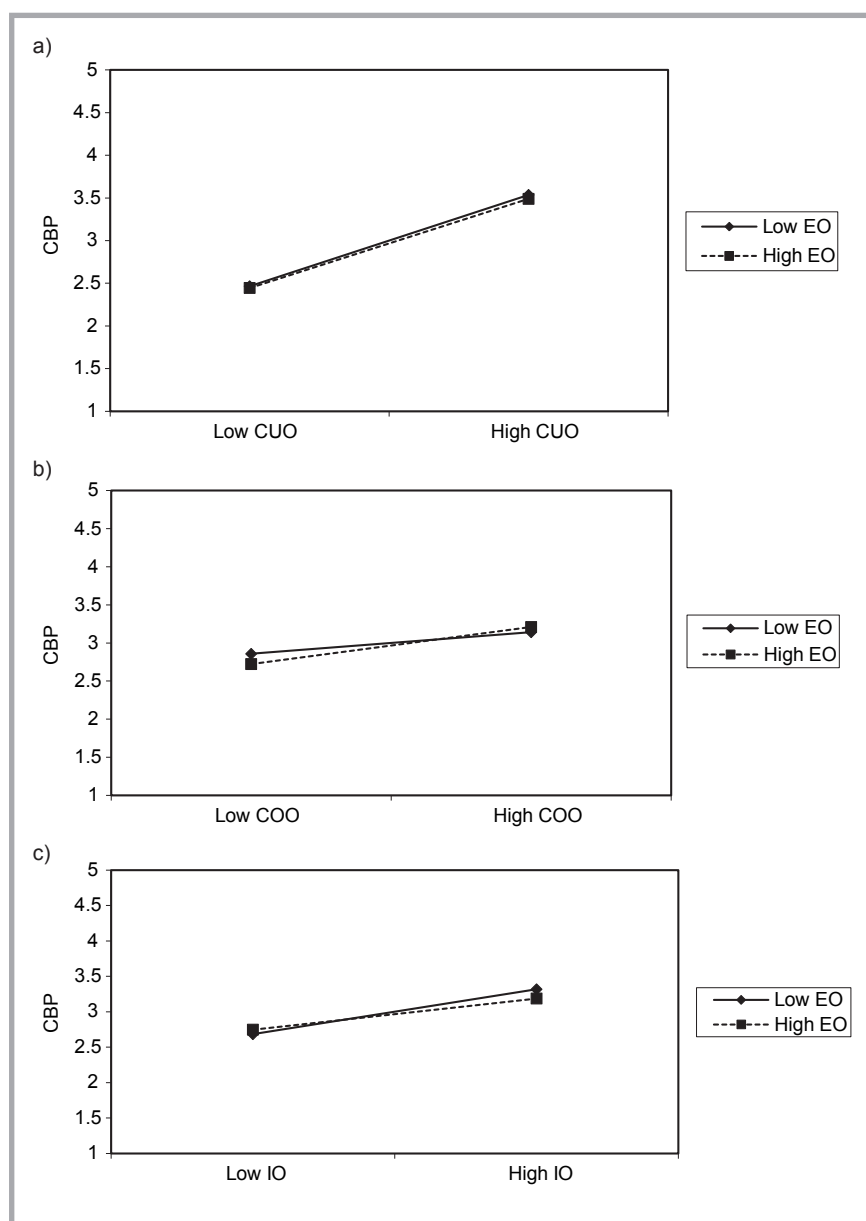


Figure 2. Moderating effects.

inter-functional orientation and CBP. The previous study did not mainly focus on the impact of EO on customer service, while this one mainly emphasises the efficiency of EO. The fashion industries mainly focus on employee behaviour towards dealing with customer. Employees play an essential role in implementing different strategic plans for customer satisfaction. Of those strategies and methodologies that focus on exploring new approaches or the substitution of existing ones, PMO can be considered very important. The fashion industry needs to emphasise the development of new products, giving a specific speciality to its products and refining some of its existing products to ensure it will be successful in the market.

## Managerial implications

The study's finding on the positive relation between MO dimensions and CBP suggests that textile firms could implement MO parameters in the firm as guidelines on their strategic actions, as well as to satisfy customers, and accelerate their customer-based outcomes. The positive impact of MO and CBP emphasises that there is a circular feedback loop between the firm's management team and its customers. The management is responsible for customer feedback and satisfying customer demands. Managerial decisions with respect to the firm's MO dimensions are considered to have a significant effect on customer service, leading to high-quality service. In turn, the custom-

er gives better feedback and satisfaction to the employees' service [20]. It not only contributes to the firm's progress but also provides more contribution towards CBP parameters. The firm also makes such a database based on the customers' feedback. With this feedback, the managerial team makes strategic plans and decisions that contribute to the firm's development and help in improving CBP parameters.

The above study also revealed that the implementation of EO in a company enables different parameters of MO to be implemented in the firm, which contributes to the firm's progress. When implementing customer orientation, one has to be very clear about strategic plans and decisions, and there must be a closed-loop to see the consequences of those plans in the firm in the form of customer feedback. There are many industries where the employees are the representatives of the strategic plans made for the customers; representing the plans and decisions in the form of their service [23]. The employees are said to be known as the implementers of the firm's cultural orientation. The firm's management must ensure that the employees representation and service are in coordination with the firm decisions and focus mainly on the customer-oriented culture. The firm must also provide some training and feedback reports to staff to enable them to learn about resources and company demands. EO implementation can enable staff to remain keen on company goals. There must be a consistent understanding and relationship between the management and employees.

Fashion-type companies whose primary focus is to satisfy the customer must create such opportunities and facilities that can be improved and be helpful for fast communication between the organisation's departments and for proper resource allocation between the department and divisions [18]. The study above reveals that the firm utilises its resources and plans to satisfy stakeholders, which has a good impact on the customer and defines the employees' needs and demands. Therefore, considering all the parameters and issues, companies' management must make such transparent policies that can make sure who is responsible for resource allocation, who can help out in making strategic plans, and who is responsible for considering customer needs. This will be helpful to ease the restrictions imposed by administrative procedures within the organisation. Fashion companies can also

encourage employees to grow their skills, which will help them to ease the restrictions imposed by the multi-divisional organisational structure. This can create more empowerment in the company and contribute to internal communication and coordination by enabling peer interaction. In response to this current competitive climate, learning is essential for companies who are trying to provide solutions to a limited set of customer needs to make their brand names stand out from their rivals. In this sector, such businesses will focus on advertising efforts to monitor their products' significance and their decisions to use specific communication strategies. Companies skilled at making their brand image, or who work hard that their products are essential for a specific place on the market, will benefit from actively positioning themselves for competitive business orientations.

### Limitations and future research

The study above achieved findings has contributed to understanding ideas related to CBP, but there are some limitations. The main focus was on fashion companies with respect to how the progress of such companies can be refined, but this research limits the generalisability of the findings. This study must be implemented in different companies to make such findings more applicable. Future research must create a loop to understand the dimensions of MO, EO, and other types of performance, and hence must provide feedback. Third, the previous research provides the basic foundation and suggests that competitor orientation positively impacts CBP and EO, which can create a positive relationship between inter-functional orientation and the performance. The findings of the study above have not made such theoretical foundations of the literature clear. Therefore, future studies must clarify the mechanism of competitor orientation, EO, and inter-functional orientation in affecting the performance and investigate how HR and organisational strategies influence the mechanism.

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