

EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL INNOVATION AS MEDIATOR IN
ENHANCING WHOLESALE AND RETAIL SMALL AND MEDIUM
ENTERPRISES' PERFORMANCE

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Azman Hashim International Business School
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

NOVEMBER 2022

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to almighty Allah for the abundance in grace, mercy and favour granted to me throughout the journey of my PhD programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the Almighty Allah for giving me the opportunity to complete my PhD thesis. The past three years of my life have been both challenging and rewarding. I appreciate that I have been surrounded by some of the most brilliant people in their fields. However, it is impossible to name all the people who have contributed over the years toward the completion of this thesis with their support, encouragement, advice, data and resources. To all the unsung heroes, I am eternally grateful. First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Harcharanjit Singh for his unparalleled and invaluable guidance, support, encouragement and patience. I would like to also thank Dr. Shathees Baskaran for his constant help and motivation.

My gratitude goes to my family who has given endless moral support, encouragement and prayer. My special thanks go especially to my father who is been a great and wise teacher in my life and my lovely mother for her infinite patience especially during my absence, and her sincere love which has accompanied me all the way in my long struggle and has pushed me to pursue my dreams. Then, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to my wife Afnan, and my lovely kids Abdullah and Husam. You endured my prolonged lack of care and continued to support me until the end. Without your love and understanding, this journey would not have been possible. Great thanks to you. May Allah bless you all. Last but not the least, to my brothers, sisters and friends, I thank you so much for continuously giving me the undivided support and eternal prayers.

Furthermore, I want to express my appreciation for the financial support I received during my PhD. Journey, from Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research Yemen, and the support from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), you made this research study a reality.

ABSTRACT

In the fast-changing environment, Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) need to seize business opportunities and develop dynamic capabilities that produce high performance. Malaysia's wholesale and retail SMEs have suffered a severe decline in their business performance. Moreover, the sector's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution is comparatively low compared to other sectors in Malaysia. In addition, the wholesale and retail sector also suffers heavily from low productivity. The present study has investigated the relationships between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management (HRM) practices, and organizational learning towards firm performance and organizational innovation. The current study also investigated the relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance. Likewise, the present study tested the mediating role of organizational innovation between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, and organizational learning towards organizational innovation. Hence, 201 responses were obtained from the owners/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Thirteen hypotheses were tested in the study, and only ten of them were supported, and three hypotheses were not supported. The present study found a positive and significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning, organizational innovation, and firm performance. However, market orientation and HRM practices were found to have no relationship with firm performance. A positive and significant relationship was found between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, and organizational learning towards organizational innovation. Besides that, organizational innovation mediates the relationship between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning and firm performance. However, the study failed to provide empirical evidence for the mediating role of organizational innovation between HRM practices and firm performance. The study made significant contributions, especially for the owners/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia, by increasing their knowledge and awareness of appropriate strategies to improve organizational capabilities and how these strategies could foster an organizational innovation culture and increase firm performance. It also expands the current knowledge from the perspective of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Thus, if the owners/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia could apply these strategies, they would enjoy superior firm performance and ensure business sustainability. Similarly, policymakers in Malaysia were provided recommendations to develop and establish policies to support the growth of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia.

ABSTRAK

Dalam persekitaran yang pantas berubah, Perusahaan Kecil dan Sederhana (PKS) perlu merebut peluang perniagaan dan membangunkan keupayaan dinamik yang boleh menghasilkan prestasi tinggi. Namun begitu, PKS borong dan runcit telah mengalami penurunan yang teruk dalam prestasi perniagaan mereka. Selain itu, sumbangan Keluaran Dalam Negara Kasar (KDNK) sektor ini agak rendah berbanding sektor lain di Malaysia. Di samping itu, sektor borong dan runcit juga mengalami produktiviti yang rendah. Kajian ini menyelidik hubungan antara orientasi pemasaran, orientasi keusahawanan, amalan pengurusan sumber manusia (HRM), dan pembelajaran organisasi terhadap prestasi firma dan inovasi organisasi. Kajian ini juga menyiasat hubungan antara inovasi organisasi dan prestasi firma. Selain itu, kajian ini menguji peranan pengantara inovasi organisasi antara orientasi pasaran, orientasi keusahawanan, amalan HRM, dan pembelajaran organisasi terhadap inovasi organisasi. Sebanyak 201 maklum balas telah diperolehi daripada pemilik/pengurus PKS borong dan runcit di Malaysia. Data telah dianalisis menggunakan Pakej Statistik untuk Sains Sosial (SPSS) dan Pemodelan Persamaan Struktur Kuasa Dua Terkecil Separa (PLS-SEM). Tiga belas hipotesis diuji dalam kajian ini dan hanya sepuluh daripadanya disokong manakala tiga hipotesis tidak disokong. Kajian ini mendapati hubungan positif dan signifikan di antara orientasi keusahawanan, pembelajaran organisasi, inovasi organisasi dan prestasi firma. Walau bagaimanapun, orientasi pasaran dan amalan HRM didapati tidak mempunyai hubungan dengan prestasi firma. Hubungan positif dan signifikan didapati antara orientasi pasaran, orientasi keusahawanan, amalan HRM, dan pembelajaran organisasi terhadap inovasi organisasi. Selain itu, hubungan antara orientasi pasaran, orientasi keusahawanan, pembelajaran organisasi dan prestasi firma telah dimediasi oleh inovasi organisasi. Walau bagaimanapun, kajian ini gagal memberikan bukti empirikal untuk peranan pengantara inovasi organisasi antara amalan HRM dan prestasi firma. Kajian ini memberikan sumbangan penting, terutamanya bagi pemilik/pengurus PKS borong dan runcit di Malaysia, dengan meningkatkan pengetahuan dan kesedaran mereka tentang strategi yang sesuai untuk meningkatkan keupayaan organisasi, dan bagaimana strategi ini dapat memupuk budaya inovasi organisasi dan meningkatkan prestasi firma. Ia juga memperluaskan pengetahuan semasa dari perspektif PKS borong dan runcit di Malaysia. Oleh itu, jika pemilik/pengurus PKS borong dan runcit di Malaysia boleh menggunakan strategi ini, mereka akan menikmati prestasi firma yang unggul dan memastikan kemampunan perniagaan. Begitu juga, penggubal dasar di Malaysia telah diberikan cadangan untuk membangun dan mewujudkan dasar yang boleh menyokong pertumbuhan PKS borong dan runcit di Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DCT	-	Dynamic Capability Theory
EO	-	Entrepreneurial Orientation
FP	-	Firm Performance
HRMP	-	Human Resource Management Practices
KBV	-	Knowledge-Based View
MO	-	Market Orientation
OI	-	Organizational Innovation
OL	-	Organizational Learning
RBV	-	Resource-Based View
SMEs	-	Small and Medium-Size Enterprises

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a brief description of the current research is presented. The chapter commences by introducing the context of the research background with a particular focus on the impact of Market Orientation, Entrepreneurial Orientation, HRM Practices, Organizational Learning, and Organizational Innovation on Firm Performance in Wholesale and Retailer SMEs in Malaysia. Over the last few decades, the overall contribution of SMEs to Malaysian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been on descending a thrust on account of poor sectoral performance. The issue of low SMEs performance would have critical consequences on the country's economy, and the problem needs to be handled tactfully. Next are the problem statement and the research questions, as well as the research objectives. In the following sections, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, the definition of key terms, and finally, the organizational thesis was discussed.

1.2 Research Background

Globalization has created many concerns for companies in various industries and has resulted in foreign goods flowing easily into domestic industries (Dominguez & Mayrhofer, 2017). Furthermore, not only goods but also human resources and other capitals flow to the domestic industries (Belu et al., 2018). Globalization makes very tight competition unavoidable for companies, especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Musthofa et al., 2017). SMEs have a prominent role in a country's economic, progressive and social advancement (Yoshino & Taghizadeh-Hesary, 2019). Moreover, it plays a vital role in the global economy through its commitment to the GDP and improving the living standards of the people

(Gherghina et al., 2020). Generally, SMEs accounts for at least 90% of the businesses and employ an approximate 60% workforce globally (Naradda Gamage et al., 2019). Thus, the SMEs' contribution to reducing poverty and providing sustainable economic growth is conclusive. Significantly, SMEs have become an essential part of the global economy through the fare of everyday items to several countries (Zafar & Mustafa, 2017).

In the developing world, SMEs account for at least 90% of the national business; and they represent more than 95% of all the companies in the world (Auzzir et al., 2018). According to Tambunan (2019), SMEs make a significant contribution to the development of communities in rural economies worldwide. This shows the importance of SMEs in shaping the economic landscape of emerging economies (Bello et al., 2018). Developing and emerging economies are beginning to fully comprehend the important role of SMEs in developing and sustaining economic growth (Prasanna et al., 2019). Consequently, these nations seek innovative means to strengthen SMEs in their country for future economic prosperity (Ndiaye et al., 2018).

SMEs received adequate attention on economic and social development policies in developing or more economically developed countries (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2018). Since the 1990s, a series of Government White Papers on Competitiveness in the United Kingdom provided more significant effects to the roles and contribution of the SMEs sector to the growth of the economy to increase competitiveness (OECD, 2017). Likewise, several major countries like the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States of America (USA) have experienced successes in generating jobs, innovation, and growth through the contribution of SMEs in their country (OECD, 2017).

SMEs contribute significantly to the commercial landscape and are regarded as the core of the Asian economies (Yoshino et al., 2016). Despite that, not only do SMEs promote the economic development of a country, but their success level indicates the efficacy of government policy in developing an entrepreneurial society in the nation (Nasir et al., 2017). Moreover, as one of the world's fastest-growing

economic regions, Southeast Asia has widely adopted a growth model based on foreign investment, international trade, and integration with global and regional value chains (Lee et al., 2019). Thus, this approach provides an excellent opportunity for SMEs to increase their competitiveness for sustainable growth in a fiercely competitive marketplace (OECD/ERIA, 2018).

SMEs development is regarded as an essential pillar of regional integration efforts. Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises constitute about 97% to 99% of the enterprise's workforce in most ASEAN countries (Lopez Gonzalez, 2016). Similarly, countries like Singapore, Thailand, and Indonesia, also depend on SMEs, and most of the economic resources of these countries are developed through the growth of SMEs (OECD/ERIA, 2018). Moreover, SMEs in Malaysia is one of the largest business establishments in the country and a vital component of the country's economic development; and are regarded as central to Malaysia's industrial development (Hami et al., 2018). In addition, SMEs could be considered an establishment responsible for training entrepreneurs to develop the company on a broader scale (Razak et al., 2018).

Ibrahim et al. (2018), suggested that based on the Economic Transformation Program Report, Malaysia has effectively planned on transforming its business operation to strengthen and position its SME's performance at a high rate of growth that will assist in effectively sustaining the lifespan of the organization. In addition, the Malaysian government has set out strategies that will help to promote SMEs to reach their optimal performance level by 2030 (Ariffin, 2019). Similarly, compared to other nations, SMEs in Malaysia are considered diverse; they include medium-sized contract manufacturers, grocery store operators, petty traders. Moreover, the medium-sized contract manufacturers supply parts and materials to large corporations or service providers such as software firms or medical researchers that offer professional services to overseas markets (Tahir et al., 2018).

Fundamentally, SMEs in Malaysia are vital to the economic growth that contains 99.2% of the total entrepreneurs in Malaysia were registered SME traders and accounted for 38.2% of the GDP, while 48% of the country employment and

13.5% towards the country's share of export (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2020). More importantly, SMEs' activities are dominated by services that have contributed 63.3% and manufacturing sectors with 19.8%. On the other hand, the agriculture sector contributed 9.7% to SMEs' GDP. In comparison, the construction, mining and quarrying sectors contributed 5.6% and 0.5%, respectively (SME Corp, 2019/20). SMEs' main sectors in Malaysia are classified as service, manufacturing, agriculture, mining and quarry, and construction.

Furthermore, the service sector is vital to the development of a country. The service sector is also critical to accessing essential services and attaining several additional goals, which include poverty reduction, among others (Kim & Wood, 2020). Additionally, the service sector is also known as the tertiary sector and is considered the main driver of Malaysia's economic growth. Specifically, the tertiary sector of the economy provides services to businesses and consumers. Significantly, in 2019, the service sector contributed 63.3% of the total exports in Malaysia (SME Corp, 2019/20).

According to the SME Corporation Malaysia, the service sector offers various services such as insurance and finance, storage and transportation, real estate and business, and communication utilized as intermediate service (SME Corp, 2019/20). Likewise, the final services sub-sector comprises wholesale and retail trade, accommodation and restaurants, utilities and other services. According to SME Corp report (2019/20), 63.9% of service sectors are classified as "Wholesale and Retail Trade & Food & beverages and accommodation." Additionally, a survey conducted by the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce & Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM) revealed that 27% of the total SMEs in Malaysia fall within the category of "Wholesale and Retail " businesses (ACCCIM, 2017).

Wholesale and retail industries SMEs are scattered throughout Malaysia. Hence, SMEs' contributions, obstacles, and prospects benefit several firms operating in Malaysia's wholesale and retail sub-sector of the distributive trade sector (SME Corp, 2019/20). In the same way, the SMEs operating in the wholesale and retail subsector of the distributive trade have a significant role in the Malaysian economy

and society. Moreover, the active role of SMEs in the wholesale and retail subsector of the distributive trade is implied by their contribution to the GDP and employment with regard to values and growth rates (SME Corp, 2019/20). Based on Figure 1.1, the majority of the SME sectors such as food and beverages and accommodation, utilities, and other services experienced a steady GDP growth from 2017 to 2019. In comparison, the government services contributions to GDP experienced a sharp decline from 4.9% in 2017 to 3.7% in 2019. Whereas, the wholesale and retail sector fluctuate between 2017 to 2019, which shows 7.1% in 2017, 8.1% in 2018, and 6.7% in 2019. However, the contributions of most of the sectors to GDP in 2020 is negative for wholesale and retail, food beverages and accommodation, and other services. Except for government services and utilities, which contributed positively. This significant decline is attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 virus (Maliszewska et al., 2020; Mustaffa et al., 2021).

