

Untangling the Market Orientation and Customer Orientation Continuum: Proposing Independent Conceptualizations

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Abstract

This study explores the distinctive characteristics of and interconnections between market orientation (MO) and customer orientation (CO), delving into their conceptualizations and measurement scales. The primary objective is to disentangle the relationship between these constructs, identifying diverse theoretical approaches along the MO and CO continuum and presenting new integrative conceptualizations of both constructs. Through a comprehensive search of the literature, we amass 155 articles from sources in the Web of Science and cross references, each of which we thoroughly examine and categorize, enabling analysis of the field and derivation of conclusions.

Critically, we map the evolution of conceptualizations and scales for both constructs, highlighting ambiguity in the literature. We also characterize MO and CO along cultural vs. behavioral and individual vs. organizational dimensions. Additionally, our research identifies three primary streams addressing the relationship between MO and CO: (1) treating the concepts as synonymous, (2) viewing CO as part of MO, and (3) conceptualizing MO and CO as independent constructs. Our major contribution is the development of integrative conceptualizations of MO and CO, grounded in the key characterizations uncovered. Finally, we propose a research agenda for the further development of our findings and theoretical perspectives.

Keywords: market orientation, customer orientation, MO and CO research streams, conceptual development, MO and CO measurement scales, literature review

1. Introduction

Market orientation (MO) and customer orientation (CO) are two mature and widely recognized concepts in the marketing literature (Deshpandé et al., 1993; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990; Saxe & Weitz, 1982). There is a widespread consensus that MO is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of the marketing concept (Gray & Hooley, 2002; Alhakimi & Baharun, 2009). The marketing concept is the business philosophy that leverages all activities and processes of a company to satisfy customer needs while fostering mutually beneficial long-term relationships (Kotler, 2003). Before the emergence of the MO concept, however, CO was already recognized as a crucial element in the field of marketing (Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2020). Saxe and Weitz (1982) defined CO as the implementation of the marketing concept at the individual employee level. Since then, myriad authors have examined CO through their respective studies (e.g., Brown et al., 2002; Donovan et al., 2004; Ifie, 2014; Kelley, 1992). According to Rodríguez-Cano et al. (2004), numerous studies have been dedicated to MO and CO constructs due to their relevance to the marketing concept and their ability to predict and bring about business performance.

Since the origin of MO and CO, scholars have shown great interest in reviewing and addressing both constructs from a variety of different perspectives. The two concepts have often been treated as if they were interchangeable, however, with researchers occasionally blurring the lines between cultural and behavioral dimensions (Narver & Slater, 1990). This confusion has led to differing operational definitions of each concept, impeding theoretical clarity and consistency in the field.

González-Benito and González-Benito (2005), for instance, conducted an extensive review of the methodologies used to define and assess MO and its relationship to organizational performance, as either the main or secondary research aim. Their meticulous review encompassed

a substantial body of academic literature, comprising 157 articles. Unfortunately, the review was unable to differentiate between MO and CO as the majority of articles studied the term MO; the CO label only appeared in reference to Narver and Slater's (1990) concept of MO.

Van Raaij and Stoelhorst (2008) highlighted that when the definition of MO is excessively broad, it can encompass disparate aspects. Roersen et al. (2013) revealed the existence of contradictory results across studies due to the lack of universal agreement on the concepts. Anosike and Eid (2011) also identified the interchangeable use of terminologies as a problem in the conceptualization of MO. The interchangeable use of MO and CO leads to significant confusion, making the understanding of these constructs complex and daunting (Hadcroft & Jarratt, 2007). This conceptual ambiguity is not trivial as it causes many authors to mix concepts that are unrelated. We noted this problem even in recent works, such as that of Jiang et al. (2020), Baber et al. (2020), or Castell et al. (2023).

We argue that it is inappropriate and inconsistent with the realities of business and marketing to conceptually equate MO and CO, provided the dimensions at which each orientation operates, unless we ignore the importance of terminology. However, despite the increasing number of published studies with diverse perspectives on the conceptualizations of MO and CO, there is sparse research analyzing, describing, or explicitly defining the relationship between the two. While Lafferty and Hult (2001), for example, studied and integrated five MO research streams, they took the relationship with CO into consideration in only two of them. Roersen et al. (2013) stated that one of those streams is generally considered as defined by Narver and Slater (1990). Voss and Voss (2000) viewed the other stream to be the narrow conceptualization proposed by Deshpandé et al. (1993). Li et al. (2017) added another perspective about a possible relationship between MO and CO. According to them, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) argued that MO and CO are distinct concepts.

While there have been numerous attempts to clarify the MO and CO concepts with original research and reviews, the MO and CO continuum has not been extensively addressed in the literature (Shah et al., 2015), resulting in limited consensus regarding the interpretation of these constructs (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). Unfortunately, previous works offering a differentiation fall short in three ways: (1) lacking precision, (2) approaching the relationship between these constructs differently, and (3) providing several distinct research streams without reaching a general agreement (Roersen et al., 2013). Furthermore, previous works have been primarily focused on the study of MO or CO, with the study of the differentiation and relationship between MO and CO simply a byproduct, not the main focus.

Because a definitive resolution between the conceptualizations of MO and CO has not yet been reached, additional theoretical discourse and updated research are needed (Gupta et al., 2019). By addressing both conceptualization and differentiation, this work seeks to resolve critical ambiguities in the literature and offer guidance for future empirical investigations. Providing a more precise conceptualization of MO and CO that clarifies the distinctions among the various research streams can establish a strong foundation for future scholars to develop their research agendas and form a clear position on the relationship between these constructs. As Deshpandé and Farley (1998) stated, the presence of abundant undifferentiated constructs is a hindrance to the progress of marketing research.

Considering the lack of a clear definition of the MO and CO relationship in the literature despite the substantial interest in the constructs, a more comprehensive and integrative study of the concepts and their relationship is necessary. In fact, MO and CO arise from distinct conceptual frameworks; while satisfying customer needs may be central to both constructs, MO does not inherently encompass CO as a construct. Clarifying these frameworks is essential to avoid mixing their purposes and to advance theoretical precision in the field. To the best of our knowledge, no

authors have yet undertaken the task of systematically collecting, studying, and integrating the vast literature available on the conceptualization, differentiation, and, most importantly, the relationship between MO and CO.

This study, therefore, aims to conduct an integrative review to (1) explore the conceptual evolution of MO and CO, focusing on their definitions, interconnectedness, and measurement scales; (2) characterize the distinctive features of MO and CO, examining their conceptual dimensions, analyzing and untangling the relationship between them to identify the different theoretical approaches to the continuum between the constructs; and (3) propose a new conceptualization of MO and CO that provides academics and practitioners with an adequate reference to frame their future work.

In fulfilling these objectives, we contribute to the field in several key ways. Drawing on a systematic review of the literature on MO and CO, we first trace the evolution of both constructs over time, including their conceptual definitions and associated measurement scales. We then reveal two key continua—individual versus organizational level, and behavioral versus cultural orientation—that structure how the constructs have been characterized. Our analysis also identifies and classifies the various research streams, highlighting those that diverge from dominant perspectives. On these foundations, we propose integrative definitions that distinguish MO and CO as related but fundamentally distinct constructs. Specifically, we conceptualize MO as an organizational-level dynamic capability enabling responsiveness to market conditions, and CO as an individual-level behavioral orientation toward understanding and addressing customer needs. These conceptualizations are developed and substantiated in the sections that follow, offering a clearer foundation for future research and empirical inquiry.

The article is organized into eight sections. Following this introduction, the second section details the methodology employed to respond to the objectives. The third section builds the

literature review among our corpus of articles on the evolution of MO and CO conceptualizations and the development of their scales. We then address the various characterizations of MO and CO in the fourth section. Next, we present the main research streams on the relationship between MO and CO. The main part of our article, Section 6, offers a novel and integrative conceptualization of both constructs based on our previous results. We close our discussion with a series of research proposals in Section 7. In the final section, the paper concludes by summarizing the theoretical and managerial contributions of the study. It also acknowledges the limitations of the present study.

2. Methodology

The aim of this study is to conduct an integrative literature review of the existing MO and CO concepts in order to identify and synthesize the different lines of thought regarding their relationship. As Snyder (2019) suggests, the choice of review method should be driven by the nature and purpose of the study. In our case, the integrative review approach was deemed most appropriate given the maturity of both constructs and the need for a critical reassessment and potential reconceptualization (Torraco, 2005). This method allows for the development of new conceptual frameworks by going beyond description to include critique and synthesis (MacInnis, 2011; Post et al., 2020).

An integrative literature review is understood as a form of research that “reviews, critiques and synthesizes the representative literature on a topic in an integrated way, so as to generate new frameworks and perspectives” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). It requires an initial conceptual structuring—such as identifying competing research streams—as a means to organize the literature and discern emergent patterns. Accordingly, this study follows a structured protocol that combines Torraco’s (2005) methodological guidelines with elements of the PRISMA 2020 workflow (Page et al., 2020), ensuring rigor and transparency. The resulting six-step process—summarized in Figure 1—includes: (1) data source selection, (2) identification of suitable articles, (3) journal

filtering, (4) selection process, (5) synthesis method, and (6) findings. The full detail of the methodology is provided in Web Appendix A.

- Insert Figure 1 around here -

The first step involved identifying the most appropriate data source. While any of the major scientific databases—Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, and Google Scholar—could provide access to high-quality and authoritative sources, we selected WOS as the most suitable option for our purposes. Given the scope and historical depth required to examine decades of literature on MO and CO and their strategic significance (Valenzuela-Fernández et al., 2018), WOS offered the most robust fit. Although Google Scholar provides broad coverage and an extensive citation system, it does not offer standardized journal-level quality indicators such as CiteScore, Scimago Journal Rank, or Journal Impact Factor (Bosman et al., 2006). Scopus was also considered a strong alternative (Pranckutė, 2021), but WOS was ultimately preferred for two reasons: (1) its comprehensive citation tracking and robust bibliometric tools (Tunger, 2020), and (2) its established reputation in the field, dating back to the inception of many foundational studies on MO and CO (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

We conducted a Boolean search within WOS to identify articles addressing both MO and CO. The search string required the presence of either term in the title (TI), abstract (AB), or author keywords (AK):

(TI=MO OR AB=MO OR AK=MO) AND (TI=CO OR AB=CO OR AK=CO)

We limited the results to research and review articles within the Business and Economics category. This search, conducted on January 10, 2023, yielded an initial set of 544 articles.

