

# **Similarities and Differences in Consumer Orientation and Marketing Strategies among Malay Men and Women Entrepreneurs in Malaysia**

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## **Abstract**

Does entrepreneur's gender influence his or her consumer orientation and marketing strategies? Based on the role-centered perspective, this paper posited that men and women entrepreneurs would not differ in their consumer orientation and in their evaluation of some generic marketing strategies. However, the empirical results from a small sample of Malay men and women entrepreneurs in peninsular Malaysia indicate an insignificant gender influence on consumer orientation. But contrary to expectations, the results for two marketing strategies indicate a significant gender influence. Some possible explanations for the contradictory findings are also discussed.

## **Introduction**

In examining the similarities, contrasts and contradictions between men and women in managing organisations, a pertinent issue that needs to be explored is that of their consumer orientation and marketing strategies. Do women and men entrepreneurs display a significant difference in consumer orientation? How are their marketing strategies similar or different?

To address the above questions on a theoretical level, this paper draws on the literature on sex-role stereotyping and role-centered perspective to conceptually establish for the similarities, contrasts and contradictions between men and women entrepreneurs in their consumer orientation and marketing strategies. Besides a theoretical account, the expected similarities and differences were examined empirically by sampling a small group of Malay women and men entrepreneurs in various parts of peninsular Malaysia in the manufacturing, retailing and service businesses.

## Study Background

Shefsky (1994) claims that gender does not provide an edge in being an entrepreneur but gender does account for some differences between men and women entrepreneurs. He cites the tendency for men to use the word control and women the word independence as their reason for being entrepreneurs. However, the difference is not purely attributed to the entrepreneurs being male or female but because of the prevalence of societal stereotyping that creates different opportunities between the gender. Entrepreneurs are a special group of people with such characteristics as self-confidence, task-result oriented, risk taker, leadership, originality and future-oriented (Meredith, Nelson & Neck 1982). Through societal stereotyping some of these characteristics have been associated with men rather than women. For example, studies on self-confidence than men ( Lenney 1977; Macoby & Jacklin 1974; White, De Sanctis, & Crino 1981). Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Crino 1981). Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman (1968) found that college students tended to perceive men as being more aggressive and independent than women.

The sex role stereotyping or the belief that a set of traits and abilities is more likely to be found in one sex than the other would lead to the expectations that women and men would behave differently as entrepreneurs. Shefsky (1994) states that women have a greater burden in convincing bankers and investors than men because of the sex role stereotyping. Schein (1978) highlighted that sex role stereotypical thinking has a negative impact on perceived and actual performance of women in management and hinders a women manager's opportunity to acquire or utilise work-related power acquisition behaviours. Similarly, Dalton and Todor (1985) and Arvey (1986) have also asserted that the gender of individuals may bias a wide variety of managerial decisions.

The literature is replete with studies that support the prevalence of sex role stereotyping. However, sex role stereotyping is a useful explanation for perceptual differences by a group of peoples about one sex or other. In other words, bankers may perceive women borrowers to be a higher risk than men borrowers or managers may perceive male and female subordinates differently. But in self evaluation, sex role stereotyping is a less useful explanation for gender differences. Would a women entrepreneur think less more of her success than a male counterpart because she is trapped by the societal stereotypical concept of women? Would she attribute her success to being a women? Regardless of gender, attribution of success is first and foremost to the individual's own effort and hard work. But in the case of a failure, one of the reasons could be sex role stereotyping that deprives a man or a women from getting an opportunity.

An alternative to sex role stereotyping is the role-centered perspective. Under this perspective, an individual's attitudes, traits or behaviours would vary according to the situation or role that the individual is in rather than the individual's sex. In a study on self-confidence among Americans, Carr, Thomas, & Mednick (1985) found that the women's self-confidence tended to vary according to situations more than that of men indicating that women's self-confidence was not generally lower than men as indicated by some studies. Chusmir & Koberg (1991) further support that gender is not a major factor in determining level of self-confidence.