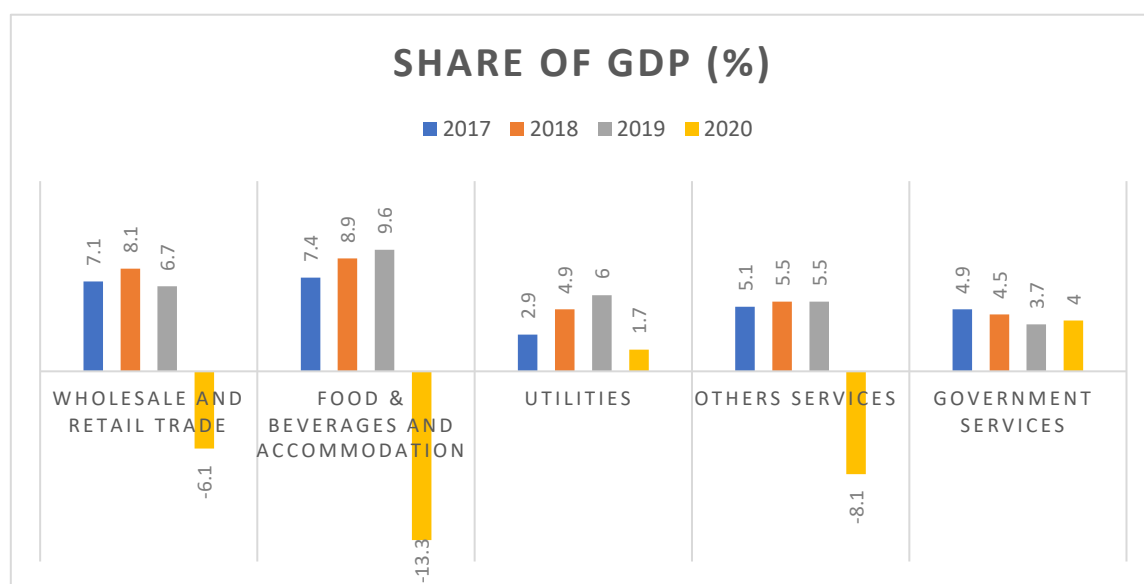


Figure 1.1 Performance of service subsector (Share of the GDP) (Bank Negara Malaysia (2017/20))

Nevertheless, the wholesale and retail SMEs did not receive ample consideration and was absolutely ignored (Tehseen et al., 2017). Therefore, more research is needed on Malaysia’s wholesale and retail SMEs as their overall performance is low (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2019). Most research on SMEs in Malaysia

is concentrated on other sectors, namely services and manufacturing (Nasir et al., 2017; Nor-Aishah et al., 2020).

Innovation plays an important role in the economic progress of any nation because it creates a competitive market among industries and profoundly affects the firm's performance and economic growth more broadly (Rasheed et al., 2020). The use of innovation has the potential to create both direct and indirect wealth by altering and improving existing resources. (Pulka et al., 2021). Innovation enables companies to enhance product quality and services by differentiating themselves from their competition, thus contributing to competitive advantage and sustainability (Muangmee et al., 2021). Cozzarin (2017) specified that innovation usually refers to a product or process-related innovation by default. Malaysia is classified as an Upper Middle (UM) income country based on its gross national income (GNI) per capita, according to the Global Innovation Index (GII) for 2016-2021. Malaysia was placed 36th in 2021, down one position from the previous year (GII, 2021). Malaysia is one of the few other middle-income economies in the top 30 of the global innovation index (GII), although its ranking has not improved over time. Malaysia has been hovering near the top 30 for the previous 11 years, but it has failed to break through (Dutta et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, efforts to align governmental and private sector for science, technology, and innovation stakeholders have been generally uncoordinated, the impact of policies and strategies has been limited (Mahmud et al., 2019). There appears to be some competition among the various agencies over who should take the lead in aligning and overseeing science, technology, and innovation efforts; the private sector is not sufficiently involved in innovation (Reid et al., 2022). Across the different ministries and government entities, there is confusion over functions and boundaries. Many people may have overlapping tasks, which can lead to duplication of effort and oversight on some topics (Reid et al., 2022). Although, significant funding is available, but obtaining can be difficult for SMEs (Wasiuzzaman et al., 2020). In addition, rural and urban communities do not have equal access to commercialization funding. Finally, the majority of available funds are geared toward early-stage investment, leaving a gap in funding for SMEs looking to expand

their user base and product offerings, grow their company, expand their market, and recruit new talent, or develop new products, expand into new markets, or even acquire other businesses (Jayashree et al., 2021). Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate factors that could improve the wholesale and retail SME sector in Malaysia.

1.3 Problem Statement

SMEs are important to the economy and the social landscape of Malaysia and are viewed as crucial pillars of the nation (Tahir et al., 2018). Even though SMEs make a significant contribution to the economic growth of Malaysia, the contribution to GDP is still lacking compared with advanced countries with huge economic capacity (Musa & Chinniah, 2016). Moreover, SMEs in Malaysia faced a lot of pressure and a myriad of challenges (Halim et al., 2015). In addition, SMEs in Malaysia face challenges such as scarce resources, poor managerial skills, inadequate knowledge (Amin et al., 2016). Notably, one of the main issues that need to be addressed is the lower productivity of SMEs as compared with larger establishments in Malaysia and SMEs in other countries. In this regard, SMEs in Malaysia are incapable of sustaining competition from larger establishments located in Malaysia and abroad (OECD, 2017). Nevertheless, the lower rate of output from SMEs in Malaysia presents several opportunities for growth and improvement (Lim, 2016).

According to Halim et al. (2015), the slow improvement in labor productivity is receiving less attraction from investors; this is due to financial crisis as a result of slow performance. Additionally, the impact of globalization in Asian countries has presented several challenges to wholesale and retail in Malaysian retail industries. Some of the challenges include worries resulting from inadequate key resources for business success and lack of know-how to successfully compete with their foreign competitors (Tehssen, 2014). Finance is one of the significant facets for the SMEs companies' growths and has constantly remained an impediment for SME companies to continue growing (Mustafa et al., 2020).

When the business expands, various challenges and difficulties emerge due to factors such as technological advancement that involve some change in policies, processes and structures (Muda & Rahman, 2016). Likewise, the challenges faced by the use of SMEs businesses during their corporate existence require the preparation, expertise and encouragement of people to participate in commercial enterprise strategies with a view to achieving business success (Sani et al., 2019). SMEs face many difficulties and challenges from the growing competitive environment, which would hinder them from achieving sustainable growth (Mahmud et al., 2019). Hence, due to these challenges, SMEs are compelled to downsize, form mergers, or close their business due to their poor business performance (Halim et al., 2015). Thus, there is a need to investigate factors that may influence SME performance (Razali et al., 2018).

Despite of the growing attention to the SME sector in Malaysia, not much attention has been paid to its business performance (Singh & Mahmood, 2014). SMEs in Malaysia face a significant problem with their firm performance (Musa & Chinniah, 2016; Muda & Rahman, 2016; Sani et al., 2019). However, Bakar et al. (2017a) suggested that there is still a lack of study regard to strategic improvisation with Malaysia SME performance. Based on the significant contribution of SMEs to the national economy, it is necessary to study and evaluate SMEs' performance (Ismail et al., 2016). According to Bakar and Mamat (2017b), it would also be interesting to study and compare the approaches made by SMEs in other sectors in order to gain further insights into the dynamic nature of SME performance. Henceforth, the research is focused on the wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia.

Furthermore, limited studies are being carried out on wholesale and retail SMEs and firm performance (Tehseen et al., 2017). Wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia operate in volatile market environments where they face the crucial problem of survivability due to intense competition within the industry. Therefore, it is important for managers and entrepreneurs to be able to thrive in such a competitive business climate (Falahat et al., 2018). Despite of that, like a few SMEs sectors in Malaysia, wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia also are having challenges in their business performance (Falahat et al., 2018).

Figure 1.2 showed the wholesale and retail SME's business performance from the year 2016 to 2020. There is a fluctuation in the business performance from 2016 to 2020 period. Specifically, the business performance in the year 2016 was between -18.8% to -31.5%. However, in 2017, the business performance increased to 20.7% in the second quarter and dropped to 2.2% in the last quarter of 2017. Likewise, in 2018 the performance at the first quarter was -1.5% and gradually increased to 12.6% in the fourth quarter. Meanwhile, in the year 2019, the business performance was -6.4% in the first quarter, while slightly increasing to 13.4% in the second quarter, and declined to 8.7% in the third quarter and the performance was -3.9% in the final quarter respectively. Moreover, the performance drops in 2020 slightly by -2.9% but further dropped drastically in the second quarter at -81.2%. Similarly, performance recovered from -81.2% to -34.2% in the third and -29.3% in the fourth quarter. However, the business performance still continued to be very poor. This significant decline is attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 virus (Maliszewska et al., 2020; Mustafa et al., 2021).

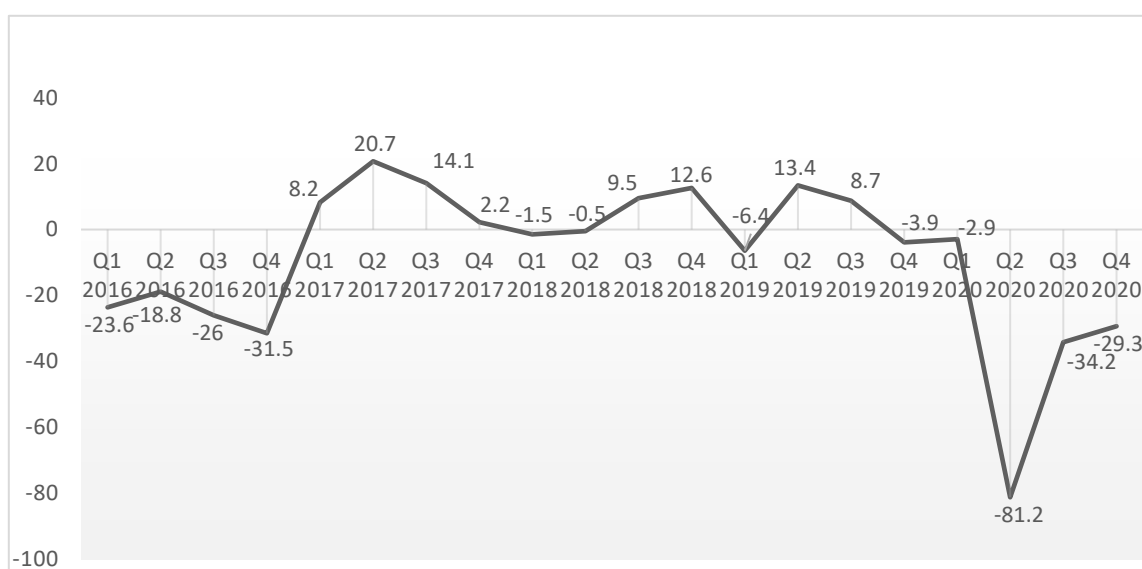


Figure 1.2 The wholesale and retail trade net balance of business performance (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2021)

Based on the Figure 1.2 wholesale & retail SMEs business performance, the net balance was used to demonstrate the business performance of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021),

the decrease or increase in net balance indicates the decrease or increase in business performance. For example, it is found that the business performance started at -23.6% in 2016 and the performance fluctuated over time and finally rested at -29.3% in 2020. Thus, the poor business performance, wholesale & retail SMEs should take serious initiatives to recover and review their performance periodically because of changes in the environment (Ibrahim et al., 2018). Furthermore, throughout their business life, SMEs required training, knowledge, and motivation to engage in commercial enterprise techniques and increase their business performance (Muda & Rahman, 2016, Sani et al., 2019). Hooi and Ngui (2014), suggested that strategies such as innovation, external business environment, and human capital development can improve the performances of SMEs in Malaysia. Therefore, specific concerns and problems facing Malaysian Wholesale and Retail SMEs in terms of profit, sales goals, and ROI, quality, satisfaction, market effectiveness, and efficiency plays major role in improving the net balance of business performance (Tajudin et al., 2021).

Moreover, in the Malaysian economy, the innovation affects the marketability of businesses by increasing their relevance (Ammeran et al., 2022). Technological advancement and tighten innovation are critical for wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Malaysia's position in the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2021 across all parameters has placed Malaysia 36th out of 132 countries in 2021, down one position from the previous year (GII, 2021). Malaysia was placed 36th in the innovation input sub-index and 34th in the innovation output sub-index. As a result, GDP growth is much lower than its potential output level, with a deficit of 49% (Ignatius, 2022). Malaysia will need an ambitious innovation goal, a synergized ecosystem, and a 'bridge' between research and commercialization to move ahead in the area and reach its goal of being among the top most innovative countries by 2030 (Ignatius, 2022).

Ammeran et al. (2022), report that SMEs have been negatively affected by rapidly escalating tech-adaptation challenges, and less adoption of innovation in wholesale and retail as compared to other sectors (Ammeran et al., 2022; Tehseen et al., 2016). The authors further state that pandemic such as COVID-19 outbreaks severely affected the SMEs businesses by the drop in demand and scarcity of resources. Zulkiffli et al. (2022), emphasized the impact of Covid-19 on SMEs

adoption of new innovations. According to Zulkiffli et al. (2022), Malaysian SMEs continue to face a variety of challenges. Some of those include a lack of access to finance, limitations on human resources, a lack of innovation adoption, a lack of knowledge of potential customers and markets, and global competition. In addition to technological challenges, start-up funding, marketing, management skills, education level, social networks, age of owners, and government support, other challenges include unfair treatment by local authorities, and stiff competition (Wee et al., 2019).

Innovation leads to the product, process and services improvement, and assists SMES to survive, to grow faster, to be more efficient, and ultimately to be more profitable (Chen et al., 2018). According to Teh and Kee (2020), point out Malaysia's innovation rate has not yet reached its full potential. In addition, the authors point out that innovation in Malaysia is still at its infancy, particularly among SMEs. Among the challenges to SMEs innovation adoption, Hameed et al. (2019), contends that spill over motivation, maximizing internal innovation, and incorporating external knowledge are among the key factors. Although research has been carried out on innovation barriers to the wholesale and retail sectors in Western countries like the UK, no study has been carried out to examine the barriers to innovation in Malaysian wholesale and retail industries. (Maaodhah et al., 2021; Tehseen et al., 2016).

As a result, this study intends to close this gap by investigating the impact of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning and organizational innovation in Malaysia. These critical components could play major role in improving companies' profit, sales goals, and ROI, quality, satisfaction, market effectiveness, and efficiency. Nevertheless, existing studies are lacking that addressed these concerns, which affects how owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs understand the significance of these variables in their firms (Sajilan & Tehseen, 2019; Tehssen, 2014; Tehseen et al., 2017).

Many studies provided understanding regarding how market orientation plays a major role in large companies (Hussain et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this strategy is absent in wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia (Tehseen et al.,

2021). Likewise, market orientation could play a huge role wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia (Maaodhah et al., 2021). Hence, understanding the effect of market orientation on the performance of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia could help wholesale and retail owner/managers to gather market intelligence such as information generation about customer demand, competitors, and new market development; disseminating this information to specific business section; and organization-wide responsiveness that could positively increase business performance significantly (Mahrous & Genedy, 2019).

In addition, entrepreneurial orientation is one of the challenges facing Malaysia's wholesale and retail sector (Hussain et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2016). Owner/managers are not willing to find and accept new opportunities to improve wholesale and retail SMEs sector in Malaysia (Hiung et al., 2019). Although, entrepreneurship orientation requires high investment, planning, risk-taking, and implementing business changes strategically and effectively (Hussain et al., 2018; Kajalo & Lindblom, 2015). These efforts could have been the factors discouraging owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs toward practicing entrepreneurial orientation (Alam et al., 2022). Hence, understanding the significance of entrepreneurship orientation is handy, and this study focused on closing this gap.