To enhance focus and ensure quality, we filtered the results by including only articles published in journals listed under the Marketing field in the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide (CABS, 2023). This yielded a more refined dataset of 443 peer-

reviewed articles from journals recognized for their relevance and academic rigor. To ensure the dataset remained current, the list of analyzed articles was updated with a new search conducted on June 11, 2025, using the same suitability criteria and journal filtering. This update resulted in the addition of 32 new articles, which were subsequently reviewed and incorporated into the analysis.

The 475 articles were screened following a two-stage process conducted by three researchers. In the first stage, the articles were equally distributed for initial abstract screening. Each article was then cross-reviewed by a second team member to ensure consistency and reduce bias. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion involving the third reviewer. Articles were selected based on their explicit or implicit relevance to MO and/or CO, including their conceptual definitions, operationalizations, or theoretical interplay. This process led to a core set of 117 articles.

Each of the 117 articles was analyzed in depth using a shared coding framework. Weekly team discussions were held to ensure coherence and address interpretative differences. The analysis followed three summarizing guidelines, aimed at categorizing the contributions of each article in relation to: (1) the conceptualization of MO and/or CO, (2) the use or development of measurement scales, and (3) the presence of an explicit or implicit relationship between MO and CO.

In addition, we performed backward citation tracking, identifying cross-referenced articles cited in the initial corpus. This led to the inclusion of 38 new articles -each confirmed by at least two reviewers as relevant- some of which addressed only one construct but were nonetheless critical to understanding its evolution. Our final dataset consisted of 155 articles. The full list of articles is provided in Web Appendix B.

3. The interconnected evolution of the constructs

3.1. A non-linear evolution of concepts and scales

Through our summarization process, aiming to accomplish our first research goal, we initially focused on articles that provided a conceptualization of MO and/or CO, as well as those that utilized empirical scales to measure one or both constructs. As a first key result, we identified a total of 62 articles out of the 155 that introduced a new conceptual definition. We also identified 91 articles that utilized or formulated scales to gauge and evaluate the constructs of MO and/or CO. Naturally, some articles (45) accomplished both—defining the construct and measuring it. Therefore, altogether, we included 108 articles in our analysis of conceptualizations and scales, as some articles addressed both. These articles encompassed the seminal and most well-known conceptual definitions of and scales for MO and/or CO. Subsequently, we scrutinized these definitions and scales and assessed their utilization, along with their expansiveness. While the remaining articles in the dataset did delve into MO and/or CO, they did not contribute to the conceptualization of the constructs or propose or apply specific measurement scales.

Our analysis revealed an intricate and extended evolution of both MO and CO, showing that the concepts evolved concurrently but not always in parallel. Their development paths often intersected, reflecting agreements and disagreements within the literature. Therefore, the literature has witnessed a continuous, yet non-linear, evolution of the MO and CO constructs. During this evolutionary process, earlier constructs significantly influenced subsequent ones (e.g., Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). This cross-fertilization often originated from conceptualizations derived from the opposing construct—i.e., a CO conceptualization based on a prior MO conceptualization (e.g., Deshpandé et al., 1993), or vice versa. This intricate interplay led to the non-linear evolution of both constructs over time, making it challenging to disentangle one from the other.

The development of scales aimed at measuring MO and CO emerged as well as a crucial phase of the evolution following the emergence of the conceptualizations. The first scale appeared in 1982 with Saxe and Weitz's development of the selling orientation–customer orientation (SOCO) scale. In the 1990s, a series of scales aimed at measuring MO was introduced, reflecting the deeper conceptual understanding of MO that developed during that period. As the understanding of MO and CO deepened, so did the need to adapt these scales to different contexts. Although seminal scales such as those from Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) were initially thought to be universally applicable, researchers soon began to propose alternative scales tailored to specific contexts. Scales were adapted by adding new items, reducing their complexity, or focusing on specific dimensions, depending on the needs of the study.

In addition, many studies combined different scales to respond to new conceptualizations or achieve a more comprehensive understanding of MO and CO. Rather than choosing between scales, researchers often selected individual dimensions or items to suit their specific focus, thus ensuring a more nuanced and integrated understanding of these constructs.

The richness of the evolution of the MO and CO concepts is depicted in Figure 2, which illustrates how various constructs and scales have informed the field over the past decades. The figure follows the evolution of conceptualizations and scales, highlighting those authors that proposed new conceptualizations and/or new scales, used previous scales, or adjusted existing scales.

- Insert Figure 2 here -

To enhance the clarity and accessibility of Figure 2, we have included Table 1, which provides a detailed reference list of the articles represented in the figure. This table offers key bibliographic information—namely, the authors and journal names—organized chronologically to mirror the temporal evolution depicted in Figure 2. By making explicit which articles correspond

to each conceptual and measurement development, the table facilitates a clearer understanding of the trajectory of MO and CO constructs.

- Insert Table 1 here -

Figure 2 also depicts five open lines originating in the field's seminal contributions. We introduce them here as navigational cues rather than findings: they indicate the major research streams that will be developed later in Section 5. In particular, Saxe and Weitz (1982) introduced CO without specifying its relationship to MO; Hennig-Thurau and Thurau (2003) discussed CO as independent from MO; Deshpandé et al. (1993) treated MO and CO as synonymous; Narver and Slater (1990) positioned CO as part of MO; and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) articulated MO without defining its link to CO.

3.2. Unfinished maturation of the constructs

MO first appeared in the literature in the mid-20th century (Keith, 1960). It then entered a period of dormancy until the late eighties and early nineties when Shapiro (1988), Kohli and Jaworski (1990), and Narver and Slater (1990) reintroduced the concept. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) conceptualized MO as a process involving the active comprehension of customer needs (referred to as intelligence generation), the dissemination of this understanding throughout the organization (i.e., information dissemination), and the engagement of various departments in customer-centric activities (i.e., responsiveness). This foundational work led to the development of the MARKOR scale (Kohli et al., 1993), which operationalized these dimensions and was widely adopted and modified over time. Ruekert (1992) developed a new conceptualization and scale that considered MO to be the development and implementation of a market-oriented strategy, based on the collection and utilization of customer information. Lervik Olsen et al. (2014) later used Ruekert's definition of MO to develop a new conceptualization and scale of CO.

Day (1994) combined the capabilities approach with total quality management to further develop a market-oriented strategy, a contribution that was particularly impactful in broadening MO's application in strategic management and organizational capabilities. His conceptualization linked MO with firm competitiveness and innovation, setting the stage for future applications and new conceptualizations (Stock & Hoyer, 2005). Scholars such as Chung (2019) adapted the MARKOR scale to better suit dynamic markets, emphasizing specific dimensions like responsiveness to market intelligence. Other scholars reduced the scale items to suit their specific research needs (Caruana et al., 2003; Jiménez & Cegarra, 2007), merged dimensions to explore broader applications like inter-firm relationships (Francescucci et al., 2018) and adapted the model to diverse contexts (Schlosser & McNaughton, 2009; Palla et al., 2025) or processes management (Vaikunthavasani et al., 2019).

3.2.1. The cultural conceptualization of Market Orientation

Narver and Slater (1990) proposed a different conceptualization of MO as an organizational culture with a long-term focus on profitability. Their framework introduced three components—CO, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination—forming the basis of the MKTOR scale. This scale also underwent numerous adaptations as scholars sought to refine it, often supplementing additional distinct items (e.g., Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2011), reducing the number of items across its three dimensions, or reducing the items while also including other measures or indicators (e.g., Gatignon & Xuereb, 1997; Zhao & Cavusgil, 2006). Some scholars used only one or two dimensions of the scale (Auh & Menguc, 2007; Roersen et al., 2013; Ameen et al., 2024), while others added further dimensions (e.g., Feng et al., 2019; Matsuo, 2006). In some cases, individual dimensions of the MKTOR scale were amalgamated with those of Kohli and Jaworski's (1990) MARKOR scale in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive conceptualization (Powers et al., 2020; 2025).

Despite its widespread use, Narver and Slater's (1990) conceptualization and scale were criticized due to the lack of cultural focus (Homburg & Pflesser, 2000). In response to such criticisms, Hadcroft and Jarratt (2007) worked to better integrate the customer focus within MO and Andreou et al. (2020) innovated on the conceptualization through the identification of MO characteristics within companies' annual reports, providing a fresh lens for understanding how market-oriented activities are communicated and evaluated by external stakeholders. These adaptations and refinements reflect the flexibility of MO as a construct. Narver et al. (2004) introduced the concepts of responsive MO and proactive MO, which represent two distinct organizational approaches to engaging with customer needs. These dimensions were embraced and extended by scholars such as Atuahene-Gima et al. (2005) and Cai et al. (2015). Aydin (2021) further contributed by studying the role of proactive and responsive MO in creating market-driven innovation.

3.2.2. The emergence and development of Customer Orientation

While the conceptual roots of MO can be traced back to Keith (1960), CO was the first to receive formal empirical operationalization. Saxe and Weitz (1982) were the earliest to develop a scale to measure CO, as noted by Michaels and Day (1985), preceding the widely cited measurement models of MO that emerged later in the 1990s. As conceived by Saxe and Weitz, CO aligns all organizational functions with customer needs and long-term relationships. It focuses on assisting customers in line with the marketing concept. Saxe and Weitz emphasized that the customer-oriented approach should consider costs and benefits, as profitability is achievable when employees are equipped to meet customer needs. Saxe and Weitz were also the first to develop a scale for CO, operationalizing CO as a set of behaviors that effectively align the organization with its customers. This scale became foundational and has been applied in a variety of contexts, both

in personal selling (e.g., Michaels & Day, 1985) and broader business environments (Boles et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2002; Ha & John, 2010).

Over time, Saxe and Weitz's conceptualization evolved, giving rise to new models developing both in isolation (e.g., Ha & John, 2010; Michaels & Day, 1985) and through amalgamation with other theoretical frameworks (e.g., Homburg et al., 2011a; Siguaw et al., 1994). Homburg et al. (2011a) expanded the traditional CO framework to investigate salesperson CO, specifically emphasizing how it develops across different functional and relational stages. Their approach integrated elements from previous CO scales and applied them to individual-level performance.