If men and women are able to adjust their attitudes, traits and behaviours in accordance with the situation or role that they are in, then given a particular situation or role it can be expected for both sexes to display similar attitudes, traits and behaviours. In the entrepreneurial role, being a leader and/or a manager for a particular organisation, men and women should not differ in matters critical to the performance and welfare of the organisation.

Marketing orientation and strategy are an important aspect of most organisations. It is not a choice among entrepreneurs whether to be consumer oriented or not but it is a necessity to ensure future survival of the business. Just because women are associated with the gentler traits, it does not mean that men are any less consumer oriented than women. Whether the entrepreneur is a man or a woman, it makes good business sense to be consumer oriented because that is the prerequisite for business success. In addition, the degree of importance of some generic marketing strategies should not differ by entrepreneur's gender.

The expectation of similarities between the responses of both sexes is based on the premise that gender should not be the determining factor of marketing strategy importance. It makes very little sense, for example, that women and not men should prefer product innovation and development whereas this strategy is crucial for all businesses. As indicated by Pearce & Robinson (1985), strategy selection should be based on such factors as organisational strengths and weaknesses, competitors' position, and market growth. Selector's gender has not been featured as an important factor for strategy choice.

## **Study Methods**

To examine the similarities and differences in consumer orientation and marketing strategies among women and men entrepreneurs in manufacturing, retailing and service businesses, a survey was conducted by using a structured questionnaire. This survey constituted a part of bigger study under the IRPA research sponsored by the ministry of science, Technology and Environment, Malaysia. The structured questionnaire was administered through personal interview by trained student enumerators or self-administered by the entrepreneurs, depending

on the choice made by the entrepreneurs. For the purpose of this study sampling, an entrepreneur was defined as an individual who owned fully or partly the business that he or she was running. The Malay ethnicity of the entrepreneurs was determined through self-labelling as prescribed by Cohen (1978).

A total sample of 451 Malay entrepreneurs was obtained for the study proper with 122 in manufacturing, 156 in retailing, and 173 in services. A majority of the businesses were sole-proprietorships, partnerships and private-limited companies with an average existence of 8.2 years and an average number of full-time employees of ten. However, for this study there were only 88 respondents, 69 males and 19 females because of the non responses on the measures of marketing strategies. Though limited in sample size and lacking in statistical power, the finding is still useful to indicate the direction and magnitude of relationships.

Consumer orientation was measured by using five items in Likert Scale format. The degree of agreement or disagreement with the statements was measured by means of a five-point scale where 1 represents strong disagreement and 5 represents strong agreement. Marketing strategies were measured in 15 items in which respondents were asked to evaluate on a five-point scale whether each item influences little or highly the current performance of the business (1 represents little influence and 5 represents high influence).

Factor analysis by means of principal components analysis and varimax rotation was utilised to collapse the measurement items into the various factors. Reliability analysis was also performed on the factors to establish the extent of the internal consistency of the measures. To test for gender influence on consumer orientation and marketing strategies, several runs of analysis of variance and analysis of covariance were performed by using the factor scores as the dependent variables. Analysis of covariance is useful in this study to factor out the influence of variables that tend to covary with gender.

## Results

Table 1 provides the results of the factor analysis performed on the twenty-item measures of consumer orientation and marketing strategies. As evident from the tables, four relatively "clean" factors resulted with factor loadings exceeding 0.60. Items purported to measure consumer orientation have indeed loaded on a single factor whereas items pertaining to marketing strategies have loaded on three factors. By examining the variables in each of the three factors of marketing strategies, the factors can be labelled as marketing integration/coordination, internal marketing resources and product strategy orientation. These factors along with the factor for consumer orientation account for 70.5% of the variance in the variables.

From Table 1, we can observe that the reliability coefficients for the four factors have also exceeded the minimum requirement of 0.70 prescribed by Nunnally (1978). The findings indicate that measures of the four factors are indeed internally consistent. From the scale means, we can interpret that a majority of the respondents tended to be consumer-oriented and tended to agree that marketing integration/orientation influenced the performance of their business.