Moreover, knowledge encouraging the implementation of HRM practices, training, selection, and appraisal (Goodarzi & Bazgir, 2015) could influence employee productivity which in turn affects the firm performance positively. Furthermore, there are studies suggesting that SMEs firms in Malaysia are not applying organizational learning to meet the market demands (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021; Rahman et al., 2018). This could be as a result of lacking understanding concerning the impact of organizational learning on firm performance, particularly wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Organizational learning focuses on creating and transferring knowledge and attitude of firms to improve firm performance (Rahman et al., 2018). Knowledge is important for product development and understanding current and future markets (Maktabi & Khazaei, 2014). This motivates wholesale and retail sector to encourage dynamic behaviors based on market

indicators. Thus, organizational learning is considered in this study to understand its significance to Malaysia's wholesale and retail sector.

Finally, organizational innovation encourages firms to develop and implement new ideas (Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018; Martin_Rios & Pasamar, 2018), which has not been employed by wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Several companies are having problems due to a lack of innovation concepts and resources capabilities that enable them to innovate and compete globally (Annamalah, 2020; Distanont & Khongmalai, 2018). For example, owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia lack openness to new ideas, lack alternate solutions, and lack creativity in the business process (Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018; Martin_Rios & Pasamar, 2018). Knowledge obtained from this study could encourage wholesale and retail SMEs to be worried about organization innovation in influencing overall business performance.

Therefore, it was posited that SMEs wholesale and retail firm performance could be enhanced through market orientation, HRM practices, entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning and organizational innovation (Amin et al., 2016; Mahmud et al., 2019; Mokhtar et al., 2014).

Firm resources such as tangible and intangible resources can create a competitive advantage to attain its superior performance (Barney, 1986, 1991; Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984; Wheelen et al., 2015). The resource-based view theory is considered one (1) of the most adopted strategic management theories that incorporate abilities and resources as a vital and clear foundation for gaining sustainable competitive advantages to increase firm performances (Braganza et al., 2017). Several studies highlighted that resources such as innovation are rare and unique, which may lead to competitive advantage, and enhance a firm's performance (Gitahi & K'Obonyo, 2018; Sok et al., 2017). Subsequently, resource-based view theory postulates that unique capabilities, valuable resources, and core competencies are highly linked to exploring the firm's sustainability that prolongs the firm's performance (Adnan et al., 2018). Battisti and Deakins (2017), suggested that based

on research base view, firm resources lead to sustainable competitive advantage; whereas ordinary capabilities would have a significant effect on firm performance.

Joensuu-Salo et al. (2018), explained that market orientation is a rare and precious organization resource that is difficult to reproduce. Moreover, it is regarded as the firm's internal capabilities that create a sustainable competitive advantage (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2018). Based on RBV theory, firm resources such as market orientation; can build organizational capability and competency while increasing firm performance (Bucktowar et al., 2015). Market-oriented firms addressed the expressed and latent needs of the customers (Hussain et al., 2016). Based on RBV theory, firms that engage in market orientation or customer-led activities would increase their performance (Jogarathnam, 2017). Market orientation emphasizes the capability of organizations' strategic resources to fulfill market needs (Hussain et al., 2016). Additionally, based on market orientation, how the customers or competitors attended by the firm through organizational resources are considered unique and implicit (Paladino et al., 2015). Based on the RBV theory, firms will analyze their internal organizational resources before following the rivals and consumers implicitly; thus, the initial starting points and determinants of strategy between firms may differ (Paladino et al., 2015).

HRM practices are classified as organizational capital resources (Lu et al., 2015). Furthermore, human resource practices create competitive advantage; and its potential can only exist with the presence of an effective human resource management system (Lu et al., 2015). Studies have found that HRM practices are the key to sustainable advantage and increase firm performance (Chadwick & Dabu, 2009; Karami et al., 2004; Ismail et al., 2010). HRM practices can be incidentally ambiguous, unique, and synergistic on how companies can improve their competencies (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). Moreover, HRMP creates intelligent, flexible, and competent firms compared to their competitors through the application of policies and practices (Hameed & Mohamed, 2016). These policies and practices could be focused on recruiting, selection, training skilled s and directing their maximum effort to cooperate within the resource bundle of the organization (Hameed & Mohamed, 2016).

Market orientation is an approach that enables an organization to predict, respond to, and exploit environment changes and hence achieve higher efficiency (Buli, 2017). Market orientation received great attention in both academic and business fields in view of the important role it plays in leading to the successes of businesses (Zebal & Saber, 2014). As a result, a market orientation strategy can sustain organizational performance and competitive advantages in the long term (Cacciolatti & Lee, 2016). Powers et al. (2015), stated that market orientation strengthens firm performance in comparison to alternative strategic orientation. Wijesekara, et al. (2016) suggested that the firm performance is impacted by one of the market efforts, particularly market orientation. Many past studies have shown that there is a significant and positive impact of market orientation on performance (Hussain et al., 2016; Mahrous & Genedy, 2019; Mamun et al., 2018). Based on the discussion, market orientation was found to be the antecedent of firm performance; as such, there is a need to investigate more on the link between market orientation and firm performance. However, additional research, particularly in the wholesale and retail SMEs context, is required to explain the relationship between market orientation and firm performance (Sawaeen & Ali, 2019).

Entrepreneurial orientation is an approach that is defined as the procedures, practices, and decision-making activities that are applied to improve products and services quality based on customer needs which may improve performance (Chavez et al., 2017; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Furthermore, Otache and Mahmood (2015) stated that entrepreneurial orientation is part of strategic orientations of an organization that describes the extent to which entrepreneurial activities are carried out by the organization. Many empirical studies found a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance (Alkhazali et al., 2017; Covin & Miller, 2014; Lee & Chu, 2017). Based on the literature reviewed, entrepreneurial orientation is the antecedent of firm performance; as such, there is a need to investigate more on the link between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. Therefore, Nwekpa et al. (2017) suggested that future research should investigate the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

Human resources management practices are approaches applied in managing employees and organizational culture and environment, which are empirically related to a company's overall performance (Delery & Doty, 1996). However, a combination of several practices is logically designed to improve the effectiveness of an organization and yield better outcomes (Dhull & Narwal, 2016). HRM practices could assist the firm to effectively manage its employees parallel with organizational strategies for achieving higher performances (Gituma & Beyene, 2018). Furthermore, the effective execution of HRM practices in the firms is the foundation for creating a unique business edge; and has a positive relationship with company performance (Lazim et al., 2015). Many empirical studies found HRM practices have a positive effect on firm performance (Goodarzi & Bazgir, 2015; Mehmood et al., 2017; Ogunyomi & Bruning, 2016). Accordingly, HRM practices are found to be the antecedent of firm performance; as such, there is a need to investigate more on the link between HRM practices and firm performance. Therefore, future research should investigate the relationship between HRM practices and firm performance (Saridakis et al., 2017; Zakaria et al., 2018).

Moreover, organizational learning is defined as a source for acquiring a sustainable competitive advantage (Antunes & Pinheiro, 2020). The organizational learning is seen as a key factor for heightening organizational performance (Pham & Hoang, 2019). Based on RBV theory, competitive advantage is created when firms compete based on their unique, distinctive, exclusive internal capabilities, resource capabilities, and competencies (Setyanti et al., 2013). Besides that, the knowledge-based view (KBV) is an extension of the RBV (Grant, 1996). KBV advances the crucial role of internal resources and emphasizes on differentiated knowledge inventories as a basis for competitive advantage and growth (Grant, 1996; Setyanti et al., 2013). Thus, a firm can advance knowledge and capabilities resources that add organizational learning value and increase firm performance (Sari & Sukmasari, 2018; Turner & Pennington, 2015). Moreover, organizational learning is essential to capture new knowledge and exchange information. Information is the fundamental resource for firms to create their competitive advantage (Wujiabudula & Zehir, 2016). Hence, organizational learning plays a central role in sustaining competitive advantage as a result of the knowledge-based view of the firm (Jain & Moreno, 2015).

Nafei (2015) suggested that organizational learning is an approach involving set of management practices that enable the organizational learning process. Likewise, organizational learning can be described as a group of mechanisms that increase the capacity of a firm to sustain and expand its performance (Siddique, 2018). Organizational learning is the capacity to create, obtain, transfer and assimilate knowledge as well as to change the behavior to reflect the new cognitive state to improve the firm performance (Pradhan et al., 2017). Several studies found that organizational learning has a significant impact on firm performance (Kang & Choo, 2018; North & Kumta, 2018; Oh, 2019; Ouma et al., 2017). Based on the literature reviewed, organizational learning played antecedent of firm performance. Musthofa et al. (2017) suggested more research is needed for understanding the relationship between organizational learning on firm performance.

Dynamic capabilities theory (DCT) was utilized to examine the relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance. DCT enables firms to develop internal resources, thereby protecting them against the competition. The response of a firm's innovation must be faster to meet the market demand since the innovation is generally considered as an act of many tasks, which include responding to dynamic changes as well as existing products improvement, services enhancement, increasing competencies, and business models (Giniuniene & Jurksiene, 2015). Similarly, DCT encourages organizational innovation to integrate, design, develop, and reconfigure internal and external resource capabilities to improve the dynamic market need for effective firm performance (Teece et al., 1990).

Firm performance has the potential to grow by exploiting capabilities and resources that are owned through research and innovation (Favourita et al., 2018). Organizational innovation is an approach that described how firms introduced new products, processes, or ideas in an organization relevant to the company's ability to engage in innovation (Hurley & Hult, 1998). Moreover, the innovative ability of the organization can help firms to diversify the opportunities and strategies which need to be implemented for improving their survival and growth (Kafetzopoulos & Psomas, 2015). Organizations which believe in innovation have reported a

significant decrease in their production costs, in addition to higher revenue and profit (Matejun, 2017). Several studies found a positive effect of organizational innovation on firm performance (Arranz et al., 2019; Ho et al., 2018; Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018). Based on the discussion above, organizational innovation was found to be the antecedent of firm performance; as such, there is need to investigate more on the link between organizational innovation and firm performance. Tuan et al. (2016), suggested that it is important to investigate the effect relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance.

Market-oriented business activities could encourage companies to introduce innovation to their products, processes and markets (Newman et al., 2016). Innovation is significantly influenced by the level of market orientation of an organization, its ability to interact with its competitors and customers, the capacity to learn using the available information and implement changes (Prifti & Alimehmeti, 2017). Therefore, it is important to assess how the marketing capability of SMEs influences their ability to internationalize and their innovation performance (Sani et al., 2019). Past studies have found a positive relationship between (Chung, 2019; Ho et al., 2018; Sutapa et al, 2017). Based on the results from past empirical studies, market orientation is found to be the antecedent of organizational innovation; as such, there is a need to investigate the relationship between market orientation and organizational innovation relationship. Several studies suggested that further research is necessary to investigate the relationship between market orientation and organizational innovation (Chamanzamin et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2017).

Entrepreneurial orientation is a distinct intangible resource or organizational capability that is used in taking advantage of new business opportunities which competitors may find hard to replicate or replace. (Lonial & Carter, 2015). Moreover, entrepreneurial orientation is a source of sustainable competitive advantages for successful firm performance (Bogatyreva et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial orientation is a type of unique resource that could be channeled into new products development regarding the environmental change (Adams et al., 2017). Entrepreneurial orientation refers to the organization's strategic orientation and innovative functions to achieve a competitive advantage (Adams et al., 2017).

Likewise, RBV theory is central to entrepreneurial orientation (Bucktowar et al., 2015). However, to ensure the success of the organization, firms need to improve their internal resources to support the capacity of each construct that is related to the entrepreneurial orientation. Entrepreneurial orientation is an organization's strength in competing, which can be difficult to be imitated by any competitors (Shirokova et al., 2016).

Entrepreneurial orientation involves philosophy, processes, practices, and decision-making actions that enable firms to innovate (Tho, 2019). Likewise, entrepreneurial orientation is considered as a manifest in product and process innovation (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2015). Notably, entrepreneurial orientation is crucial in creating and encouraging innovation (Rattanawong & Suwanno, 2014). Numerous studies revealed that entrepreneurial orientation has a positive influence on organizational innovation (Abdullah et al., 2014; Omerzel, 2016; Seo, 2019; Solano-Romo et al., 2016). Based on the results from past empirical studies, entrepreneurial orientation is found to be the antecedent of organizational innovation; as such, there is a need to investigate more on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational innovation relationship. Ejdys (2016), suggested that additional research is needed for examining the correlation between these factors.

Market orientation is a source of concepts for new services and products, which therefore seen to positively affect the firms' degree of innovation and capacity (Aydin, 2020). Hence, market orientation is crucial to the success of innovation in the service sector (Lado & Maydeu-Olivares, 2001). Organizational innovation is vital since its leads to improved firm performance and conveys novel organizational methods and resources to firms' business practices, innovation activities, and workplaces, which has affected both the nature and the outcomes of innovation (Camisón & Villar-López 2014). Past studies found a positive relationship between market orientation and organizational innovation (Alhakimi & Mahmoud, 2020; Ho et al., 2018; Widiana, 2017), as well as organizational innovation and firm performance (Arranz et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Ramadani et al., 2019). Based on the literature review, there is a high possibility that organizational innovation would

mediate role the relationship between market orientation and firm performance. Zafar et al. (2016), suggested that more research is needed to investigate the mediating effect of organizational innovation between market orientation and firm performance.

Human resource management (HRM) activities encourages the employees to carry out significant innovation by promoting the ‘creation and execution of knowledge’ behavior (Sparrow, 2016). HRM practices are crucial to effecting organizational innovation (Waheed et al., 2019). Hence, to promote innovative activities within an organization, HR managers need to consciously recruit individuals with many professional skills based on the organization’s vision (Liu et al., 2017). Previous research showed that HRM practices are significantly related to organizational innovation (Donate et al., 2016; Mat et al, 2016; Sanz-Valle & Jimenez-Jimenez, 2018). Based on the results from past empirical studies, HRM practices are antecedent of organizational innovation; however, future research needs to investigate the relationship between HRM practices and organizational innovation relationship (Lin & Sanders, 2017; Seeck & Diehl, 2017).

Entrepreneurial orientation is responsible for many innovative activities within the organization, which is consistent with a ‘strategic choice’ perspective (Bouncken et al., 2016). Moreover, firms that possess well-developed organizational innovation may return superior performance (Jalilvand et al., 2019). Past studies found a positive relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and organizational innovation (Arunachalam et al., 2018; Arzubiaga et al., 2018; Bouncken et al., 2018). Several studies found a positive relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance (González-Fernández & González-Velasco, 2018; Nunes et al., 2017 Roongchirarote & Zhao, 2017). Based on the literature review, there could be a mediation effect of organizational innovation between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance. Taiwo et al. (2019), suggested that future research should investigate whether organizational innovation mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance.