Among these alternative CO conceptualizations, two noteworthy approaches are those developed by Brown et al. (2002) and Donovan et al. (2004). The former concentrates on individual-level CO within service-oriented firms, regarding CO as an inherent trait of service employees who recognize their capacity to fulfill customer needs and derive satisfaction from doing so (Brown et al., 2002). Their framework posited that CO depends on contextual factors and an individual's inclination to address customer needs. Following the approach laid by Brown et al., Donovan et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of service employee actions and interactions in successfully applying the marketing concept within service firms, identifying four traits needed to act in such manner: attentiveness to customer needs, active communication, proactive relationship-building, and consistent exemplary service delivery. Donovan et al. also formulated a proprietary scale to assess this new conceptualization of CO.

CO has exhibited a notable association with service industries. Hennig-Thurau and Thurau (2003) defined CO as a key behavioral trait of service employees. It is particularly vital in relationship marketing (Berry, 1983), as it aligns with its goals and principles. CO is a characteristic of the service employee that (1) has the capacity and skills to identify, understand, and satisfy the

needs of their clients; and (2) acts to that end (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). These traits were later formalized in the customer orientation of service employees (COSE) scale (Hennig-Thurau, 2004), which became central to studies on relationship marketing and the development of highly relational services (Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2020).

3.2.3. Converging paths toward a unified view of MO and CO

As the constructs matured, scholars began to integrate MO and CO in their research. Deshpandé et al. (1993) suggested that CO is essentially synonymous with MO, developing a scale that measured this integrated conceptualization. Deshpandé and Farley (1998) further refined this approach, incorporating insights from both Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990). This scale emphasized the cross-functional processes and activities required to meet customer needs and has been adapted in studies like those of Tajeddini (2011) and Polo-Peña et al. (2013). Siguaw et al. (1994) combined the Narver and Slater (1990) and Saxe and Weitz (1982) scales to investigate the effects of MO and CO on job attitudes. Cross et al. (2009) differentiated between CO at the organizational level and the employee level by using specific dimensions from the Narver and Slater (1990) scale. These studies illustrate how MO and CO have been conceptualized together in various organizational contexts.

The intertwined evolution of MO and CO underscores the need for a renewed conceptualization of both constructs. However, such conceptualization should be grounded in a thorough characterization of the distinctive features of MO and CO and an analysis of the relationships connecting them. This groundwork is crucial to ensure that any new framework adequately reflects the complexity and interconnections inherent in these constructs.

4. Construct characterization

To accomplish our second research goal—characterizing the distinctive features of MO and CO, we began by focusing on the specific characterizations of MO and CO as developed in the literature.

This analysis was based on a subset of 101 articles from the main dataset of 155, selected for their detailed insights into the characteristics of these constructs. This subset enabled a thorough examination aimed at untangling the distinctive features of MO and CO. Consistent with their disciplinary roots, MO is predominantly discussed within the marketing strategy literature (e.g., Narver & Slater, 1990; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993), whereas CO is more often explored in sales and service management contexts (e.g., Saxe & Weitz, 1982; Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003). These different origins are reflected in two recurrent perspectives that we identified—the cultural-behavioral perspective and the individual-organizational perspective—within the various conceptualizations that provide a foundation for classifying them in the preceding scholarly works.

4.1. Cultural vs. behavioral perspectives

A primary discernible characteristic is whether MO and/or CO are conceptualized as cultural constructs or behavioral constructs (Gupta et al., 2019). The cultural dimension of a construct encompasses shared organizational values and norms that shape long-term strategies (Cameron & Quinn, 1999), while the behavioral dimension focuses on observable actions and processes that respond to different stimuli such as market or customer needs (Ajzen, 1991). Among the seminal works, Saxe and Weitz (1982) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) explicitly defined their proposed constructs within a behavioral framework, which has been embraced and further developed by later authors (e.g., Homburg et al., 2011a), who extended the practical application of these frameworks. In contrast, Deshpandé et al. (1993) regard MO and CO as cultural constructs (Matsuo, 2006). Narver and Slater's (1990) perception is somewhat elusive as they defined MO as behaviors emerging from organizational culture. As underscored by Homburg and Pflesser (2000), this lack of precision in Narver and Slater's work has been consistently disregarded by numerous subsequent authors (e.g., Guo et al., 2014).

Despite the ambiguity present in the work of Narver and Slater (1990), several authors who drew inspiration from their work have adopted clear positions concerning the classification of the concept as either a cultural or behavioral entity. Gotteland and Boulé (2006), Tokarczyk et al. (2007), and Pekovic and Rolland (2016), for instance, embraced the cultural conceptualization, while scholars like Ruekert (1992), Salomo et al. (2003), Auh and Menguc (2007), Lengler et al. (2013), and Jebarajakirthy et al. (2016) characterized MO as a behavioral construct.

This lack of consensus also extended to other conceptualizations, with several authors exercising interpretational discretion. Rindfleisch and Moorman (2003) found substantial similarities between the propositions of Narver and Slater (1990) and Deshpandé et al. (1993), encompassing both cultural and behavioral dimensions. Lings and Greenley (2010) determined that the conceptualizations presented by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) were both behavioral. Singh and Ranchhod (2004) similarly contended that the two conceptualizations, along with that of Deng and Dart (1994), demonstrate overlapping elements, contrary to the cultural versus behavioral divergence.

We could resolve this quandary by drawing upon the research of Van Raaij and Stoelhorst (2008), who put forth an integrative perspective, wherein behavioral MO is inherently entwined with cultural MO. In a similar vein, Gebhardt et al. (2006) asserted that MO constitutes a cultural phenomenon that profoundly influences behavior. We maintain that MO (and CO) should not be divided in a behavioral or a cultural perspective. Considering the influence of culture on attitudes (Abdul Rashid et al., 2004) and intentions (Ahmad et al., 2020) within organizational contexts—both of which serve as precursors to behavior (Ajzen, 1991)—particularly as applicable to our present milieu (Stock & Hoyer, 2005), we contend that MO (and CO) should persist throughout the entire progression, from cultural underpinnings to the resultant behavior. The cultural and behavioral dimensions are not opposites but instead represent a continuum. Cultural dimensions

establish the foundational values and norms within an organization, while behavioral dimensions reflect the practical implementation of these norms through specific actions and processes. In other words, the dual characterizations of the cultural and behavioral do not represent distinct strata but rather, they embody distinct manifestations of a unified concept as it evolves through this process.

4.2. Organizational and individual levels of implementation

In many conceptualizations, a second significant dimension pertains to whether MO and CO are regarded as organizational constructs or employee/individual constructs. The organizational perspective involves company-wide processes, structures, and strategies, including strategic planning and resource allocation for long-term goals (Day, 1994). In contrast, the individual perspective highlights employees' behaviors, attitudes, and skills in engaging customers, emphasizing adaptability and responsiveness (Brown et al., 2002; Raza et al., 2023).

Several authors have aligned themselves with the perspective of Narver and Slater (1990), which situates these constructs at the organizational level (e.g., Andreou et al., 2020; De Luca et al., 2010; Lukas & Ferrel, 2000; Siguaw & Diamantopoulos, 1995; Wren et al., 2000). It is important to note that this perspective does not necessarily imply a conceptualization of a philosophy guiding a company's strategy and actions (Day, 1994), as the organizational culture could also be (Feng et al., 2019); instead, it can encompass a more attitudinal perspective too, referring to customer (or market) orientation as the processes undertaken within an organization (Lervik Olsen et al., 2014).

Conversely, other authors considered MO and CO at the individual level, viewing them as either behavioral constructs (Brown et al., 2002; Ha & John, 2010; Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003; Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2020) or cultural constructs (Tajeddini, 2011). According to Schlosser and McNaughton (2007), since employees are responsible for implementing MO, it is appropriate to categorize it as an individual-level rather than an organizational-level construct.

A third group of authors attempted to strike a balance between these perspectives, proposing that MO is an organizational construct independent of individual-level MO (Yoon et al., 2007). Organizational level influence may extend to the individual level through the management team (Jones et al., 2003). Perspectives that clearly delineate these two levels run the risk of creating dissonance within organizations, where the firm may exhibit a high level of CO and MO while employees do not. Consequently, we suggest that organizational and individual MO/CO must be aligned for effective implementation.

4.3. Grouping of characterizations

The cultural–behavioral and individual–organizational perspectives are illustrated in a two-axis diagram shown in Figure 3. The academic articles illustrated in Figure 3 are referenced in Table 1, which was previously introduced and provides detailed bibliographic information to support easier identification and comparison. The vertical axis represents the spectrum between cultural and behavioral tendencies, while the horizontal axis represents the spectrum between individual and organizational tendencies.

- Insert Figure 3 around here -

We identify four quadrants within the figure, representing the interplay between the cultural–behavioral and individual–organizational dimensions of MO and CO conceptualizations. Quadrant I focuses on individuals’ alignment with shared organizational values, highlighting personal internalization of customer-oriented norms. Quadrant II emphasizes observable, customer-oriented actions by individuals, such as adaptability and responsiveness traits or skills, which are often tied to personal interactions. Quadrant III captures organizational-level practices and actions, including processes like market intelligence generation, dissemination, and responsiveness. Finally, quadrant IV reflects organization-wide cultural orientations, where shared

values and norms guide customer- and market-focused philosophies. Together, these quadrants illustrate the multidimensional characterization of the MO and CO constructs.

When a study appears near the midpoint of the axis, this placement reflects either an integrative conceptualization that draws on both ends of the spectrum or a lack of explicit emphasis in the original work. For example, a study situated near the center of the cultural-behavioral axis may present a balanced perspective that incorporates both shared values and observable practices, or may not strongly prioritize one over the other. Similarly, a study near the midpoint of the individual-organizational axis may discuss constructs at multiple levels of analysis or lack a clear focus on either. These mid-range positions are not indicative of conceptual weakness but instead reflect the multidimensional or ambiguous nature of some contributions.

Analyzing the distribution of articles across the plot reveals three significant patterns. First, there is a notable underrepresentation in quadrant I. This relative scarcity highlights a limited exploration of how customer-oriented cultural values are personally embraced and embodied by individuals within organizations, pointing to a potential to address the micro-level internalization of customer-centric cultural norms. Second, we observe a diagonal clustering that spans from quadrant II to IV. This pattern underscores the interplay between organizational culture and individual behavior, highlighting how cultural norms and values established at the organizational level influence individual-level actions, such as responsiveness and adaptability. This trend also suggests a reciprocal relationship, where individual behaviors actively reinforce and shape broader organizational cultural orientations. Third, a closer look reveals that many conceptualizations of MO cluster in quadrant IV, suggesting an emphasis on cultural and organizational interpretations. In contrast, CO is more commonly associated with quadrant II, highlighting its behavioral and individual facets. Some works deviate from these general patterns. For example, Deshpandé et al.