**Table 1**  
**Results Of Factor And Reliability Analyses**

Variable	1	Fac tor		4
		2	3	
Marketing Integration : coordination				
1. Marketing is involved in corporate strategy development	0.84			
2. Cooperation coordination between department/divisions in the organisation	0.88			
3. Close working relationship between marketing and personnel human resource department	0.85			
4. Close working relationship between marketing and computer data processing department	0.87			
5. Close working relationship between marketing and operations (including sales at branches)	0.70			

Internal Marketing Resources				
6. Managing of salesforce		0.77		
7. Managing of customer- contact staff		0.81		
8. Training of customer-contact staff		0.77		
9. Use of advertising/sales promotion personal selling		0.76		
10. Use of marketing research		0.64		
Consumer Orientation				
11. In-depth knowledge on consumer needs and behaviours is the main focus of this business.			0.76	
12. In running this business, I've always put priority on consumer needs.			0.84	
13. I've trained my employees to treat customers well and with courtesy.			0.80	
14. Good customer service will ensure the future of my business.			0.83	
15. Understanding of customer need will ensure the future of my business.			0.78	

Product Strategy Orientation				
16. The first among competitors to introduce new products /services				0.67
17. Developing unique products services				0.74
18. Maintaining a complete product line				0.74
19. Testing of product concept prior to product development.				0.70
20. Branding goods/services.				0.68
	7.43	1.13	2.08	1.46
Eigenvalue	37.20	15.60	10.40	7.30
% of variance	37.20	52.80	63.20	70.50
Cumulative %	0.92	0.87	0.81	0.80
Cronbrach's alpha	17.29	18.20	22.26	18.07
Scale mean	5.02	4.50	2.44	4.24
Scale standard deviation				

To examine the influence of gender on the four factors, four consecutive runs of the one-way analysis of variance, were performed in which gender was treated as the dependent variables. The results are shown in table 2. Because of the small sample size in this study, a cut-off point of 0.10 is utilised for the Type I error rate. Contrary to expectation, not all of the results in Table 2 are insignificant. Gender seems to have an important influence on two out of the four factors. However, there is no significant gender influence on consumer orientation. Whether the entrepreneur is a man or a woman, he or she tends to agree on the importance of consumer orientation.

But the results on two out of the three marketing strategies seem to differ by gender. Men and Women entrepreneurs tended to perceive a different level of influence of marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation on business performance. However, they do not differ on the importance of internal marketing resources. Based on the mean factor scores by gender, men tended to perceive a higher influence of marketing integration/co-ordination on business performance than women. Marketing's involvement in corporate strategies and co-operation/co-ordination between departments/divisions are seen as more important for men than women. By contrast, women tended to perceive such product strategies as the first in the marketplace, uniqueness, and complete product line as more

important in influencing the business performance than men. However, they do not differ on the importance of managing the sales force, managing and training the customer-contact personnel, and the use of promotional tools and marketing research.

**Table 2**  
**Anova Results**

Dependent variable	SV	SS	df	MS	F	P
Consumer Orientation	Gender	0.03	1	0.03	0.02	0.88
	Residual	86.98	86	1.01		
Marketing Integration/Coordination	Gender	8.66	1	8.66	9.51	0.00
	Residual	78.34	86	0.91		
Internal Marketing Resources	Gender	0.53	1	0.53	0.53	0.47
	Residual	86.47	86	1.01		
Product Strategy Orientation	Gender	3.04	1	3.04	3.11	0.08
	Residual	83.96	86	0.98		

The results in table 2 are prone to some errors because of the failure to control for variables that covary with gender. It may not be gender per se that is the crucial factor that influences the four factors under study but a constellation of variables that covary with gender (Sausser & York 1978). Three variables that might covary with gender were included in the analysis of covariance either as covariates (for continuous variables) or independent variable (for discrete variable). These variables include business age, entrepreneur's age and business type. Results of the ANCOVA analyses are given in tables.

As evident from Table 3, the inclusion of the three variables either as an independent variable or covariates have not changed the significant gender influence in the ANOVA analyses remained significant gender influence remained insignificant in the ANCOVA analyses. Therefore, it can be implied that the differences in marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation may be reflective of gender differences.