Hence, organizational learning was regarded as a backbone of innovation; it formed the basis of a knowledge process, which was developed due to organizational learning (Jiménez-Jiménez & Sanz-Valle, 2011). This is also applicable to wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia (Ur Rehman et al., 2019). In fact, organizational learning encourages creativity and fosters further knowledge and new concepts that can potentially impact organizational innovation (Maktabi & Khazaei, 2014). Organizational learning sought to introduce many products and services based on innovative activities to survive a competitive environment (Pinar & Arikan, 2015). Past studies found a positive and significant effect of innovation on organizational learning (Bolaji Bello & Adeoye, 2018; Fu, 2017; Schuurman et al., 2016). Based on the results from past empirical studies, organizational is the antecedent of organizational innovation. Nonetheless, Ugurlu and Kurt (2016), suggested that further research is needed to examine the relationship between organizational learning on organizational innovation.

Innovative organizations consider the HRM practices as an organization strategy that encourages the team responsibilities, improves the organizational culture, or develops customer relationships based on empowerment and participation (Rasheed et al., 2017). Furthermore, the capability of an organization to innovate permits a variety of strategies and opportunities to be tracked to boost growth and survival (Hou et al., 2019). Past studies found a positive relationship between HRM practices and organizational innovation (Diaz-Fernandez et al., 2017; Fu et al., 2015; Muhammad et al., 2015). On the other hand, only a few studies found a positive relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance (Abiodun, 2017; Ali et al., 2016; de Zubielqui et al., 2019). Based on the literature review, there is a high possibility that organizational innovation would mediate the relationship between HRM practices and firm performance. Therefore, Zakaria (2016) suggested that additional research is needed for understanding the mediating effect of organizational innovation between HRM practices and firm performance.

Organizational learning helps firms strengthen their capabilities through enhanced innovation and improved performance (Fu, 2017). Moreover, it also increased the employees' ability to enlarge the systematic, innovative process

(Husain et al., 2016), thereby improving the organization's productivity (Capello & Lenzi, 2015). Several researchers found that organizational learning positively impacts organizational innovation (Ibeku, 2018; Liao et al., 2017; Pinar & Arikan, 2015). Past studies also found a positive relationship between organizational innovation and firm performance (Gomes & Wojahn, 2017; Laban & Deya, 2019; Soomro et al., 2020). Based on the literature review, there is a plausibility that organizational innovation would play a mediating role between organizational learning and firm performance. However, there is a need for future studies to explore the mediating effect of organizational innovation between organizational learning and firm performance (Zafar et al., 2016).

Based on the suggestion and the gaps in the literature, the research intends to assess the relationship between market orientation, HRM practices, entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning, organizational innovation and wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance. In addition, the research has used resource-based view theory, knowledge base view theory and dynamic capabilities theory as its underpinning theory.

1.4 Research Questions

In line with the research background and problem statement highlighted in the preceding section, this research has engaged the following questions that are intended principally to examine the prospective organizational innovation mediating relationship that exists between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning and firm performance. These research questions were stated in the direct entrenchment of the bona fide respondent chosen for this research, the Malaysian wholesale and retail SMEs. These questions are:

1. Does market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning, organizational innovation has a positive impact on firm performance?

2. Does market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning has a positive impact on organizational innovation?
3. Does organizational innovation mediate the relationship between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning and firm performance?

1.5 Research Objectives

This research aims to find empirical evidence in the relationship between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning, organizational innovation and firm performance in a single framework. Moreover, it is believed that market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning are important resources which need to be mediated by organizational innovation that will enhance its firm performance. Therefore, this research attempts to meet the following objectives:

1. To examine whether between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning, organizational innovation has a positive impact on firm performance.
2. To examine whether market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning has a positive impact on organizational innovation.
3. To examine whether organizational innovation mediate the relationship between (market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning) and firm performance.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Present research aims to contribute to the theory and practice in the area of wholesale and retail SMEs performance in Malaysia. Based on the theoretical viewpoint, present research would explore factors of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning, organizational innovation that would impact SMEs' wholesale and retail performance. In addition, the research also examines the mediating role of organizational innovation between (market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, human resource management practices, organizational learning) and firm performance.

Hence, by examining these identified relationships, the research will provide academicians and practitioners with insight into factors that contribute to wholesale & retail SMEs' performance. Thus, this research aims to add new empirical evidence and theoretical linkages on the interaction between organizational constructs, such as market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning and organizational innovation and firm performance on the perspective of wholesale & retail SMEs.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

The literature discussion explains the potential of this research work in making a significant contribution in several key areas. Firstly, the research makes a significant contribution to current body of knowledge on small and medium enterprises, especially SMEs wholesale and retail in Malaysia. Past studies have focused their research mostly on the perspective of large firms (Ali et al., 2019; Dass & Chelliah, 2019). Wholesale and retail SMEs contribution to the national economy cannot be ignored in the worldwide economy; similarly, in the context of Malaysia (Tahseen & Sajilan, 2018). As highlighted in the problem statement, the wholesale and retail SMEs GDP performance has been declining significantly over the years. Thus, future research should investigate the reason of this decline and provide solution on how to increase the Wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance (Hiung

et al., 2019). Based on the literature review; not much research has been conducted in Malaysia; in the context of wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance.

Past studies suggested that wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance could be improved from the perspective of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation (Hussain et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2016), HRM practices, organizational learning (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021; Rahman et al., 2018), and organizational innovation (Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018).

Secondly, the research makes a theoretical contribution through the lens of traditional management theory. Particularly, the RBV theory was adopted through empirical data to investigate the relationship between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, and firm performance. Furthermore, the study conceptualizes organizational learning from knowledge-based view and organizational innovation from dynamic capability theory to address some of the weaknesses of RBV. Specifically, the inability of RBV to show how organizational resources changes over a period of time is considered a major weakness (Donnellan & Rutledge, 2019). Moreover, Kraaijenbrink et al. (2010), insisted that the RBV are general in perspectives. Therefore, considering knowledge and innovation approaches from dynamic capabilities helps firms accomplish a competitive edge comprehensively. This required the firms to develop or create, renew, and redesign organizational resources to achieve competition. Hence, this research employed the theoretical proposition regarding the benefits of dynamic capacities and explains that organizational learning and innovation capabilities are knowledge-based capabilities. These capabilities are crucial in enhancing organizational competitive advantage, which could affect the overall firm performance significantly.

Thirdly, present research contributes to the wholesale and retail SMEs scholarly literature concerning dynamic capabilities as an extension of RBV. This is as a result of few studies in the literature about DCT and apparent inconsistencies and contradictions of the previous findings (Acosta et al., 2018; Bocconcelli et al., 2018 Christmann, 2019). Furthermore, more research is needed on how dynamic capabilities could develop SMEs performance with limited resources to build and

integrate diverse capabilities received little attention (Fernandes et al., 2017). Therefore, this study intends to address this research gap by extending the dynamic capability theory by investigating how organizational innovation serves as a dynamic capability to improve effective firm performance abilities.

Furthermore, this study framework explains how firm resources such market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organization learning, and organizational innovation forms firm capabilities. Firm capabilities are difficult for competitors to replicate. As a consequence, unique dynamic capabilities could derive firm competitive edge and increase firm its performance.

This premise is a reflection of the dynamic capability theory by Teece and Pisano (1994), that was extended from the resource base view theory Barney (1986, (1991). Past researchers has used dynamic capability theory to investigate knowledge capability, organizational innovation (Chamanzamin et al., 2018; Ejdys, 2016; Seeck & Diehl, 2017), and organization learning (Basheer et al., 2018; Durmuş-Özdemir & Abdukhoshimov, 2018; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2016). Based on dynamic capability theory organizational innovation and change dynamics form firm competitive advantage and are crucial to the firm's performance. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research especially in the context of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Thus, this study provides some understanding on how firm resources forms its firm dynamic capabilities and increase the wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance.

Finally, the study makes a significant contribution to the present body of knowledge from the organizational innovation point of view. The past literature on organizational innovation has demonstrated that there is a gap in organizational innovation studies, and future research should close this gap (Chamanzamin et al., 2018; Ejdys, 2016; Seeck & Diehl, 2017). Past studies have investigated the mediating role of organizational learning between (market orientation, entrepreneurship orientation, HRM practices, and firm performance) (Durmuş-Özdemir & Abdukhoshimov, 2018; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2016; Basheer et al., 2018). However, none of these studies have been conducted on the wholesale and retail SMEs, especially in Malaysia.

Therefore, this study hypothesized that the realization of greater effects of market orientation, entrepreneurship orientation, HRM practices, and organizational learning on firm performance could not be achievable without the mediating role of organizational innovation. Since the market orientation, entrepreneurship orientation, HRM practices, and organizational learning variables as organization resources would be better utilized if SMEs have the ability to innovate organizational resources effectively as this encourages the firm to have a competitive edge and create new value to the existing resources. However, as at now this understanding has not been thoroughly studied, especially in the context of SMEs. Therefore, the results of this study would expand the current body of knowledge from the wholesale and retail SMEs' perspective.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

Present research is expected to benefit the owner/managers of SMEs wholesale and retail in Malaysia by forming awareness about the characteristics that have a consequence on wholesale and retail SMEs firm performance. This research would also assist in providing valuable input to SMEs owner/managers on how market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning, and organizational innovation affect performance. Furthermore, it is posited that the research would provide insights on how market orientation, HRM practices, and organization learning could become a firm's unique resources and capabilities which could help wholesale and retail SMEs achieve competitive advantages and superior firm performance.

Moreover, wholesale and retail owner/managers of SMEs ought to concentrate on activities that are related to market orientation as they would benefit in terms of performance. Organizations that pay close attention and recognize the desires of their customers are better positioned in the market as compared to those others (Mokhtar et al., 2014). Moreover, entrepreneurial orientation can help owner/managers to discover new opportunities to expand business markets based on their customer demand.

Furthermore, processes such as accelerated marketization, economic and social transformation are like any other processes, present opportunities and challenges. Thus, companies could make efforts to improve entrepreneurship education and training to enhance corporate value. In addition, the accelerated process of marketization and social and economic transformation presents opportunities and challenges. Therefore, companies ought to improve the level of entrepreneurial orientation to enhance their corporate value. This can be achieved by adopting novel technology and administrative approaches, taking risks in dynamic environments, and staying ahead of the competition (Zhu et al., 2018).

Additionally, based on the research results, this research will enable the owner/managers of SMEs to fully understand that HRM practices are an important function in organizational success despite being small in size (Krishnan & Scullion, 2017). Moreover, this research is expected to assist wholesale and retail owner/managers in developing robust internal resources and capabilities to suit the competitive business atmosphere through the application of HRM policies and practices to enhance firm performance. Furthermore, an organization that is committed to learning may gain a deeper understanding of its environment, including the consumers, rivals and novel technology. Matter of fact, innovation involves an inclination to adopt new concepts and ideas. This implies that a positive learning environment is valuable to firms that aspire to outclass their rivals through numerous innovative approaches (Ibeku, 2017).

In addition, SMEs wholesale and retail can follow a policy that helps in enhancing their performance in shorting term such as focusing on achieve competitive advantage by having resources and abilities that are valuable, unique and difficult to be copied by others. However, the sustainability of competitive advantage depends on the innovation capacity of the firm. Owner/managers can sustain a high level of performance through high investing in market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices and organizational learning such as services, value addition, rebranding, hiring better employee and training programs for employees. Furthermore, technology and innovation improvement become more of differentiating factor within a modern company, market orientation and

entrepreneurial orientation. These becomes a great factor in achieving success in competitive market marketplace.

1.6.3 Policymakers Significance

Based on the research results, this research provide insight to make recommendations to the government officials on how some policies could enhance the wholesale and retail SMEs' firm performance. Since the research is based on SMEs that are vibrant to the national economy, especially on the national GDP and employment generation, the government should place policies that would assist wholesale and retail firm performance. Likewise, the policymaker should provide infrastructure to make this wholesale and retail enterprises sector more competitive and productive. Based on the research findings; the policymakers could establish an HR practice center for owner/managers of wholesale and retail; where they can obtain managerial support to be more productive and efficient by taking information and knowledge about market orientation, entrepreneurial development programs, making a structural organizational environment and innovations.

This research is expected to assists policymakers in better understanding the cumulative effects of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practises, and organisational learning initiatives on the SMEs businesses; as well as the role and impact of policy targeted to SMEs, such as supporting innovation, sustaining business dynamism, assisting skills development and facilitating access to finance and public markets. These efforts should take into account synergies and trade-offs across multiple policy areas, including anticompetitive effects that may result from certain policies; acknowledge the heterogeneity of the small and medium-sized business population; and acknowledge the multidimensional contribution of these companies to society and the economy of Malaysia. For stakeholder decision making in SME policy, a holistic approach is essential as it encompasses a broad range of issues that across ministry and government agency boundaries. Nevertheless, the business sector, unions, and financial institutions needs to be closely consulted.

Once the wholesale and retail SME sector is well developed, the government could also assist them in finding a suitable market for products and services. The research will contribute to the policymakers to design a robust and long-term plan that will ensure the performance of SMEs effectively. Furthermore, through the findings, the research will help provide tools for the authorities; in providing the necessary assistance and consultation services to wholesale and retail SMEs. This will prepare them with the necessary resources and energy to promote and encourage entrepreneurial culture towards enhancing the entrepreneurial training and development of managerial implications.

1.7 Scope of the Research

Present research is focused on the firm performance of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. Therefore, the study focus on wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. The reason is that the wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia have had poor firm performance in the past five (5) years (2016-2020) (DOSM, 2021). Hence, investigating this poor performance will help in addressing the firm performance issues and subsequently improve SME improvement. Nevertheless, this research scope is limited to the SMEs since present research did not include micro-companies because they are generally informally organized and structured (Wong & Marrilees, 2005). Despite of that, the unit of analysis for the research is organization; and the data would be collected from the owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia.

In order to investigate effectively, the study collected data from owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia, who have first-hand information about the company's plans, strategies, future directions, and overall performances of their company (de Oliveira et al., 2015). Moreover, owner/managers feedback is helpful; because they are the most relevant persons that could provide information about firm performance (Singh & Mahmood, 2014). Hence, the data would be collected from the owner/managers of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia.

In addition, the data were collected about market orientation, HRM practices, entrepreneurial orientation, organizational learning, and organizational innovation on a five (5) point Likert scale. Each of the variables was measured using items adapted from the literature. Furthermore, firm performance is selected because it is a major issue, especially in developing countries. Similarly, investigating the relationships between specific variables that determinant SMEs' wholesale and retail enterprises' performance is the focus of the present research. Additionally, the research investigated the mediating effects of organizational innovation between market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning and firm performance.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

Definitions of terms and other relevant concepts in this research are adapted from the definitions by previous authors to fit the context of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia.

1.8.1 Firm Performance

a) Definition

“Firm Performance reflects the organization's overall effectiveness in meeting multiple goals” (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1987).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, firm performance refers to the extent which profit, sales goals, and ROI, quality, satisfaction, market effectiveness, and efficiency have

been achieved by the firm. Hence, the firm performance refers to outcome of the business operation of the wholesale and retail SMEs based on a financial year.