(1993) emphasize the individual and cultural aspects of CO, placing their work in quadrant I and distinguishing it from the mainstream.

This integration of cultural and behavioral dimensions demonstrates the interconnected nature of MO and CO across organizational and individual levels. It should be recognized, therefore, that the use of one or the other term is not interchangeable if one relates to cultural, organizational, and long-term aspects, while the other relates to behavioral, functional, and individual employee or vendor levels, in the short-term. As previously discussed, the literature presents a variety of ways in which MO and CO have been characterized, particularly along cultural–behavioral and individual–organizational lines. To synthesize these perspectives, we used Figure 3 to map the main conceptualizations according to these two axes. This visual representation makes clear what we presented as a notable lack of consensus in the literature: while some authors depict MO as a cultural and organizational phenomenon, others frame it in behavioral and individual terms. Similarly, CO has been conceptualized from both perspectives, depending on the author and context. This variation in characterization lays the groundwork for the conceptual overlap discussed in the following section.

5. Untangling the relationship continuum

To fully address our second research objective—untangling the relationship between MO and CO and identifying how prior work has treated this relationship (often as a continuum), we extended our analysis of the subset of 108 articles, examining whether authors explicitly or implicitly articulated any relationship between the two constructs and how these connections were described. Thus, the total set of 155 articles were categorized into six groups: (1) authors treating MO and CO as equal concepts, (2) those considering CO as a subset of MO, (3) works viewing MO and CO as independent constructs, (4) articles dealing exclusively with MO, (5) articles dealing exclusively with CO, and (6) a final group of an undefined nature for those works that

could not be classified into the previous five categories. Table 2 provides an overview of the total articles in each category, which we will further characterize concerning their relationship between MO and CO.

- Insert Table 2 around here -

We observed significant variations in the clarity of expression regarding the MO and CO relationship, ranging from authors who explicitly stated their association to those who indirectly or implicitly indicated their conceptual category based on contextual clues in their writings. Figure 4 complements Table 2 by depicting representative articles for each of the six groups, providing a visual guide to the categories introduced here.

- Insert Figure 4 around here -

The academic articles depicted in Figure 4 are referenced in Table 1, previously introduced, which provides detailed bibliographic information to facilitate cross-referencing.

5.1. Market orientation and customer orientation as equal concepts

As illustrated in Figure 4, the first category, in which MO and CO are viewed as synonymous, contains 10 articles with explicit mentions of the concepts as equal and 13 with implicit references. Shapiro (1988) was the first to explicitly state that the constructs are so near in meaning as to have few important distinctions between these terms. Ruekert (1992) similarly claimed that using the term MO alone to refer to both concepts was consistent with the growing body of literature on the topic. An essential work within this category was the seminal paper of Deshpandé et al. (1993), who asserted that MO was synonymous with CO. According to our results, many scholars, such as Day (1994), Wren et al. (2000), Stock and Hoyer (2005), Polo-Peña et al. (2013), and Castell et al. (2023), followed in the footsteps of these early works. It is worth mentioning that a majority of articles that implicitly described MO and CO as synonymous surprisingly followed Kohli and

Jaworski (1990) in the conceptualization and scales of their articles (e.g., Matsuno et al., 2005; Naudé et al., 2003).

5.2. Customer orientation as an element of market orientation

In total, 64 articles were classified as defining customer orientation as an element of market orientation. (52 explicitly and 12 implicitly), as summarized in Figure 4. Narver and Slater (1990) were the seminal authors within this category, referred to by other scholars such as Sigauw and Diamantopoulos (1995) and Gatignon and Xuereb (1997). Many authors within this group thought distinctively on CO, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination as three dimensions of MO. Some authors remarked that the inter-functional coordination dimension should be separated from the MO construct (Eibe Sørensen, 2009; Roersen et al., 2013). Gatignon and Xuereb (1997) asserted that while inter-functional coordination should not be part of MO, it may function as the glue between different strategic orientations (i.e., CO, competitor orientation, and technological orientations). Similarly, Haon et al. (2023) postulated that inter-functional coordination plays an enabling role between organizational and cultural context and the development of MO. Several authors identified CO as the primary dimension of the three MO dimensions (Andreou et al., 2020; Conduit & Mavondo, 2001; Jiménez-Zarco et al., 2011; Matsuo, 2006; Wang et al., 2021). Co is a cornerstone of MO as “customer-based information became a key feature of the quest for an appropriate conceptualisation of MO” (Appiah-Adu & Singh, 1998, p. 386).

5.3. Customer orientation and market orientation as independent constructs

We found nine articles in which the authors specified their view that MO and CO are independent constructs and five in which the differentiation was implicit. Figure 4 also lists the studies in this category. Those explicitly mentioning the differentiation between both constructs did so mostly in terms of the level of implementation, considering CO to be at the individual level and MO to be at

the organizational level (e.g., Brown et al., 2002; Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003; Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2020; Yoon et al., 2007). Conversely, the implicit group rarely mentioned MO and focused their studies on CO, while still suggesting a certain level of independence between the constructs (e.g., Feng et al., 2019; Homburg et al., 2011b; Lervik Olsen et al., 2014; Tajeddini, 2011).

5.4. References to only one construct or undefined relationship

As shown in the outer circle of Figure 4, a total of 54 articles existed in these last three categories, including most of the literature reviews and meta-analyses. We found a total of 21 articles referring only to MO. Amongst them, we encountered the seminal article from Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and subsequent articles by the authors (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Kohli et al., 1993; Jaworski et al., 2000). We also included in this category the work of Deshpandé and Farley (1998), who synthesized previous seminal contributions; studies such as Kirca et al. (2005), Homburg and Pflesser (2000), and Grinstein (2008), which examined MO alongside other strategic orientations; and Powers et al. (2025), who explored MO from both external and internal perspectives in the B2B context.

The group of 18 articles that exclusively mentioned CO included the seminal article from Saxe and Weitz (1982), articles adapting CO to alternative settings, like González-Porras et al. (2021) who introduced the concept of CO in hospitality and Guo et al. (2025) who studied CO in the context of digital new ventures, and articles that simply changed the name of the construct to, for instance, guest orientation (Susskind et al., 2007).

The final undefined group consisted of 15 articles mentioning both constructs, including literature reviews by Lafferty and Hult (2001), Hadcroft and Jarratt (2007), Li et al. (2017), and Gupta et al. (2019). Other articles in this group claimed that there was “no consensus on the meaning of CO and its relationship with MO” but did not clarify their relationship (Morales-

Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2019, p. 969). Other authors such as Baber et al. (2020) and Sadiq et al. (2022) referred to both concepts without detailing any possible relationship.

5.5. Mapping the research streams

As presented in our previous discussion in sections 5.1 to 5.4, we identified key aspects that help define the overall relationship between the MO and CO constructs. To assist academics in positioning themselves before delving into the study of these constructs, their antecedents, and potential impacts, we constructed a map of the primary works in these research streams, presented in Figure 4. Our map provides an interesting analysis aimed at enhancing our comprehension of the situation, with the primary goal of unraveling the misunderstandings between the MO and CO constructs. Despite the consistent study, conceptual evolution, and high acceptance of both MO and CO, numerous authors have expressed consternation over the vague differentiation between the two constructs within the academic literature (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003; Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba, 2019; Shapiro, 1988).

Surprisingly, a considerable number of scholars of these concepts do not clearly position themselves, seemingly paying insufficient attention to this aspect. This deficiency in their theoretical foundation poses a significant risk of misinterpretation of their findings. One's positioning within a specific research stream offers distinct benefits and potential drawbacks, depending on the theoretical and practical objectives of the researcher. Aligning with the stream that treats MO and CO as synonymous, for instance, might offer simplicity and broad applicability, particularly for studies aimed at integrating constructs or addressing high-level organizational outcomes. However, this position risks perpetuating the conceptual ambiguity and misalignment that we seek to address in this study.

Adopting the perspective that CO is an element of MO allows for a nuanced exploration of the hierarchical relationship between the two constructs, which can be particularly valuable for

studies examining strategic alignment and cross-functional coordination. Yet, this positioning might inadvertently constrain the independent conceptual development of CO. Finally, the stream that considers MO and CO as independent constructs provides a robust framework for differentiating and analyzing these concepts in depth offering greater conceptual precision, flexibility and valuable analytical clarity, enabling researchers to explore their distinct antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes.

However, this approach may present challenges when attempting to meaningfully integrate the constructs into unified models of marketing strategy or organizational behavior, as their separation can lead to fragmented theoretical frameworks or operational redundancies if not carefully managed. Integrating both constructs into cohesive empirical models can become challenging, potentially weakening explanatory power and managerial relevance. Thus, while this stream enhances conceptual differentiation, it requires careful theoretical framing to ensure coherence and applicability.

Furthermore, some researchers mention only one of the two terms within their articles despite dealing with a marketing orientation philosophy or a client satisfaction focus. Even if an organization's modus operandi involves prioritizing the fulfillment of customer requirements, the conceptualization of MO does not necessarily include CO, and, therefore, MO and CO should come from different conceptual frameworks. This brings us to our third research aim—to establish a clear conceptualization and differentiation of the MO and CO constructs.

6. An integrative conceptualization

As mentioned in Section 1, our ultimate goal is to offer an integrative conceptualization of the MO and CO constructs. Only once we concluded our comprehensive review and analysis of the evolution, characterization, and theoretical stances of previous work, could we move to this objective, drawing on the discussions and patterns we observed within the articles. Thus, we

developed new conceptualizations by focusing on the distinctive elements of the constructs (core attributes) and integrating them in a coherent way, as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2016). Consistent with their methodological framework, the core attributes of MO and CO were identified based on the primary definitions found in the most influential seminal articles within the dataset of 155 studies reviewed. See Table 3 and Table 4 for the core attributes alongside the corresponding definitions from seminal works.