**Table 3**  
**Ancova Results**

<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>SV</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>MS</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P</b>
Consumer Orientation	Covariates					
	Bus age	0.01	1	0.01	0.01	0.92
	Ent age	0.17	1	0.17	0.16	0.69
	Main effects					
	Gender					
	(G)	0.01	1	0.01	0.01	0.92
	Bus type	0.88	2	0.44	0.40	0.67
	(B)					
Marketing Integration Coordination	Interaction	1.46	2	0.73	0.67	0.52
	B*B	77.55	71	1.09		
	Residual					
	Covariates					
	Bus age	3.84	1	3.84	3.87	0.05
	Ent age	0.36	1	0.36	0.36	0.55
	Main effects					
	Gender (G)	7.35	1	7.35	7.39	0.01
Internal Marketing Resources	Bus type	0.17	2	0.09	0.09	0.92
	(B)					
	Interaction	0.63	2	0.31	0.32	0.73
	G*B	70.61	71	1.00		
	Residual					
	Covariates					
	Bus age	0.69	1	0.69	0.82	0.37
	Ent age	2.41	1	2.41	2.86	0.10
Product Strategy Orientation	Main effects					
	Gender (G)	0.05	1	0.05	0.05	0.82
	Bus type	1.83	2	0.91	1.09	0.34
	(B)					
	Interaction	11.60	2	6.89	6.89	0.00
	G*B	59.76	71			
	Residual					
	Covariates					
Product Strategy Orientation	Bus age	0.40	1	0.40	0.42	0.52
	Ent age	0.62	1	0.62	0.65	0.42
	Main effects					
	Gender (G)	4.96	1	4.96	5.19	0.03
	Bus type	2.18	2	1.09	1.14	0.33
	(B)					
	Interaction	4.82	2	2.41	2.52	0.09
	G*B	67.97	71	0.96		
	Residual					

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study has uncovered insignificant gender differences on consumer orientation and internal marketing resources but significant gender differences on marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation. There are three possible explanations for the unexpected significant findings. Firstly, it is tenable that there is no real difference in gender but the statistical significance could be an artefact of variables that covary with gender but have not been taken into account in this study. Although this study attempted to control for such variables as business age, entrepreneur's age and business type, it might be possible that some other variables such as business size, and entrepreneur's experience in big organisations could attribute for the differences in marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation and not gender. Future research should address this point by measuring or controlling for business size and big business experience to ensure that differences in marketing strategies are indeed because of the differences in entrepreneur's gender.

Secondly, we could take the stance that women and men entrepreneurs are indeed different in their evaluation of importance of marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation on their business performance. If they are indeed different on these two factors, what set of explanation would account for the difference? We could speculate that trait theories might still provide a relevant explanation for gender differences. It is possible that men could be more holistic and women being more focused in their thinking that resulted in men placing a greater importance on marketing integration/coordination in the organisation than women. Being focused, women entrepreneurs may tend to place a greater weight on product strategy for success whereas men may tend to view product strategies as constituting a part of the whole business strategy.

Finally, the empirical findings suggest that the role-centered perspective may not hold for all situations. Adjustment of attitudes, traits and behaviours to suit the situation or role may not be generally prevalent. Consumer orientation and importance of internal marketing resources may cut across gender but the difference in men and women entrepreneurs still prevail in their evaluation of the importance of marketing integration/coordination and product strategy orientation. As a results, we may imply that there are situations in which men and women entrepreneurs are able to adjust their attitudes, traits and behaviours to suit a particular situation or role. However, in some other situations gender manifestations are too strong for the role-centered perspective to hold. In these situations, we should look at both the role-centered perspective and differences between gender. Future research should attempt to identify a set of straits prominent in men and women that distinguish their strategy formulation, implementation and decision making in organisations. Further, research

should be geared towards the identification of moderating variables that could provide the explanatory or predictive power for gender similarities and differences.

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