1.8.2 Market Orientation

a) Definition

“Market orientation is defined as the gathering of information related to clients and the competition, disseminating it throughout the organization and exploiting it to best satisfy the prevailing market needs” (Shapiro, 1988).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, market orientation refers to an organization-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, spreading of intelligence across departments and organization-wide responsiveness to it. Therefore, the market orientation activities can be measured based on the number engagement on customer’s orientation, competition and also inter-functional co-operation.

1.8.3 Entrepreneurial Orientation

a) Definition

“Entrepreneurial orientation is defined as an organizational willingness to find and accept new opportunities and taking responsibility to affect change” (Morris & Sexton, 1996).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, entrepreneurial orientation refers to a strategy-making process and business operations through risk-taking, strategic planning activities; customer needs and wants identification, innovation, vision to reality, and identify opportunities. Entrepreneurial orientation performance can be measured based on the following dimensions (1) autonomy, (2) competitive aggressiveness, (3) innovativeness, (4) proactiveness, and (5) risk taking.

1.8.4 HRM Practices

a) Definition

“HRM practices is defined as a system that attracts, develops, motivates, and retains employees to ensure the effective implementation and the survival of the organization and its members” (Schuler & Jackson, 1987).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, HRM practices refer to the combination of several practices that are systematically designed to be geared towards improving SME effectiveness and yield better performance outcomes. The practices comprise compensation, performance appraisal, selection and training, and development. HRM practices can be measured based on the HR is operating efficiently, on factors such as productivity, recruiting, retention and employee relations.

1.8.5 Organizational Learning

a) Definition

“Organizational Learning is defined as a process of creating, transferring knowledge and attitude of the company that reflects learning outcomes of the company” (Fiol & Lyles, 1985).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, organizational learning refers to the dynamic process of creation, acquisition, and integration of knowledge aimed at the development of resources and capabilities that contribute to better organizational performance. Organizational learning can be measured based on experience, risk, connection to the real world, dialogue and community cooperation.

1.8.6 Organizational Innovation

a) Definition

“Organizational Innovation is defined as the process of generating, developing, and implementing ideas or behaviors that were new to the organization at the time of adoption” (Damanpour & Evan, 1984).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research, organizational innovation refers to openness to the new idea through willingness to try out new ideas, seek out alternate ways to do things, creativity in its methods of operation and rate of product introduction. Hence, organizational innovation performance can be measured based on the firm ability to

transform innovation inputs into output; thus the ability to transform innovation capability and effort into market implementation.

1.8.7 Owner/Managers of SMEs

a) Definition

Owner/managers of SMEs is a person who owns the business and or responsible for supervising and motivating employees and for directing the progress of SMEs, often puts stamp on the way things are done and provides solutions to many challenges and ensure control of the business's operations (Lobonțiu & Lobonțiu, 2014).

b) Operational Definition

In the present research owner/managers refers to the wholesale and retail SMEs owner or managers that are in charge of a business setup in Malaysia.

Table 1.1 SMEs definition

Category	Small	Medium
Services & Other Sectors	Sales turnover from RM300,000 to less than RM3 million <u>OR</u> Employees from 5 to less than 30.	Sales turnover from RM3 million to not exceeding RM20 million <u>OR</u> Employees from 30 to not exceeding 75.

Source: (SME Corp., 2021)

1.9 Organizational Thesis

Chapter one provided the introduction, motivation and background of the research, the identification of the problem statement and issues, research objectives and research questions, as well as the significance of the research, the scope of the research. Additionally, the chapter also provides definitions of the key research variables.

Chapter two explained the literature review, the development of the theoretical framework for research which was developed to examine the strength of the influence of various variables of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, HRM practices, organizational learning organizational innovation on firm performance of wholesale and retail SMEs in Malaysia. The chapter also discussed the underpinning theories used by the present research.

Chapter three presented the research methodology adopted for the present research. Moreover, the chapter discussed the research design, population and sampling design, the instruments of variables, data collection method and procedures, the data analysis techniques, and ends with a summary.

Chapter four provided a detailed description of the data analysis process, elaborated on the research findings and the hypotheses developed for the present research. The variables were tested using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis software (Version 26) tool for the first phase of the required analysis. The second phase of the various tests, including validity, reliability, hypothesis testing, structural modeling, path modeling and mediation testing, were accomplished using SEM-PLS software, and results were interpreted accordingly.

Chapter five provided a discussion on the findings of the present research, including the concluding remark. Similarly, the chapter highlighted research key findings. Likewise, the chapter summarizes the discussion on the research objectives and research questions. Finally, the chapter discussed the theoretical, practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

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Appendix A Research Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

My name is Ali Maaodhah, and I am PhD candidate at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Azman Hashim International Business School, Kuala Lumpur. You are invited to participate in a PhD Research Project of the survey entitled: “The Impact of Organizational Innovation as Mediator in Enhancing the Performance of SMEs in The Wholesale and Retail Sector”.

Please be assured that your responses will be kept, strictly private and confidential and it will be used for academic research purpose only. Anonymity is promised, and no individual particulars will be disclosed anywhere.

We deeply appreciate, for your kind cooperation in completing this questionnaire. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor through the information provided below.

I would like to thank again, for spending your valuable time to be part of this research. Yours faithfully,



.....
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SECTION A: FRIM PROFILE

Kindly respond to following questions by placing a check mark (✓) in the answer box that corresponds to your firm.

1. Company Form

- Private Limited Company
- Sole Proprietorship
- Partnership

2. Organizational Tenure

- 1 to 10 years
- 11 to 20 years
- 21 to 30 years
- More than 30 years

3. Number of Employees

- 5-15 employees
- 16-25 employees
- 26-35 employees
- 36-45 employees
- 46-55 employees
- 56-65 employees
- 66-75 employees

4. Location of Company

- Sleangor
- Kuala Lumpur
- Johor
- Kedah
- Melaka
- Negeri Sembilian
- Kelantan
- Pahang
- Penang
- Perak
- Perlis
- Terranganu
- Sabah
- Sarawak

SECTION B: RESPONDENT PROFILE

Kindly respond to following questions by placing a check mark (✓) in the answer box that corresponds to yourself.

1. Gender

- Male
 Female

2. Age

- 20-30 years
 31-40 years
 41-50 years
 51-60 years
 61 and above

3. Ethnicity

- Malay
 Chinese
 Indian
 Others: _____

4. Educational Level

- Secondary
 Diploma
 Bachelor
 Master
 PhD/DBA
 Others: _____

5. Job Tenure

- Less than 5 years
 5-10 years
 11-15 years
 16-20 years
 More than 20 years

SECTION C

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to Market Orientation. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	Market Orientation (MO)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	In this company, we meet with customers at least once a year to find out what products or services they will need in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
2	In this organization, we do a lot of in-house market research.	1	2	3	4	5
3	We are slow to detect changes in our customers' product preferences.	1	2	3	4	5
4	We survey end-users at least once a year to assess the quality of our products and services.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We are slow to detect fundamental shifts in our industry (e.g. competition, technology, regulation).	1	2	3	4	5
6	We periodically review the likely effect of changes in our business environment (e.g. regulation) on customer.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We have interdepartmental meetings at least once a quarter to discuss market trends and developments.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Marketing personnel in our company spend time discussing customers' future needs with other functional departments.	1	2	3	4	5
9	When something important happens to a major customer or market, the whole company knows about it in a short period.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Data on customer satisfaction are disseminated at all levels in this business unit on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
11	When one department finds out something important about competitors, it is slow to alert other department.	1	2	3	4	5
12	It takes us forever to decide how to respond to competitors' price changes.	1	2	3	4	5
13	For one reason or another we tend to ignore changes in our customers' product or service needs.	1	2	3	4	5
14	We periodically review our product development efforts to ensure that they are in line with what customers want.	1	2	3	4	5

15	Several departments get together periodically to plan a response to changes taking place in our business environment.	1	2	3	4	5
16	If a major competitor were to launch an intensive campaign targeted at our customers, we would implement a response immediately.	1	2	3	4	5
17	The activities of the different departments in this company are well co-ordinated.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Customer complaints fall on deaf ears in this company.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Even if we came up with a great marketing plan, we probably would not be able to implement it in a timely fashion.	1	2	3	4	5
20	When we find that customers would like us to modify a service, the departments involved make concerted efforts to do so.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to Entrepreneurial Orientation. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher propensity to take risks.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher tendency to engage in strategic planning activities.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher ability to identify customer needs and wants.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher level of innovation.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher ability to persevere in making our vision of the business a reality.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Relative to our competitors, our company has a higher ability to identify new opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION E

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to HRM Practices. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	HRM Practices (HRMP)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Performance is based on objective, quantifiable results.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Performance appraisals include management by objective, with the mutual goal setting	1	2	3	4	5
3	Performance appraisals include developmental feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Incentives are based on team performance.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Compensation packages include an extensive benefits package.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Compensations include higher wages.	1	2	3	4	5
7	The incentive system is tied to skill-based pay.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Compensation is contingent on performance.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Selection is comprehensive (uses interviews, tests, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
10	Selection emphasizes their ability to collaborate and work in teams.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Selection involves screening many job candidates.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Selection focuses on selecting the best all-around candidate, regardless of the specific job.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Selection emphasizes promotion from within.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Selection places priority on their potential to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Training is continuous.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Training programs are comprehensive.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Training programs strive to develop firm-specific skills and knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5
18	The training programs emphasize on-the-job experiences.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION F

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to Organizational Learning. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	Organizational Learning (OL)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The employees attend fairs and exhibitions regularly.	1	2	3	4	5
2	There is a consolidated and resourceful R&D policy.	1	2	3	4	5
3	New ideas and approaches on work performance are experimented continuously.	1	2	3	4	5
4	The company has formal mechanisms to guarantee the sharing of the best practices among the different fields of the activity.	1	2	3	4	5
5	There are individuals within the organization who take part in several teams or divisions and who also act as links between them.	1	2	3	4	5
6	There are individuals responsible for collecting, assembling and distributing internally employees' suggestions.	1	2	3	4	5
7	All the members of the organization share the same aim to which they feel committed.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Employees share knowledge and experiences by talking to each other.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Teamwork is a very common practice in company.	1	2	3	4	5
10	The company has directories or e-mails filed according to the field they belong to, so as to find an expert on a concrete issue at any time.	1	2	3	4	5
11	The company has up-to-date databases of its clients.	1	2	3	4	5
12	There is access to organization's databases and documents through some kind of network (Lotus Notes, intranet, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
13	Databases are always kept up-to-date.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION G

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to Organizational Innovation. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	Organizational Innovation (OI)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Our company frequently tries out new ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Our company seeks out new ways to do things.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Our company is creative in its methods of operation.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our company is often the first to market with new products and services.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Innovation in our company is perceived as too risky and is resisted.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Our new products or services introduction have increased over the last 5 years.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION H

This section requires you to provide your feedback pertaining to Firm Performance. Please circle the number in the box that best represents your response to the question according to the given rating as follows: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Undecided, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

No	Firm Performance (FP)	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Profit goals have been achieved.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Sales goals have been achieved.	1	2	3	4	5
3	ROI goals have been achieved.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Our product(s) have a higher quality than those of our competitors.	1	2	3	4	5
5	We have a higher customer retention rate than our competitors.	1	2	3	4	5
6	We have a better reputation among major customer segments than our competitors.	1	2	3	4	5
7	We have a lower employee turnover rate than that of our competitors.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B Research Novelty

No	Author/Year	Market Orientation	Entrepreneurial Orientation	HRM Practices	Organisational Learning	Mediated by Innovation	Firm Performance	Wholesale & Retail Sector	SMEs	Malaysia
1	(Masa'deh et al., 2018)	✓	✓				✓			
2	(Wahyuni & Sara, 2020)	✓	✓				✓		✓	
3	(dos Santos & Marinho, 2018)	✓					✓	✓		
4	(Sabiou et al. 2019)			✓			✓			
5	(Waheed et al., 2019)			✓		✓	✓			
6	(Milani & Salavati, 2018)	✓				✓	✓			
7	(Al Zeer et al., 2020)	✓					✓	✓		
8	(Kittikunchotiwut, 2020)		✓		✓		✓			
9	(Zhu et al., 2018)		✓	✓	✓		✓			
10	(Chienwattanasook & Jermstittiparsert, 2019)		✓		✓		✓		✓	
11	(Al Idrus et al., 2018)	✓			✓		✓			
12	(Ali et al., 2020)	✓	✓				✓		✓	
13	(Astuti et al., 2021)	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
14	(Alshammari, 2020)			✓	✓		✓			
15	(Migliori et al, 2019)	✓	✓				✓			
16	(Masa'deh et al., 2017)	✓	✓				✓			
17	(Asad et al., 2020)	✓	✓				✓		✓	

No	Author/Year	Market Orientation	Entrepreneurial Orientation	HRM Practices	Organisational Learning	Mediated by Innovation	Firm Performance	Wholesale & Retail Sector	SMEs	Malaysia
18	(Bolaji Bello & Adeoye, 2018)				✓	✓	✓			
19	(Ahmad et al, 2020)			✓	✓		✓			✓
20	(Jyoti et al., 2017)			✓	✓	✓	✓			
21	(Mamun et al., 2018)	✓	✓				✓		✓	✓
22	(Rehman et al., 2019)				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
23	(Ali et al., 2019)	✓	✓				✓		✓	
24	(Alshammari, 2020)			✓	✓		✓			
25	(Jerez-Gómez et al., 2019)			✓	✓		✓			
26	(Zhu et al., 2018)		✓	✓	✓		✓			
27	(Buli, 2017)	✓	✓				✓		✓	
28	(Bamfo & Kraa, 2019)	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	
29	(et al., 2018)			✓			✓			
30	(Zakaria et al., 2018)			✓			✓		✓	✓
31	(Kittikunchotiwut, 2020)		✓		✓	✓	✓			
32	(Migliori et al., 2017)	✓	✓				✓			
33	(Presutti & Odorici, 2019)	✓	✓				✓		✓	
34	(Lee et al., 2019)		✓				✓			✓
	Total	17	19	11	13	8	34	2	12	5