- Insert Table 3 around here –

- Insert Table 4 around here -

The core attributes of MO can be categorized as follows: (1) being a dynamic capability, as the firm's ability to adapt strategies to evolving markets; (2) implying a process that leads to a systematic generation and application of market intelligence; (3) achieving a cross-functional alignment through the dissemination of market insights across the organization; and (4) adequate responsiveness through adaptation and innovation. The core processes of market intelligence and responsiveness are necessary attributes of MO as they enable organizations to anticipate and respond to market dynamics. Conversely, cross-functional integration and long-term value creation are supplemental attributes that enhance the implementation of MO. Cross-functional integration fosters coordination across departments, while long-term value creation reflects the ultimate goal of MO but is not critical to its functionality. Building on these attributes, we define MO as follows:

Market orientation (MO) is the dynamic capability of an organization to continuously align its strategies and operations with evolving market conditions through the systematic generation, interpretation, and utilization of market intelligence. It enables the organization to anticipate and meet customer needs while adapting to competitive forces, integrating customer-centric insights across all levels to foster innovation and responsiveness and, ultimately, sustain long-term value creation for customers and stakeholders.

This unambiguous definition of MO avoids overlap with other concepts, as it focuses on the dynamic ability of organizations to respond to changing market conditions, rather than simply focusing on customers or specific customer behavior. In addition, this is a relevant definition of MO as an adaptive capacity, as it continuously adapt to a changing context, that offers a unique perspective aligning with the essential elements of the concept, including the generation, interpretation, and application of intelligence.

We followed a similar process to define CO, applying the guidelines of Podsakoff et al. (2016). We identified the core attributes of CO by reviewing the conceptualizations of CO in our dataset and integrated them into a coherent framework. CO's core attributes can be categorized as follows: (1) individual behaviors, focused on direct employee-customer interactions; (2) a customer-centered mindset, reflecting a proactive understanding and fulfillment of customer needs; (3) personalized value creation, through tailored actions aimed at building long-term relationships; and (4) organizational support that provides an empowering environment for customer-centric actions. Attributes 1 to 3, individual behaviors focused on customer understanding and proactive engagement to create value in the long-term, are necessary and sufficient (Podsakoff et al., 2016) attributes of CO, as they form the foundation for effective customer-specific actions, enabling employees to anticipate and respond to customer needs. However, although CO can be displayed by individuals even in low-support contexts, organizational support is a supplemental attribute, functioning as an antecedent or moderator rather than a defining component. Organisational support enhances the activation of CO and further differentiates it from related concepts like MO, where the organizational dimension is strictly necessary. Organizational support empowers employees to prioritize customer-centric actions while it facilitates the ultimate goal of CO—long-term loyalty and satisfaction—but is not critical to its core behaviors and mindset. Therefore, building on these attributes, we define CO as follows:

Customer orientation (CO) is the individual capacity of employees to understand, anticipate, and respond to customer needs and preferences, ensuring that each interaction enhances customer satisfaction and fosters long-term relationships. CO involves a proactive, customer-centered mindset, where employees at all levels engage with customers to deliver personalized value. While driven by individual behaviors, CO is generally supported by an organizational environment that empowers employees to act in ways that prioritize customer experience, aligning personal actions with the company's customer-focused strategy.

This definition of CO avoids overlap with related concepts by emphasizing customer-specific actions at the individual employee level within a supportive organizational context, rather than focusing on broader market dynamics. By framing CO as a value-creation model that is based on direct customer engagement, this conceptualization provides a distinct and actionable perspective, highlighting CO's essential elements of individual interaction, customer focus, and institutional alignment.

Looking at the proposed definitions, one can observe that MO and CO share a foundational customer-centric philosophy, but their convergence should not obscure the critical differences that define them as distinct constructs. At a general level, both orientations prioritize the customer as the focal point of decision-making, promote a proactive stance toward identifying and addressing emerging needs, and aim for the creation of long-term value. Each, in its own way, supports sustainable relationships—MO through strategic alignment and organizational responsiveness, and CO through consistent, personalized customer engagement. Additionally, while CO is enacted at the individual level, its effectiveness relies heavily on the organizational support systems typically fostered by MO, indicating a structural interdependence between the two.

However, these shared principles must be clearly distinguished from their non-negotiable conceptual differences. First, the level of analysis sharply separates the constructs: MO is inherently organizational, while CO is intrinsically individual. Second, their natures diverge—MO functions as a dynamic capability embedded in systems, processes, and strategic planning; CO, by contrast, manifests as a behavioral disposition rooted in frontline employee-customer interactions. Third, the source of information differs: MO relies on formalized, often aggregated market intelligence, whereas CO emerges from experiential, situational knowledge. Fourth, their primary goals are distinct—MO enhances strategic responsiveness across the firm; CO seeks to maximize the quality of one-to-one encounters. Lastly, MO depends on coordinated, organization-wide effort, while CO depends on empowered individuals acting within supportive structures.

These distinctions are not minor or interchangeable; rather, they are essential for the conceptual clarity and operational effectiveness of each construct. Understanding both their shared foundations and their irreducible differences is critical to advancing robust theoretical models and designing effective, multi-level customer strategies. Treating MO and CO as complementary—yet fundamentally distinct—provides a more accurate and actionable framework for both academic inquiry and managerial practice.

Building on the above analysis of shared foundations and essential distinctions between MO and CO, we advance a clear and theoretically grounded differentiation between the two constructs. By defining MO as an organizational and cultural construct (maps onto the upper end of the organizational and cultural dimensions in Figure 3), and CO as an individual and behavioral one (aligns to the highest point of the individual and behavioral dimensions in Figure 3), our conceptualizations position them as fully independent yet complementary orientations. This definitive untangling is not merely semantic; it reflects a deliberate synthesis of diverse research streams, ranging from those that treat MO and CO as synonymous to those that view the concepts

as independent. By integrating these perspectives, our approach enhances conceptual clarity, reinforces theoretical robustness, and bridges longstanding gaps in the literature, providing a clear framework to guide future research and practice.

7. Research proposals

Our comprehensive examination of the CO and MO constructs and their continuum has not only provided a detailed depiction of the relationship between the concepts, the current state of the field, and two integrative and independent conceptualizations of MO and CO, but has also generated a series of research proposals aimed at further developing and consolidating our view. These proposals seek to address gaps within the existing literature and deepen comprehension, ultimately enhancing our overall understanding of MO and CO.

7.1. Exploring the missing links in the MO–CO independent conceptualizations

Our first research proposal directly aligns with the characterization diagram we constructed (Figure 3), which illustrates areas where conceptual developments are notably absent. Specifically, drawing on the distinction we establish—which supports proposing independent conceptualizations of MO and CO—we aim to address two crucial gaps in the MO–CO relationship. First, we propose to investigate these orientations as distinct constructs from the cultural and individual perspectives. This inquiry would discern which cultural factors among individuals may affect their CO and/or MO. We would seek to determine whether these attributes resemble the cultures of customer-oriented or market-oriented organizations, as discussed by Feng et al. (2019), and whether the alignment of individual and organizational cultures influences the levels of CO and MO.

Second, we aim to explore the behavioral perspective for both constructs when CO is considered part of MO. The field would greatly benefit from the study of how different behaviors are transmitted from the lower-level customer orientation to the upper-level market orientation and

vice versa. Collectively, these avenues support more precise examination of how MO and CO relate in practice while maintaining conceptual clarity.

7.2. Potential relationship between MO, CO, and strategic marketing

The nuanced development of constructs within the articles of our dataset—along with their nature, implementation methodologies, and the distinctive perspectives often observed within the service sector—prompts us to inquire into the potential linkage between MO and CO through the strategic marketing concept (Varadarajan, 2010; 2015). Strategic marketing concerns the organizational processes for creating, communicating, and delivering superior value by aligning internal capabilities with external market conditions (Varadarajan, 2010).

This definition highlights strategic marketing as a bridging mechanism between the firm's analytical understanding of the market environment and the implementation of value-creating actions. Within this paradigm, MO can be viewed as a higher-order dynamic capability that captures the analytical, cultural, and organizational processes enabling the generation and dissemination of market intelligence, while CO represents the behavioral and relational manifestation of those insights through customer-focused actions and personalized value creation.

Accordingly, we propose that future research examine the cross-level alignment between MO and CO within the strategic marketing process, specifically, how the analytical and cultural mechanisms of MO at the organizational level translate into individual-level customer-oriented behaviors, and how this interaction drives adaptive performance and sustainable customer value.

Such research would contribute to unifying the study of MO and CO under the strategic marketing paradigm, advancing theoretical integration between the firm's market-sensing and customer-linking capabilities (Varadarajan, 2015) and offering a comprehensive understanding of how these orientations jointly support long-term competitiveness.

7.3. Ex-novo study on MO and CO scales

As evidenced throughout this analysis, there is a lack of consensus regarding the definitions of MO and CO. Dursun and Kilic (2017) noted that scholars have yet to reach an agreement on what constitutes MO and CO. In an attempt to differentiate the concepts, Dursun and Kilic drew upon the ideas expressed by Jaworski and Kohli (1996) and the insights of Slater and Narver (1998). Despite these insights from classic works and pioneers in the field of MO, Dursun and Kilic emphasized the need for a more precise definition of MO and, by extension, CO in their call for future research.

Since we addressed this need in the present study, we propose conducting a study that engages a diverse spectrum of firms encompassing various sizes, types, sectors, and geographical regions, preferably operating within market economies, to empirically confirm our conceptualizations. To advance this agenda, future research should aim to develop new measurement scales for MO and CO that are explicitly grounded in the conceptual definitions proposed in Section 6. These definitions distinguish MO as an organizational-level dynamic capability and CO as an individual-level behavioral orientation. Building upon these foundations will enable the creation of more valid and generalizable instruments that accurately capture the essence of each construct across diverse empirical settings.

To attain a comprehensive understanding of how to adequately measure MO and CO, it is advisable to implement a multiple approach similar to that of Deshpandé et al. (1993). This would entail soliciting feedback from a subset of customers and other stakeholders related to firms within the study to gauge their perceptions of CO and MO and the underlying rationales for such perceptions.

This proposed research could advance the development of more generalizable MO and CO scales, leveraging existing research to solicit participants' opinions on the items that could

independently measure each orientation. The approach would provide a fundamental and generalizable metric for each orientation, enabling subsequent modifications or adaptations tailored to specific study contexts, company types, sectors, and other relevant factors, while preserving the essence of the examined constructs.