Appendix C Timeline - Critical Thinkers of the Filed

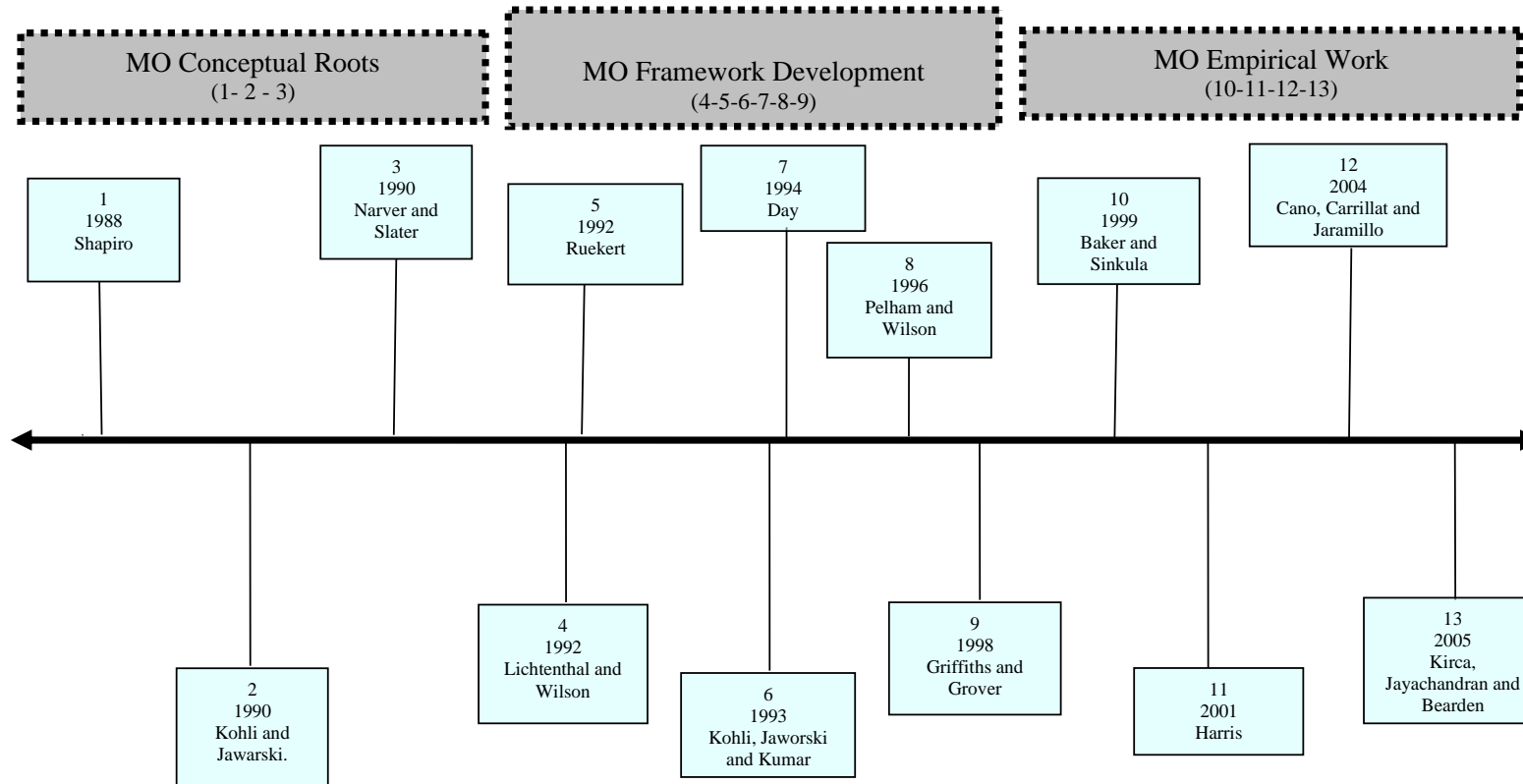


Figure 1 Timeline - Critical Thinkers in Market Orientation (MO) Research

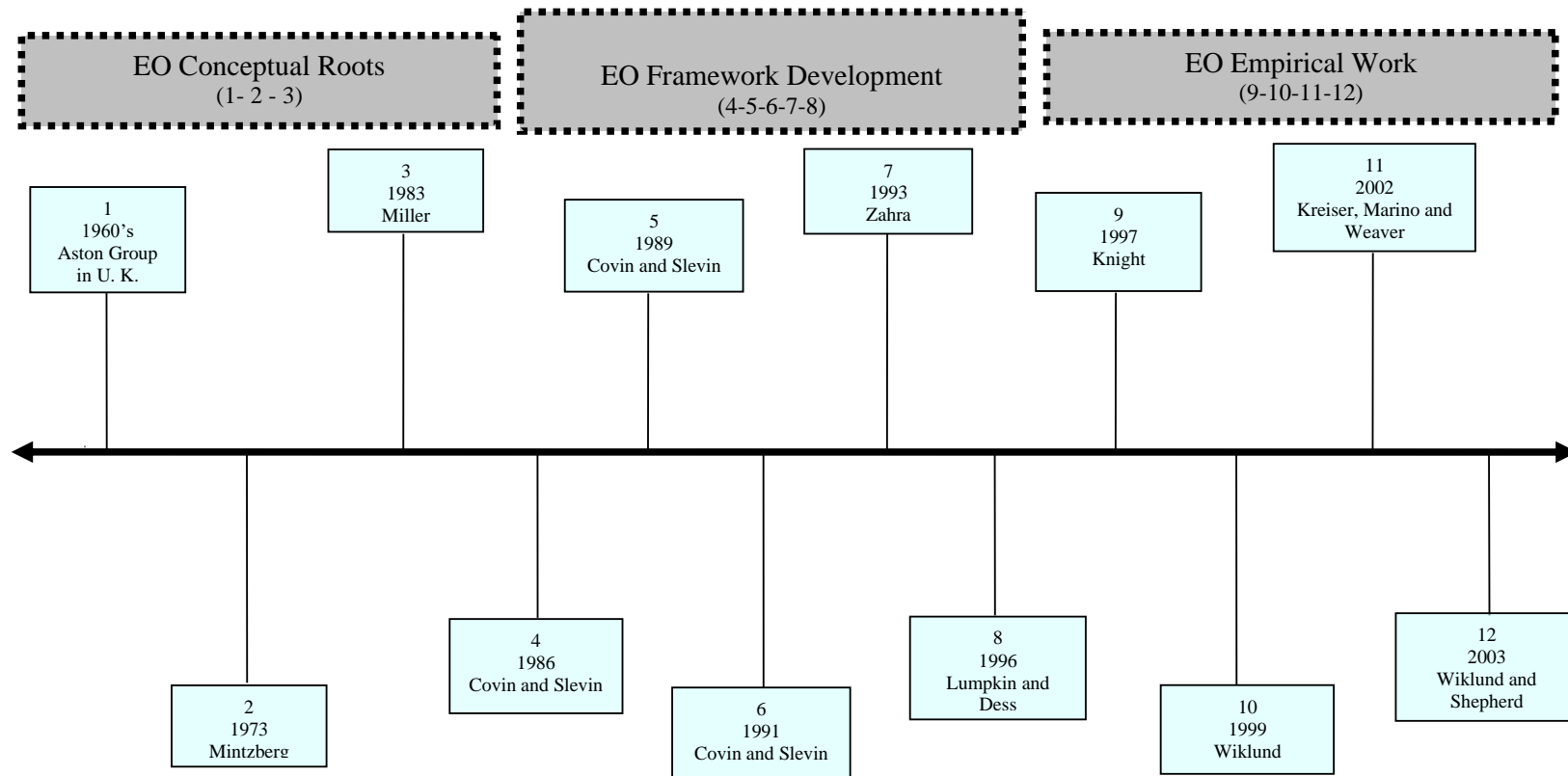


Figure 2 Timeline - Critical Thinkers in Entrepreneurial Orientation EO Research

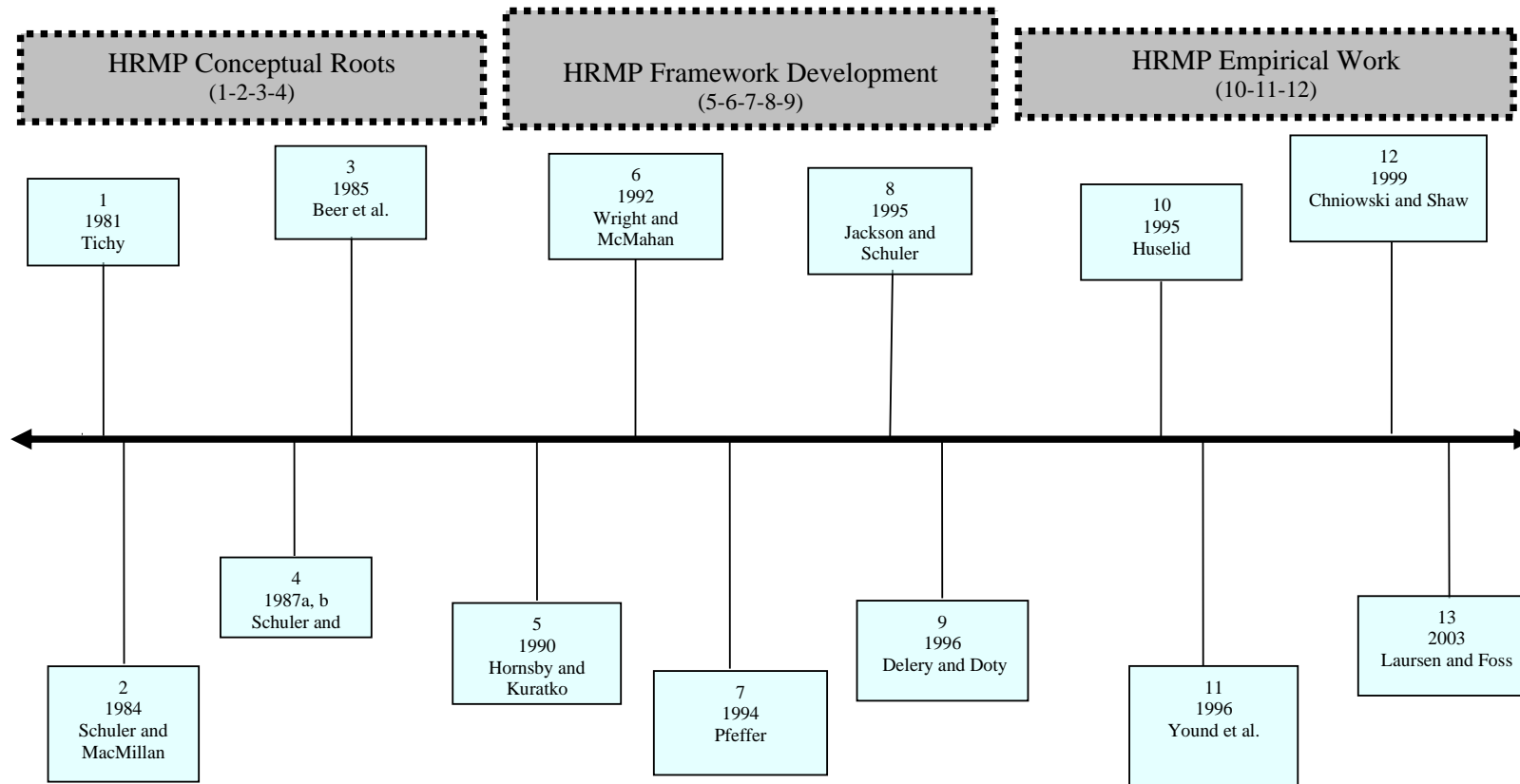


Figure 3 Timeline - Critical Thinkers in HRM Practices (HRMP) Research

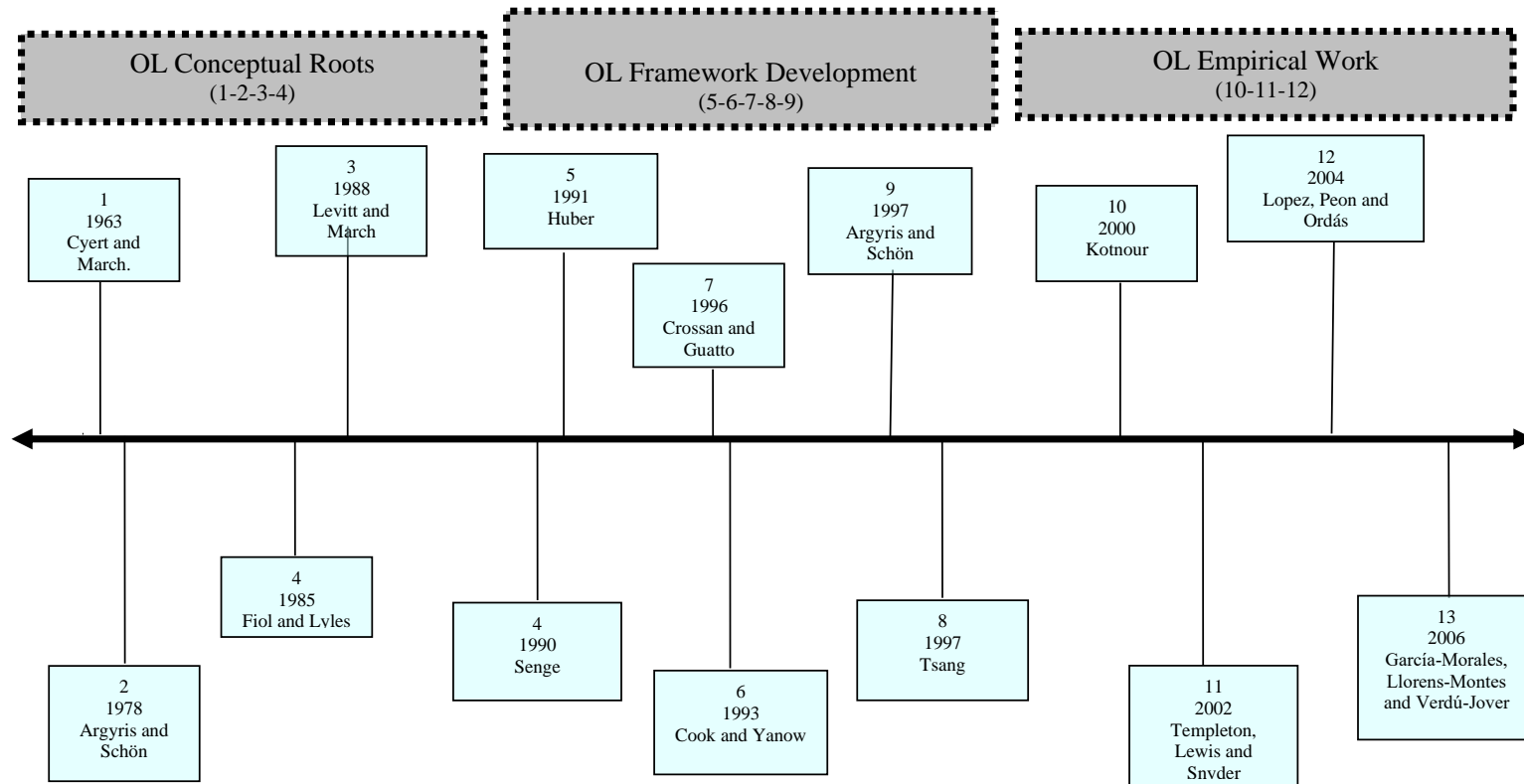


Figure 4 Timeline - Critical Thinkers in Organizational Learning (OL) Research

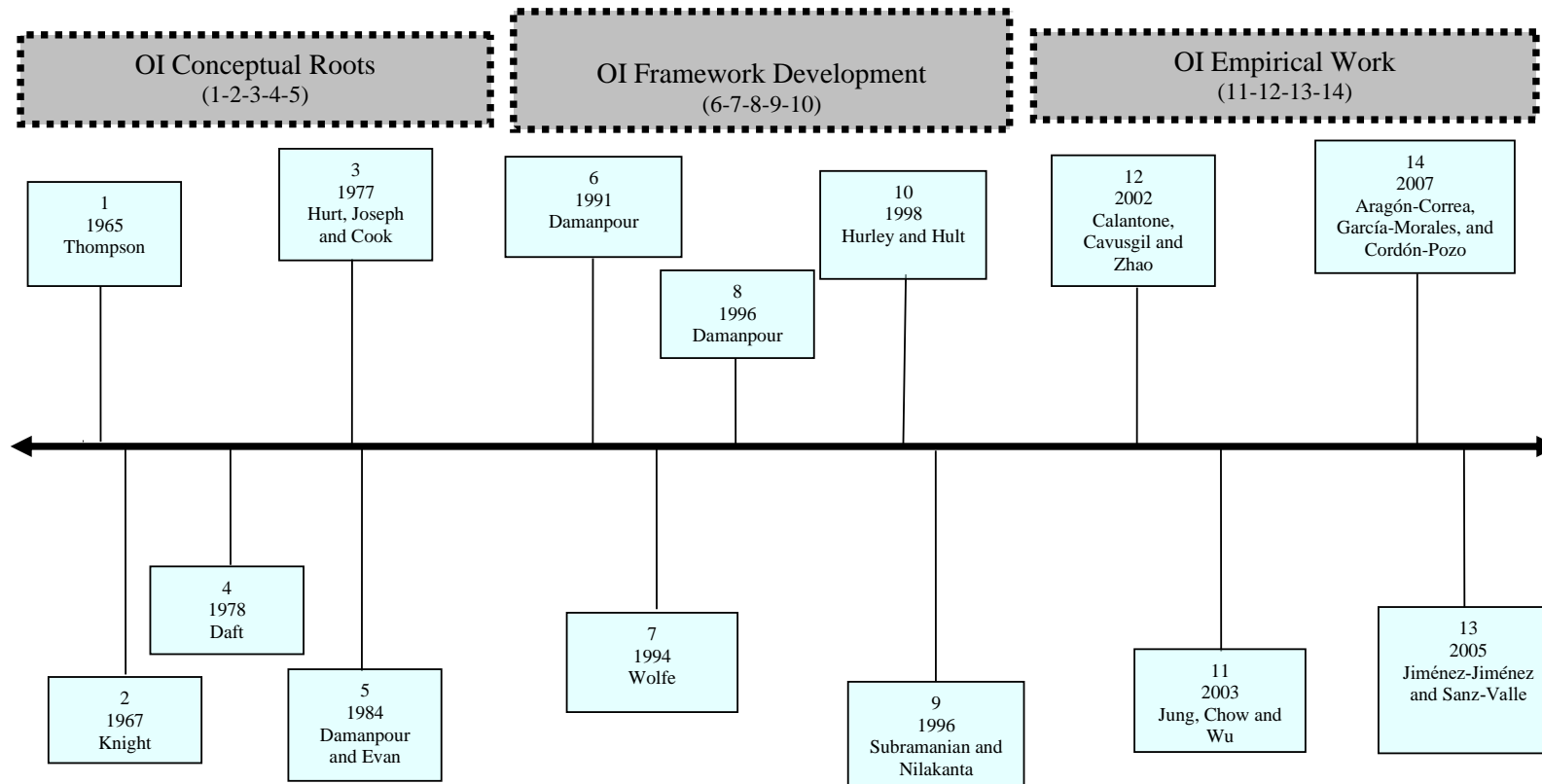
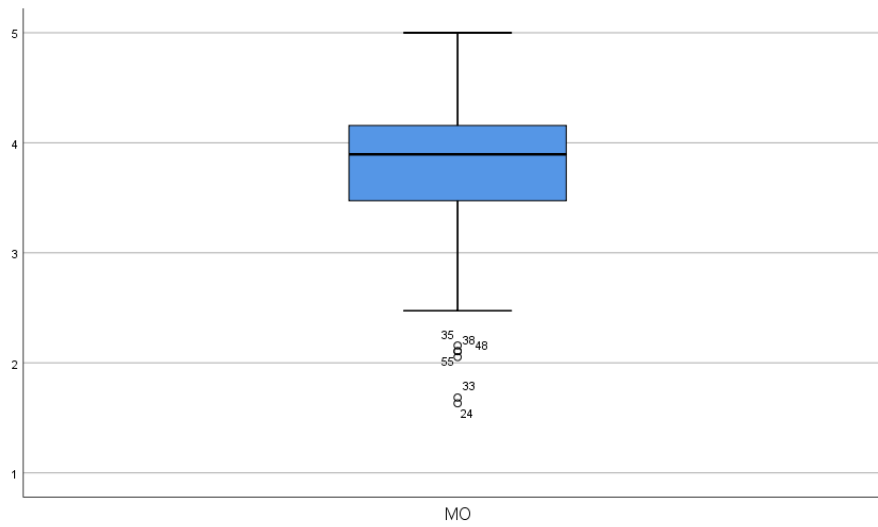


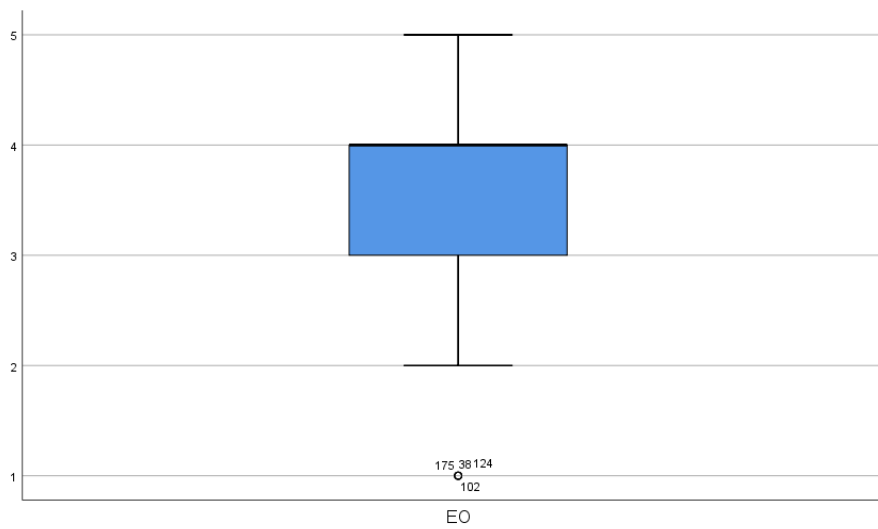
Figure 5 Timeline - Critical Thinkers in Organizational Innovation (OI) Research

Appendix D Outliers Box Plot

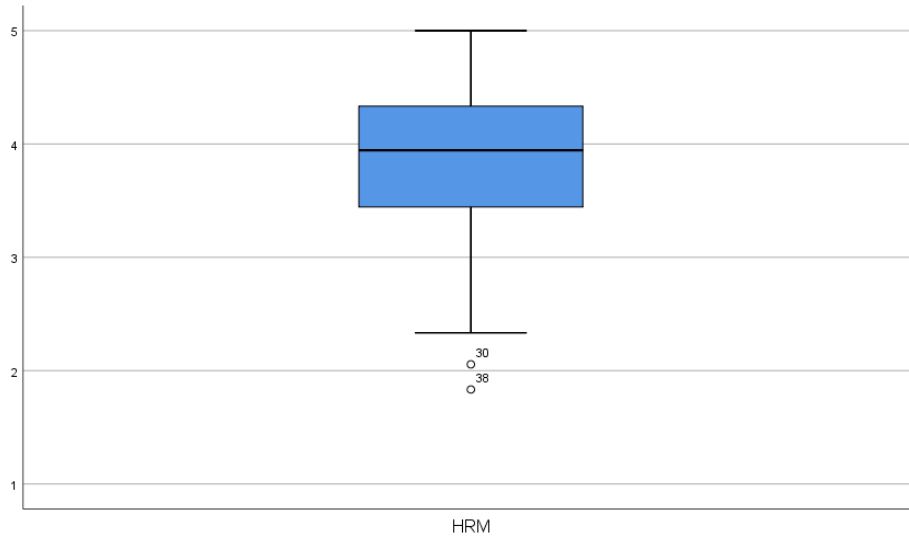
Box plot for detecting outliers for Market Orientation



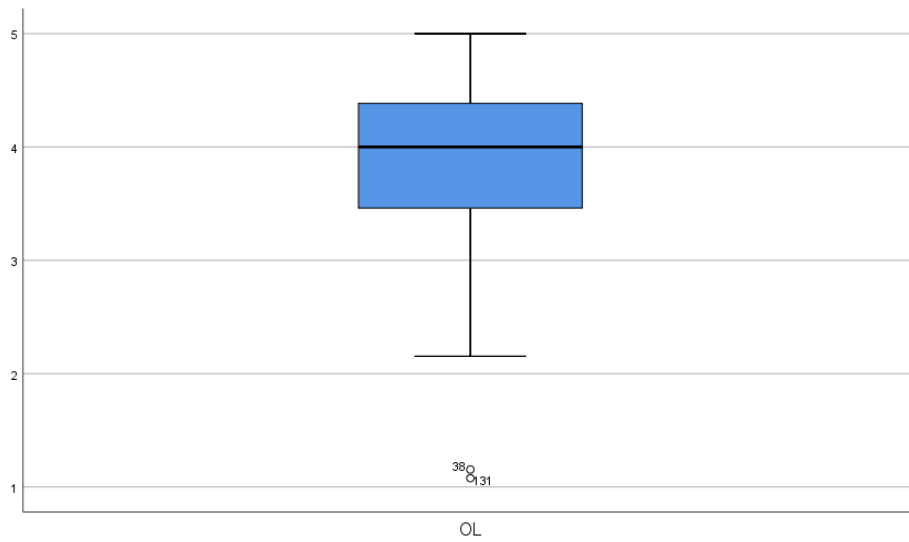
Box plot for detecting outliers for Entrepreneurial Orientation



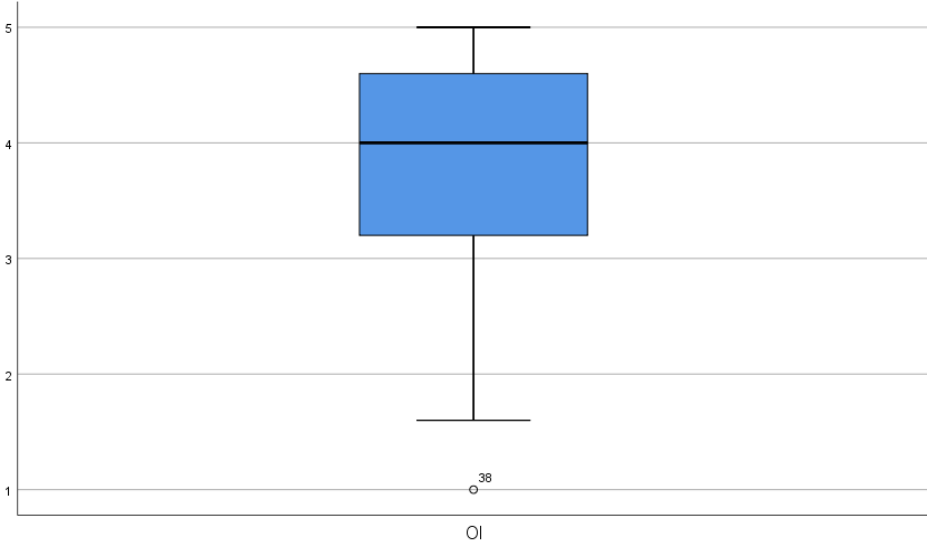
Box plot for detecting outliers for HRM Practices



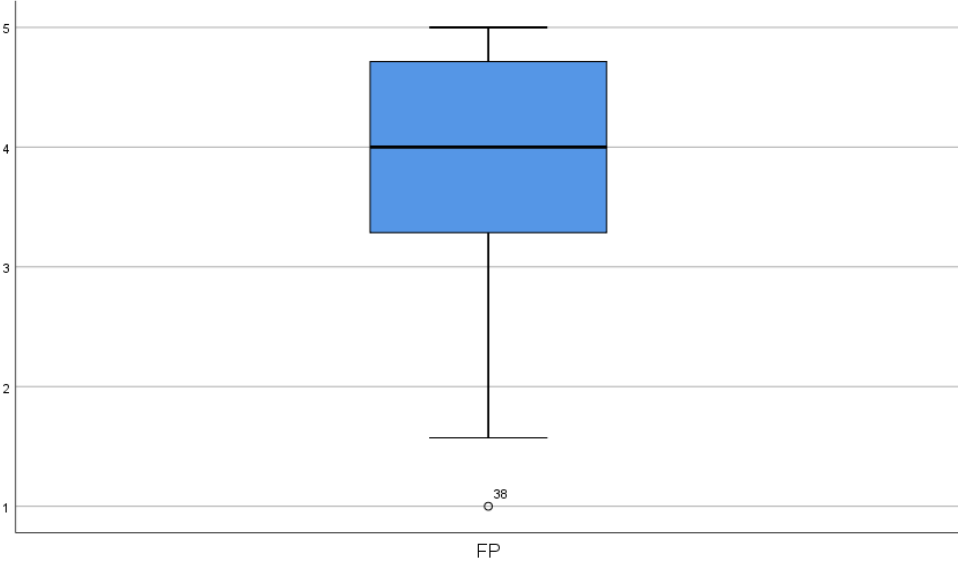
Box plot for detecting outliers for Organizational Learning



Box plot for detecting outliers for Organizational Innovation



Box plot for detecting outliers for Firm Performance



Appendix E Skewness and Kurtosis (Normality)

Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error	
MO	Mean	3.78	.045	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.69	
		Upper Bound	3.87	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.81		
	Median	3.89		
	Variance	.408		
	Std. Deviation	.639		
	Minimum	2		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	3		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.751	.172	
	Kurtosis	.764	.341	

Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error	
EO	Mean	3.64	.065	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.51	
		Upper Bound	3.77	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.68		
	Median	4.00		
	Variance	.849		
	Std. Deviation	.921		
	Minimum	1		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	4		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.499	.172	
	Kurtosis	.100	.341	

Descriptives

Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error	
HRMP	Mean	3.88	.046	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.79	
		Upper Bound	3.97	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.90		
	Median	3.94		
	Variance	.434		
	Std. Deviation	.659		
	Minimum	2		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	3		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.407	.172	
	Kurtosis	-.183	.341	

Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error	
OL	Mean	3.89	.049	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.79	
		Upper Bound	3.98	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.92		
	Median	4.00		
	Variance	.482		
	Std. Deviation	.694		
	Minimum	1		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	4		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.838	.172	
	Kurtosis	1.503	.341	

		Statistic	Std. Error	
OI	Mean	3.90	.060	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.78	
		Upper Bound	4.02	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.95		
	Median	4.00		
	Variance	.714		
	Std. Deviation	.845		
	Minimum	1		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	4		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.576	.172	
	Kurtosis	-.058	.341	

Descriptives

		Statistic	Std. Error	
FP	Mean	3.89	.059	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	3.78	
		Upper Bound	4.01	
	5% Trimmed Mean	3.94		
	Median	4.00		
	Variance	.702		
	Std. Deviation	.838		
	Minimum	1		
	Maximum	5		
	Range	4		
	Interquartile Range	1		
	Skewness	-.604	.172	
	Kurtosis	.153	.341	

Appendix F Summary of Existing Literature

Market Orientation and Firm Performance

Author	Sample	DV	Findings
Hussain, Rahman and Shah (2016)	213 manufacturing SMEs in Pakistan	Performance	The results of the research reveal the presence of positive relationship among the MO and organizational performance. The results of the research also demonstrate that the effects of MO on organizational performance are positively moderated by EO behaviors.
Abdullahi, Jakada and Sa'ad (2015)	245 women entrepreneurs in Nigeria	Business Performance	The finding indicates that market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation have positive and significant influence on business performance of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria.
Amin et al. (2016)	500 SMEs in the manufacturing in Malaysia	Performance	The finding indicates that MO has a significant relationship with SME performance. MO will mediate the relationship between EO and SMEs' performance
Beneke et al. (2016)	162 SMEs in South Africa	Organizational performance	The results revealed a significant relationship between market orientation and organisational performance
Joensuu-Salo et al. (2018)	101 SMEs in wood production industry in Finland	Firm Performance	The results show that marketing capability mediates the effect of market orientation on firm performance. For internationalized firms, market orientation and marketing capability are crucial to their success in foreign markets. However, digitalization has no effect on firm performance with internationalized firms. With other firms, the effect is direct and significant.
Kharabsheh et al. (2017)	190 manufacturing organizations in Jordan	Organizational performance	Results indicate that learning orientation, market orientation and absorptive capacity all have a positive and significant effect on organizational performance.
Wijesekara et al. (2016)	175 SEMs in Scale Garment	Organizational Performance	The results indicated that the market and entrepreneurial orientation have a significant

	Manufacturers in Sri Lanka		effect on Organizational Performance.
Jaiyeoba (2014)	249 owners in the small service firms in Botswana	Business Performance	The findings also provide evidence that performance outcomes can be enhanced by the adoption of market orientation in Botswana.
Tseng and Liao (2015)	124 managers in container shipping firms in Taiwan	Firm performance	The findings indicated that IT application and market orientation positively influence supply chain integration. Further, supply chain integration and market orientation have a positive effect on firm performance.
Udriyah et al. (2019)	150 owners and managers in textile SMEs in Malaysia	Business Performance	The result revealed that market orientation and innovation have significant effects on business performance both directly and indirectly through competitive advantage.
Oduro and Haylemariam (2019)	439 manufacturing firms in Ghana and Ethiopia	Financial and marketing performance	Results show that MO significantly improves financial and marketing performance. However, CSR reveals both “suppression” and “spurious” effects on the direct link between MO and financial and marketing performance under varying market conditions.
Hinson et al. (2017)	105 managers of star-rated (luxury) hotels in Ghana	Performance	The findings indicated that market orientation and positioning jointly affect hotel Performance.
Buli (2017)	171 managers in manufacturing SME in Ethiopia	Performance	The empirical result reveals that integrating entrepreneurial and market orientations into the operation of SMEs contributes to superior performance, which in turn enables them to thrive in institutionally complex and economically turbulent environments.
Lee et al. (2015)	156 managers in food-service franchise firms in Korea	Business performance	Findings show that Franchisor market orientation was found to lead differentiation and cost strategies, which, in turn, increase financial and non-financial business performance. Also, market orientation directly

			increases financial and non-financial business performance.
Ladipo et al. (2016)	300 small sized-hotels in Nigeria	Business performance	The results suggest that only customer orientation is significantly contributing to the performance of the small sized hotel operators. Specifically, both competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination, though practiced by the hotels are not significantly linked to its performance.
Mokhtar et al. (2014)	140 SMEs in Malaysia	Performance	Results show that customers focus and market dissemination was found to have significant relationships with SMEs performance. On the other hand, the other factors, namely market intelligence and responsiveness did not indicate significant influence on the SMEs performance.
Ho et al. (2018)	190 agricultural firms in Vietnam	Financial performance	The findings indicate that there is no significant relationship between market orientation and performance.

Entrepreneurial Orientation and Firm performance

Author	Sample	DV	Findings
Lechner and Gudmundsson (2014)	335 small Icelandic firms	Firm performance	Results show that there is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance.
Vega-Vázquez et al. (2016)	70 three- and four-star hotels in Spain	Performance	The findings indicate the firms in the hotel sector that adopt an EO orientation positively affect their results of exploitation and financial profitability. EO affects the degree of the firm's MO, enabling the firm to deliver a service to its customers that provides a greater value than the competition, thus permitting its differentiation and, consequently, a better performance.
Farooq and	276 listed firms	Business	The findings suggest that

Vij (2018)	(both from manufacturing and service sector) in India	performance	entrepreneurial orientation positively affects business performance and knowledge management orientation mediates the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance.
Kura et al. (2020)	274 owner-managers of SMEs in Nigeria	Performance	Results supported the hypothesised main effects of entrepreneurial orientation, and total quality management, on SME performance. Also, the competitive intensity was found to moderate the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation and SME performance.
Haider et al. (2017)	384 manufacturing SMEs in Pakistan	Business performance	Results indicated there were positive correlations among innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk taking with business performance of SMEs.
Fatima and Bilal (2019)	182 owners in the service and manufacturing sector of Pakistan	Performance	The findings revealed a positive association in the IEO of SME owners and their performance through a partial mediating role of active social networking.
Abou-Moghli and Al-Abdallah (2018)	152 managers in different firms in Jordan	Firm performance	The positive association was identified between corporate entrepreneurship and firm performance.
Shah and Ahmad (2019)	166 manufacturing SMEs in Pakistan	Performance	The findings revealed EO, as a whole, presents a significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs. Moreover, differentiation strategy partially mediated the relationship between EO and performance of SMEs. Two dimensions of EO, proactiveness and risk-taking propensity, strongly increased firm performance while innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, autonomy and competitive energy did not cause any significant change.
Platin and Ergun (2017)	163 manufacturing	Performance	The result showed that entrepreneurial orientation is

	SMEs in Turkey		positively and significantly related with SMEs' sales growth and exportation performances.
Arzubiaga et al. (2018)	230 Spanish family SME firms	Firm performance	The research found that the link between entrepreneurial orientation and performance is stronger in firms with lower levels of family involvement and higher levels of gender diversity in the board.
Maldonado-Guzman et al. (2017)	318 SMEs in Mexico	performance	The results obtained show that proactivity, risk taking and innovativeness along with the competitive aggression and autonomy have significant and positive effects on small and medium-sized enterprises' growth.
Aloulou (2019)	292 firms in Saudi Arabia	Firm performance	The result showed that entrepreneurial orientation is positively and significantly related with firm performances.
Pratono and Mahmood (2015)	409 owner/managers of SMEs in Indonesia	Firm performance	The result showed that entrepreneurial orientation is positively and significantly related with SMEs' performances.
Sahoo and Yadav (2017)	121 manufacturing SMEs in India	Firm performance	The results indicate that EO plays an influential role on the adoption of TQM strategy, and also has a direct effect on firm performance (FP). The results also indicate that the significance of the direct effect of EO on FP is reduced when the indirect effect of EO through TQM is included in the total effect model.

HRM practices and Firm performance

Author	Sample	DV	Findings
Mansour et al. (2014)	351 Tunisian financial services industry	Firm performance	The results indicate that a direct relationship between HRM practices and firm performance was found.
Rana and Malik (2017)	282 managers of the telecom	Organizational performance	The research found that HR practices, including selection,

	companies in Pakistan		training, compensation, performance appraisal and employee participation, have been found to be significantly and positively related to organizational performance.
Ogunyomi and Bruning (2016)	236 SMEs in Nigeria	Organizational performance	This research partially supports a model of positive relationships between certain HRM practices and firm performance.
Al-Zahrani and Almazari (2014)	175 Saudi banks	Financial performance	The research concluded that there existed a positive and significant relationship between the effective HRM practices (compensation system, planning, and job description and performance appraisal) and the financial performances of the banks.
Lai et al. (2017)	249 SMEs in the United Kingdom	Firm performance	The research found a direct and positive relationship between HRM practices SME performance, measured by financial performance and labour productivity.
Elumah et al. (2017)	285 firms in Nigeria	Financial performance	Higher financial performance was linked with the corporate HRM practices which promoted the employee attitude and behaviour towards the improvement of the firm's competitive strategies.
Mehmood et al. (2017)	90 universities in Pakistan	Organizational performance	The results indicate that a direct relationship between HRM practices and performance was found.
Sabiu et al. (2019)	181 ministries of education, boards, agencies and parastatals in Nigeria	Organizational performance	The findings show that training and development had a significant and positive relationship with organizational performance. In the same vein, compensation system was found to be significantly related to organizational performance.
Obeidat et al. (2016)	118 financial and	Organizational performance	The results indicate positive relationship between HRM

	manufacturing firms in Jordan		practices and performance.
Hameed and Mohamed (2016)	250 hospitals in India	Organizational performance	The findings show that Out of the five HRM practices, Two HRM practices, recruitment and selection, training and development are found to be significant predictors of organizational performance.
Singh et al. (2017)	177 SMEs in Trinidad	Performance	The research noted that the various HRM practices, implemented through training and selection, showed a negative effect on SME performance.

Organizational Learning and Firm Performance

Author	Sample	DV	Findings
Mutahar et al. (2015)	70 managers in telecom sector of Saudi Arabia	Organizational performance	The research confirms existence of positive association between organizational learning and performance
Altinay et al. (2016)	350 owners in service and retail SMEs in Cyprus	Performance	The results indicate that no effect between Organizational Learning and performance.
Lee and Lee (2015)	414 firms of non-life insurance industry in Taiwan	Business performance	The empirical findings indicate that: organizational learning has significant and positive effects on TQM, both organizational learning and TQM have significant and positive effects on business performance.
Mantok et al. (2019)	192 owners/manager of manufacturing SMEs in India	Business performance	The results indicate that the organizational learning has significant and positive effects on business performance.
Ali et al. (2019)	240 managers in the hotel industry of United Kingdom	Performance	The findings indicate that Organizational Learning has a positive impact on performance.
Farsani et al. (2013)	190 physical education organizations in Isfahan	Organizational performance	The results showed that the correlation between overall organizational learning and organizational performance

			was significant at the level of $P < 0.001$.
Nafei (2015)	250 healthcare organizations in Saudi Arabia	Organizational performance	The findings reveal adaptive organizational learning (AOL) and generative organizational learning (GOL) have a significantly direct effect on Organizational performance.
Rehman et al. (2019)	409 owners/managers of SMEs in Malaysia	Organizational performance	The findings revealed that innovative culture and organizational learning have a significant influence on organizational performance.
Maiga (2015)	62 managers manufacturing firms in U.S	performance	The results indicate that managers perceive that organizational learning is significantly related to competitive advantage that, in turn, is positively related to profitability.
Zhou et al. (2015)	287 managers of manufacturing and services industries in China	Firm performance	The results indicate a positive association between organizational learning dimensions and firm performance (both objective financial performance and perceptual innovation measure).
Permana et al. (2017)	114 SMEs in Indonesia	Performance	The result stated there is no influence between organizational Learning towards SMEs Performance
Gomes and Wojahn (2017)	92 textile SMEs in Brazil	Performance	The results show that the organizational learning influences the innovative performance of small and medium-sized enterprises, however, the influence of the organizational learning in organizational performance was not significant.

Organizational Innovation and Firm Performance

Author	Sample	DV	Findings
Ali et al. (2017)	195 SMEs in South Korea	Organizational performance	The findings revealed that organizational innovative has a significant influence on organizational performance.
Azar and Ciabuschi (2017)	218 Swedish export ventures	Export performance	The results indicate that organizational innovation enhances export performance both directly and indirectly by sustaining technological innovation.
Zakaria et al. (2016)	321 owner/managers of manufacturing SMEs in Malaysia	Performance	The result reveals a positive relationship between organizational innovation and SMEs performance.
Nunes et al. (2017)	397 firms in Portugal	Financial performance	The results show that firms that are engaged more intensively in knowledge networks increase the likelihood of obtaining higher levels of innovation, which can lead to better economic performance.
González-Fernández and González-Velasco (2018)	9,257 Spanish companies, considering the time horizon from 2007 to 2013.	Firm performance	The findings revealed that the return on equity (ROE) and, in particular, sales revenues are positively influenced by corporate innovation. Additionally, the analysis regarding the age of the company indicates that in start-ups or younger companies, innovation effort has a greater effect on corporate performance than in older companies.
Osei et al. (2016)	387 owner/managers of manufacturing SMEs in Ghana	Performance	The results show that product innovation is significantly related to SMEs performance.
Roongchirarote and Zhao (2017)	409 owner/managers of manufacturing and service SMEs	Financial performance	The findings show that the implementation of many innovative activities could increase the firm's profits.

Lita and Faisal (2018)	131 SME's of handicraft sector in Indonesia	Performance	The main finding establishes that organizational innovativeness has no impact on SMEs performance.
Phan (2019)	266 firms in Vietnam	Firm performance	The results indicated that two out of three aspects of organizational innovation, including "innovation in business practices" and "innovation in workplace organization," are significantly positively associated with firm performance. However, there was no evidence to support the relationship between firm performance and the third organizational innovation aspect, "organizational innovation in external relations."
Wahab and Jabar (2017)	315 SMEs in Malaysia	Organizational performance	The research found that organizational innovation did not affect performance.
Atalay et al. (2013)	113 managers of automotive supplier industry in Turkey	Firm performance	The results demonstrated that technological innovation (product and process innovation) has significant and positive impact on firm performance, but no evidence was found for a significant and positive relationship between nontechnological innovation (organizational and marketing innovation) and firm performance.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. **Ali Saleh Amer Maaodhah**¹, Harcharanjit Singh^{2*}, Zainab Mohammed Alwan Al-Juboori³, Abdul Latif Bin Allah Pitchy⁴, Iwuchukwu Ekene⁵gredgre, *The Impact of Market Orientation and Entrepreneurial Orientation on Firm Performance of Wholesale and Retailer SMES in Malaysia*, 2021.
2. Zainab Mohammed Alwan Al- Juboori*, Dr Harcharanjit Singh**, Esra'a Mohammad Abdul Kareem Alawamleh***, Ikram Ullah****, **Ali Saleh Amer Maaodhah*******, *The Impact of Intellectual Capital, Knowledge Management on Firm Performance in The Context of Malaysian SMEs*, 2021.
3. Morro Krubally ¹, Harcharanjit Singh ² *, Nazdar Balder ², Haseeb Ullah ², **Ali Maaodhah**², *Exploring SMEs growth in the greater Banjul area of The Gambia*, 2019.
4. Singh Harcharanjit¹, Naeem Haseebullah Abdul², Krubally Morro³, Balder Nazdar⁴, **Maaodhah Ali Saleh Amer**⁵, *The impact of retailscape elements, customer mood and customer pleasure on customer re-patronage intentions*, 2019.