7.4. Established and developing theoretical perspectives for the MO–CO relationship

A final promising avenue for future research involves exploring these constructs from different theoretical perspectives. We propose conducting a comparative analysis of both constructs from the perspective of an established theory, such as relationship marketing (RM) (Berry, 1983), and a theory in active development, like service-dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo et al., 2023).

RM's maturity does not diminish relevance; it signals integration into core marketing theory and continued capacity to inform evolving conceptual landscapes (Berry, 1983; Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000; Harker & Egan, 2006). RM provides a useful lens on the MO–CO link by emphasizing how long-term, value-based orientations support trust-based customer relationships, consistent with our view of MO as strategic/cultural/organizational and CO as behavioral/individual (Berry, 1983; Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). RM's evolution toward integrative, context-sensitive theorizing (Egan, 2003) invites targeted tests of antecedents, consequences, and managerial implications.

S-D logic, while consolidating, still benefits from development of core ideas, notably value co-creation. It frames value as emerging from resource integration and collaborative interactions among actors across micro, meso, and macro levels (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Wajid et al., 2019). Within this lens, MO can be examined as an organizational enabler (strategy alignment, market intelligence, resource orchestration) and CO as the interface where these strategies materialize in employee–customer interactions, linking both to co-creation mechanisms (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015; Vargo et al., 2023). Such integration complements our framework and opens promising

avenues to better understand and operationalize the conditions for sustained collaboration, innovation, and adaptability in marketing practice.

8. Conclusion

It is inarguable that MO and CO have been consolidated within the literature for many years. As we observed, there was not a clear understanding of the differentiation and relationship between MO and CO, and it looked difficult to reach an agreement upon where the different authors could settle their differences. This was the chief aim of our research and thus its main contribution—untangling the constructs of MO and CO. Our work helped explicitly identify the differences between the constructs and their respective conceptualizations, providing several scholar and managerial contributions.

8.1. Theoretical contributions

First, our depiction of the evolution of the constructs revealed not only its non-linearity but also demonstrated the substantial influence of initial constructs on subsequent ones. Cross-fertilization frequently arose from conceptualizations of the opposing construct, meaning an MO conceptualization was often built upon a preceding CO conceptualization, and vice versa. Consequently, considerable intellectual effort and theoretical rigor were needed to differentiate between the two. By delineating this evolutionary path, our work provides academia with insights into the current state of the constructs, highlights the significance of specific conceptual developments in various contexts, and outlines the requisites for future evolution.

Second, we revealed that some studies deemed the application of preexisting or standardized scales sufficient, while others opted for modifications to or the combination of preexisting scales. A few studies crafted highly specific measurement scales aligned with diverse conceptualizations of MO and CO. This pattern, analyzed in detail in Sections 4 and 5 and further synthesized in Section 6.2, prompts legitimate inquiries into whether commonly used scales align

with evolving definitions of MO and CO; whether modifications reflect necessary contextualization or persistent conceptual ambiguity; and whether the field is moving toward a stable measurement framework or remains theoretically fragmented. While we do not claim to resolve these issues definitively, we believe that drawing attention to this heterogeneity highlights both the challenges and the theoretical adaptability that characterize ongoing research in this domain. Instead of construing this as a pessimistic signal of divergence, it might equally be considered to indicate the fortitude, adaptability, and potential for advancement within this domain of knowledge.

Ultimately, by reframing scale usage as more than a methodological concern and instead positioning it as a reflection of deeper theoretical tensions and developments, we seek to encourage a more critical engagement with the alignment between conceptual definitions and their operationalization. This perspective may contribute to advancing the field toward greater conceptual coherence and measurement clarity.

It is noteworthy that the pioneering scholars were not confined to a specific temporal framework. They did not limit themselves to proposing original work in a specific era only to be refined by subsequent researchers. Narver and Slater, for instance, have continuously contributed to the study of MO from both theoretical and analytical perspectives, in collaborations (e.g. Atuahene-Gima et al., 2005; Narver et al., 2004) and individual works (Slater & Narver, 1994, 1998, 2000). Even more recently, Jaworski and Kohli (2017) shared insights gained from their ongoing research in the field of MO. This ongoing engagement of the pioneers of the field underscores the dynamic nature and enduring relevance of MO and CO research.

Third, we identified recurring parameters in various conceptualizations, which aided in categorizing perspectives from previous scholarly works. These features encompassed the cultural–behavioral view and the individual vs. organizational implementation of the MO/CO constructs.

Our study recognized three primary research streams concerning the MO and CO relationship: (1) those treating MO and CO as equal concepts, (2) those considering CO as an element of MO, and (3) those viewing MO and CO as independent constructs. We also identified seminal authors within each research stream. Based on the parameters defining different MO and CO conceptualizations within these research streams, we created two corresponding conceptual maps featuring key works used in our research (see Figures 3 and 4). As suggested by Hulland (2020), these maps are a crucial contribution in conceptual papers, as researchers should consider our synthesis when positioning themselves within the field and should establish their theoretical framework before embarking on future investigations.

Finally, we propose two integrative conceptualizations of the MO and CO constructs. For the first time in the literature, to the best of our knowledge, our paper presents conceptualizations of MO and CO that are grounded in a clear and explicit positioning regarding the defining characteristics of both constructs, as well as their relationship. This explicit positioning is intended to serve as a solid and definitive foundation for future theoretical and empirical developments in the field.

8.2. Managerial contributions

Despite the marked conceptual focus of our work, there are also several practical contributions that are worth mentioning. First, practitioners can use our consolidated overview of the existing literature to gain insights into the theoretical foundations and practical implications of MO and CO, which are integral topics for any business. This summary of the literature facilitates a more informed and strategic approach to incorporating these orientations into the operational fabric of their organizations.

Second, our framework offers practical guidance to managers aiming to improve organizational performance by clarifying how to strategically apply MO and CO principles. By

distinguishing between cultural–organizational and behavioral–individual dimensions, managers can better diagnose whether their current orientation is misaligned across strategic and operational levels. For example, if strong market-oriented values exist at the organizational level but are not reflected in employee behaviors, this misalignment may limit customer satisfaction and performance outcomes. Our synthesized view enables managers to identify such gaps and apply targeted and tailored interventions—such as training programs, internal communication strategies, or incentive systems—to reinforce alignment. Additionally, the framework helps prioritize and sequence initiatives by showing how cultural orientations (MO) can serve as a foundation for individual behavioral expressions (CO), thus improving implementation success. In this way, our study contributes to managerial decision-making by offering a conceptual map that connects abstract strategic orientations with actionable levers that influence customer experience and business results.

The correlation between the proper application of MO and CO principles and positive business outcomes, evidenced several times in the literature (e.g. Han et al., 1998; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Slater & Narver, 2000) underscores the practical significance of our research for managers seeking to optimize their organizational performance.

8.3. Limitations

While our study offers valuable insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged. First, the temporal scope of the articles analyzed extended only up to June 2025. To overcome this limitation, subsequent research replicating our investigation may be warranted to consider any emerging developments and assess the extent to which new research aligns with our recommendation of situating work within established research streams.

Second, our review exhibited a certain bias towards the conceptualization proposed by Narver and Slater (1990) due to our identification process. This bias was compensated for by our

thorough revision of articles so that only those addressing the conceptual development of any of the constructs and their relationship were selected, as well as by the addition of new articles that were most cited among the first sample set. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that our primary aim was to identify thematic trends and conceptual developments, not to conduct a quantitative evaluation of models, thus an overrepresentation of one conceptual development should not have affected our results.

Finally, the conceptual scope of our study was primarily limited to the business approaches of MO and CO. However, today's changing business landscape is witnessing the rise of new successful business orientations such as data orientation (Akter et al., 2021) that challenge or even may complement these mature frameworks. A future replication of this present study could broaden the scope of this work by exploring data orientation and how it interacts with these mature approaches.

9. Final remark

As a final remark, this study provides a clarified and integrative understanding of how MO and CO interact within contemporary organizational contexts. By disentangling their conceptual overlap and articulating the distinctive roles each plays in shaping strategic and relational processes, the research refines both constructs from theoretical and operational standpoints. Our analysis confirms that MO and CO must be understood as independent orientations, and provides new, more precise definitions that capture their distinct contributions to organizational adaptability and value creation. This enhanced clarity supports academics and practitioners in conceptualizing and designing coherent marketing systems, in which MO offers a collective and strategic framework that guides the organization's market responsiveness, while CO ensures its translation into effective customer-level actions and experiences..

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Table 1. List of Supporting Articles for Conceptualization and Characterization of MO and CO.

Year	Authors	Journal	Figure(s)	Research Stream
1982	Saxe & Weitz	Journal of Marketing	2, 3, 4	Only CO
1985	Michels & Day	Journal of Marketing Research	2	Only CO
1988	Shapiro	Harvard Business Review	2,4	CO and MO as synonyms
1990	Kohli & Jaworski	Journal of Marketing	2, 3	Only MO
1990	Narver & Slater	Journal of Marketing	2, 3, 4	CO as part of MO
1992	Ruekert	International Journal of Research in Marketing	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as synonyms
1993	Deshpandé et al.	Journal of Marketing	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as synonyms
1993	Jaworski & Kohli	Journal of Marketing	2, 4	Only MO
1993	Kohli et al.	Journal of Marketing Research	2, 4	Only MO
1994	Day	Journal of Marketing	2	CO and MO as synonyms
1995	Siguaw & Diamantopoulos	Journal of Strategic Marketing	2, 3, 4	CO as part of MO
1997	Gatignon & Xuereb	Journal of Marketing Research	2,4	CO as part of MO
1998	Deshpandé & Farley	Journal of Market-Focused Management	2,4	Only MO
1998	Appiah-Adu & Singh	Management Decision	4	CO as part of MO
2000	Homburg & Pflesser	Journal of Marketing Research	2, 4	Only MO
2000	Lukas & Ferrel	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	3, 4	CO as part of MO
2000	Wren et al.	Industrial Marketing Management	3, 4	CO and MO as synonyms
2001	Lafferty & Hult	Academy of Marketing Science Review	2, 4	Undefined
2001	Conduit & Mavondo	Journal of Business Research	4	CO as part of MO
2001	Boles et al.	Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	2	Only CO
2002	Brown et al.	Journal of Marketing Research	2, 3	CO and MO are independent
2003	Hennig-Thurau & Thurau	Journal of Relationship Marketing	2, 3, 4	CO and MO are independent
2003	Jones et al.	Journal of Business Research	3	CO as part of MO
2003	Caruana et al.	Service Industries Journal	2	CO as part of MO
2003	Salomo et al.	International Journal of Technology Management	3	CO and MO as synonyms
2004	Donavan et al.	Journal of Marketing	2	CO and MO are independent
2004	Hennig-Thurau	International Journal of Service Industry Management	2	CO and MO are independent
2004	Narver et al.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2	CO and MO as synonyms
2005	Atuahene-Gima et al.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2	CO and MO as synonyms

Year	Authors	Journal	Figure(s)	Research Stream
2005	Stock & Hoyer	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as synonyms
2005	Matsuno et al.	Journal of Business Research	4	CO and MO as synonyms
2005	Kirca et al.	Journal of Marketing	2	Reference only to MO
2006	Gotteland & Boulé	International Journal of Research in Marketing	3	CO as part of MO
2006	Matsuo	Journal of Business Research	2, 3, 4	CO as part of MO
2006	Zhao & Cavusgil	Industrial Marketing Management	2	CO as part of MO
2007	Auh & Menguc	Industrial Marketing Management	2, 3	CO and MO as synonyms
2007	Hadcroft & Jarratt	Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing	2, 4	Undefined
2007	Schlosser & McNaughton	Journal of Business Research	3	CO and MO as synonyms
2007	Tokarczyk et al.	Family Business Review	3	CO as part of MO
2007	Yoon et al.	Service Industries Journal	3, 4	CO and MO are independent
2007	Susskind et al.	Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly	4	Only CO
2007	Jiménez & Cegarra	Industrial Marketing Management	2	CO and MO as synonyms
2008	Grinstein	Academy of Marketing Science	4	CO as part of MO
2009	Cross et al.	European Journal of Marketing	2	CO as part of MO
2009	Schlosser & McNaughton	Journal of Service Marketing	2	CO as part of MO
2009	Eibe Sørensen	European Journal of Marketing	4	CO as part of MO
2010	De Luca et al.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2,4	CO as part of MO
2010	Ha & John	Service Industries Journal	2, 3	CO as part of MO
2011a	Homburg et al.	Journal of Marketing	2, 3	Only CO
2011b	Homburg et al.	Academy of Marketing Science	4	CO and MO as independent
2011	Tajeddini	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	2,3 4	CO and MO as independent
2011	Jiménez-Zarco et al.	Service Business	2, 4	CO as part of MO
2013	Polo Peña et al.	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	2,4	CO and MO as synonyms
2013	Roersen et al.	Journal of Product Innovation Management	2, 4	CO as part of MO
2014	Guo et al.	International Journal of Production Economics	3	CO as part of MO
2014	Lengler et al.	International Marketing in Rapidly Changing Environments	3	CO as part of MO
2014	Lervik Olsen et al.	Journal of Service Management	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as independent
2015	Cai et al.	International Journal of Technology Management	2	CO as part of MO
2016	Jebarajakirthy et al.	Journal of Strategic Marketing	3	CO as part of MO
2016	Pekovic & Rolland	Journal of Business Research	3	CO and MO as synonyms

Year	Authors	Journal	Figure(s)	Research Stream
2017	Li et al.	Chinese Management Studies	4	Undefined
2018	Francescucci et al.	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	2	CO and MO as independent
2019	Chung	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	2	Undefined
2019	Feng et al.	Journal of Business Research	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as independent
2019	Vaikunthavasan et al.	Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing	2	CO and MO as synonyms
2019	Gupta et al.	Review of Managerial Science	4	Undefined
2019	Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba	Service Industries Journal	4	Undefined
2020	Andreou et al.	British Journal of Management	2, 3, 4	CO as part of MO
2020	Powers et al.	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	2	Only MO
2020	Baber et al.	Journal of Strategic Marketing	4	Undefined
2020	Morales-Mediano & Ruiz-Alba	Marketing Intelligence & Planning	2, 3, 4	CO and MO as independent
2021	Aydin	European Journal of Innovation Management	2	CO as part of MO
2021	Wang et al.	Administrative Sciences	4	CO as part of MO
2021	González-Porras et al.	International Journal of Internet Marketing and Advertising	4	Only CO
2022	Sadiq et al.	Review of Managerial Science	4	Undefined
2023	Castell et al.	Journal of Business Research	4	CO and MO as synonyms
2023	Haon et al.	Journal of Business Research	4	CO as part of MO
2023	Raza et al.	International Journal of Bank Marketing	3	Only CO
2024	Ameen et al.	British Journal of Management	2	Only CO
2025	Guo et al.	Long Range Planning	4	Only CO
2025	Palla et al.	Administrative Sciences	2	CO as part of MO
2025	Powers et al.	Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	2, 4	Only MO

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2. Number of articles in each category of the MO and CO relationship.

Mention	MO synonymous with CO		CO part of MO		MO independent of CO		Referred only to MO		Referred only to CO		Undefined	
	n	%	n	%	n	n	n	%	N	%	n	%
Explicit	10	6%	52	34%	9	6%	21	14%	18	12%	15	10%
Implicit	13	8%	12	7%	5	3%						
Total	23	14%	64	41%	14	9%	21	14%	18	12%	15	10%

Note: MO = market orientation; CO = customer orientation

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Core attributes of MO.

Core attribute	Definition excerpt
1. Dynamic capability	<p>“Market Sensing as a Distinctive Capability. Every discussion of market orientation emphasizes the ability of the firm to learn about customers, competitors, and channel members in order to continuously sense and act on events and trends in present and prospective markets.” (Day, 1994, p. 43).</p> <p>“In a turbulent environment, the more enduring advantage is an ability to anticipate evolving customer needs and to generate new value-creating capabilities based on that knowledge. (Slater & Narver, 1998, pp. 1003-1004)</p>
2. MO as a process of market intelligence generation and application	<p>“...market orientation refers to the organization-wide generation, dissemination, and responsiveness to market intelligence.” (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990, p. 3).</p> <p>“...we define the level of market orientation in a business unit as the degree to which the business unit obtains and uses information from customers...” (Ruekert, 1992, p. 228).</p>
3. Cross-functional alignment through market intelligence dissemination	<p>“(In market-driven companies,) decisions are made inter-functionally and inter-divisionally.” (Shapiro, 1988, p. 4).</p> <p>“Market orientation consists of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination...” (Narver & Slater, 1990, p. 21).</p> <p>“(the interdepartmental) connectedness facilitates dissemination of intelligence.” (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993, p. 63).</p>
4. Responsiveness through adaptation and innovation	<p>“...responsiveness [...] takes the form of selecting target markets, designing and offering products/services that cater to their current and anticipated needs, and producing, distributing, and promoting the products in a way that elicits favorable end-customer response.” (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990, p. 6).</p> <p>“...market orientation consists of norms for behavior that guide the business in learning quickly [...], and responding in an entrepreneurial manner to deliver superior customer value.” (Slater and Narver, 1998, p. 1004).</p>

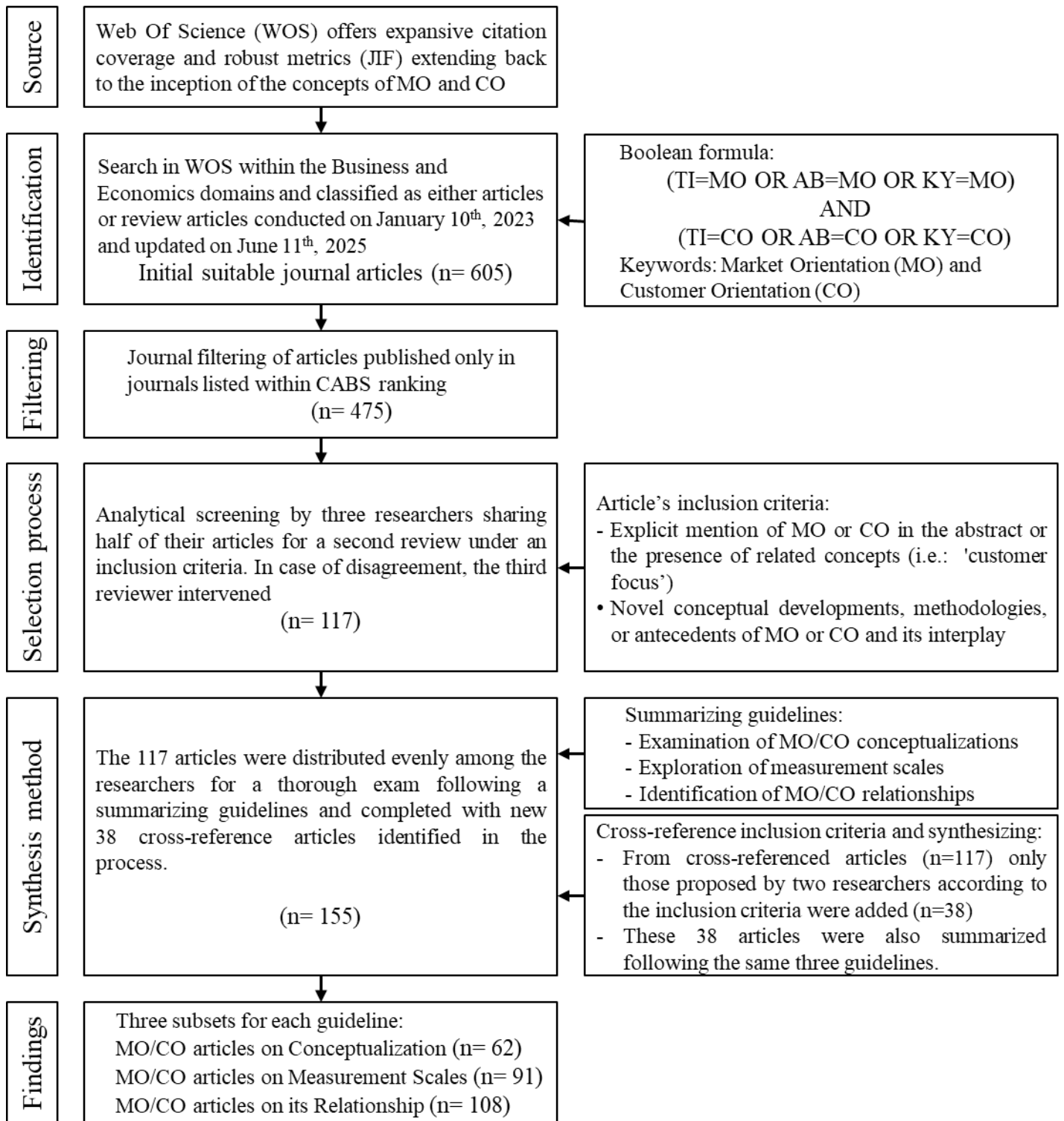
Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4. Core attributes of CO.

Core attribute	Definition excerpt
Individual behaviors, focused on direct employee-customer interactions	<p>“The term (CO) refers the degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs” (Saxe & Weitz, 1982, p. 344)</p> <p>“Implementation of the marketing concept in service firms is accomplished through individual service employees and their interactions with customers.” (Donavan et al., 2004, p. 128)</p>
Customer-centered mindset, reflecting a proactive understanding and fulfillment of customer needs.	<p>“We define customer orientation as the set of beliefs that put the customer first.” (Deshpandé et al., 1993, p. 27)</p> <p>“The social skills of the employee are crucial for customer-oriented behavior. (They) involve the service employee engaging in perspective taking. (This) means that when it comes to developing adequate solutions for a customer’s needs or problems, the employee is able to take on that customer’s perspective.” (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003)</p>
Personalized value creation, through tailored actions aimed at building long-term relationships	<p>“...customer orientation is the sufficient understanding of one’s target buyers to be able to create superior value for them continuously...” (Narver & Slater, 1990, p. 21)</p> <p>“Employees’ need to pamper the customer represents the degree to which service employees desire to make customers believe they are special.” (Donavan et al., 2004, p. 132)</p>
Organizational support that provides an empowering environment for customer-centric actions	<p>“The employee’s behavior is based on his or her own perception and evaluation of ‘formal authorization’ (moderated by) organizational structure, trust in the employee’s supervisor, the organization’s culture, and the employee’s personality.” (Hennig-Thurau & Thurau, 2003, p. 33)</p> <p>“Consequently, highly job-restricted salespeople do not have enough flexibility to make quick decisions in favor of the customer.” (Stock & Hoyer, 2005, p. 542)</p>

Source: Own elaboration.

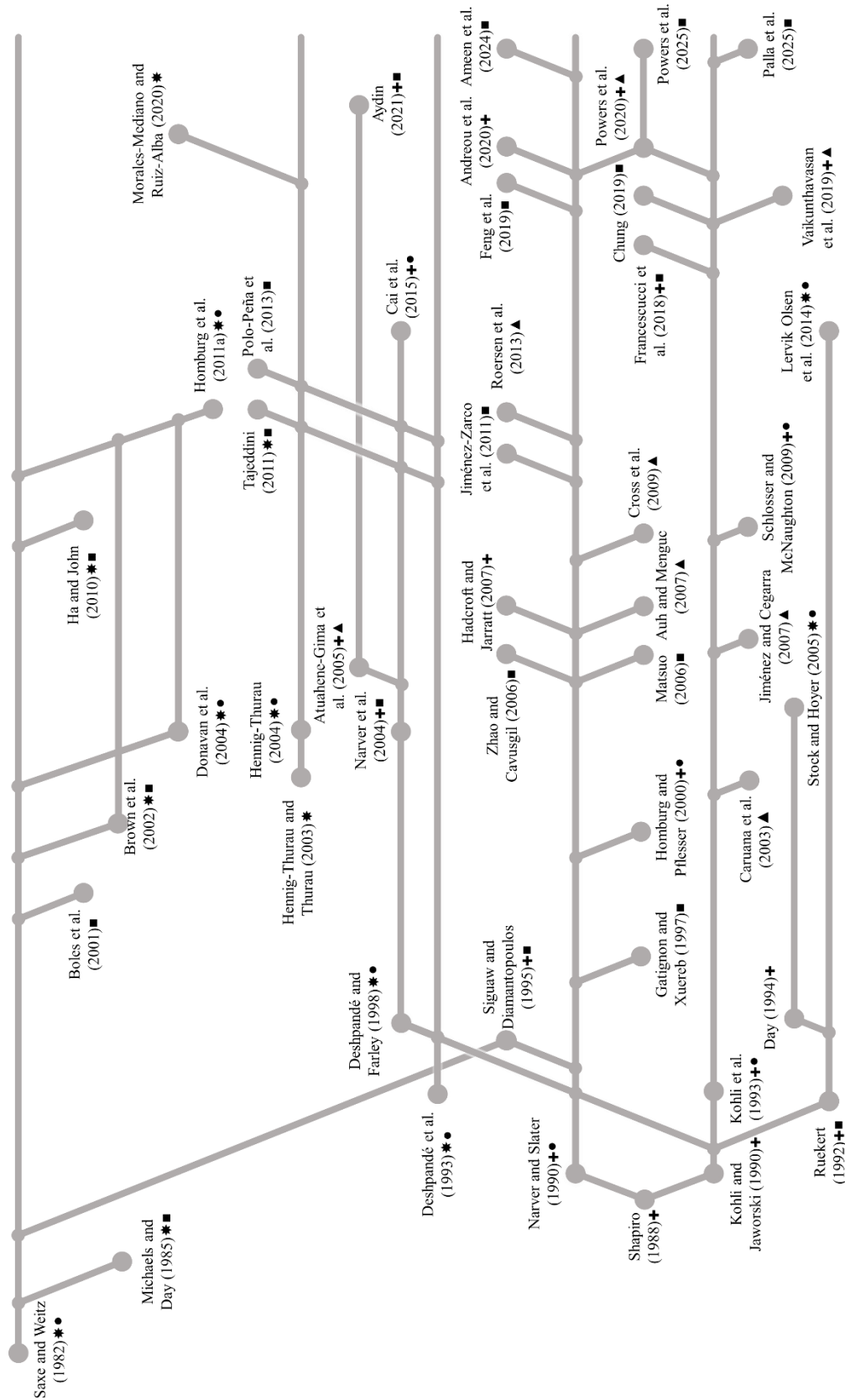
Fig. 1. Article review process.



Note: MO = market orientation; CO = customer orientation.

Source: Own elaboration based on Moher et al. (2009)

Fig. 2. Illustration of the non-linear evolution of the MO and CO concepts.

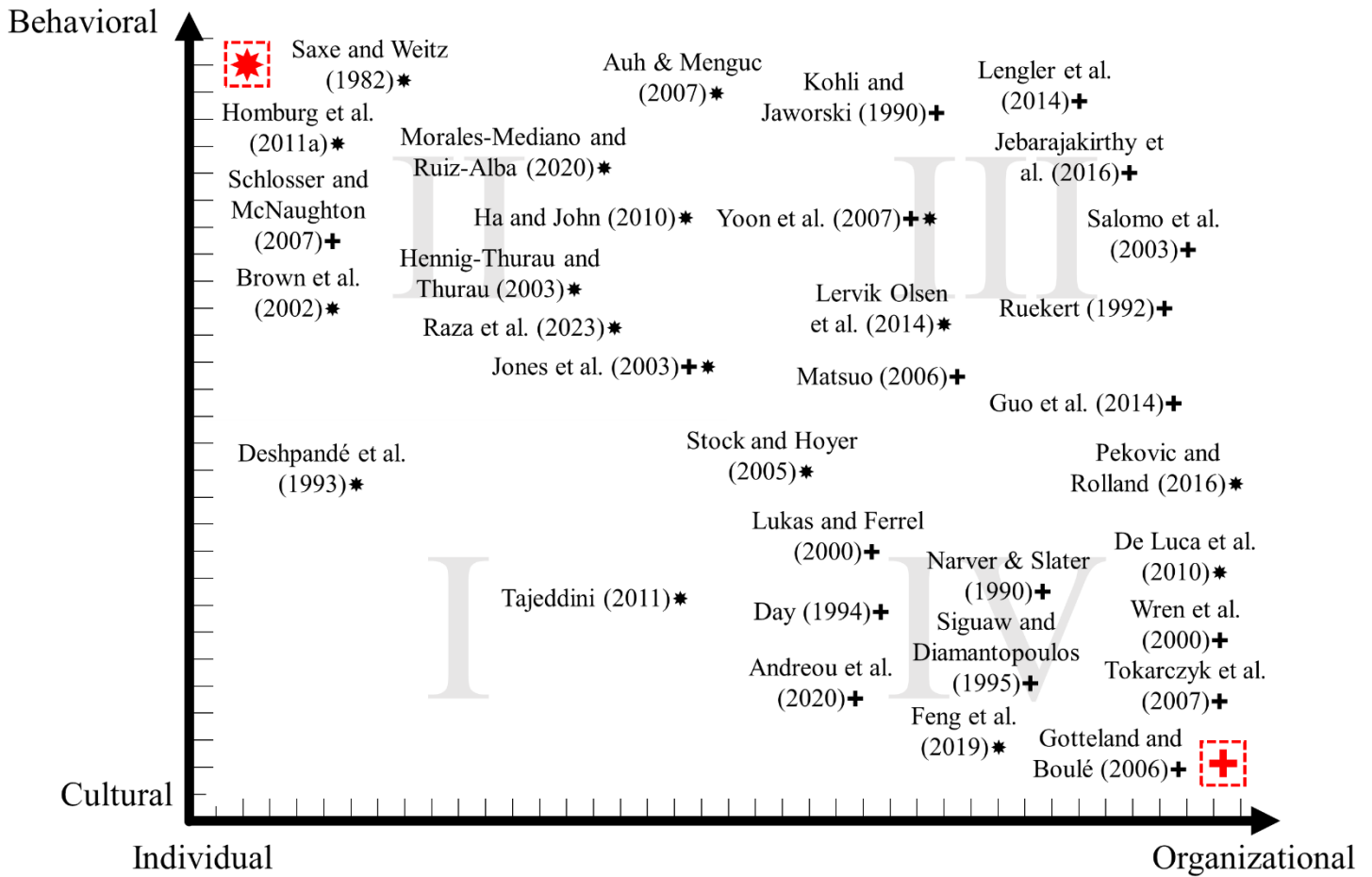


Note: Large dots represent individual articles. Fine dots on connections indicate the influence of a previous conceptualization on a new one. Crossing lines without dots do not denote a connection.

Legend: ★ New customer orientation (CO) conceptualization, + New market orientation (MO) conceptualization, ● New scale, ■ Application of an original scale, ▲ Adjusted scale.

Source: Own elaboration

Fig. 3. Characterization of the MO/CO constructs.

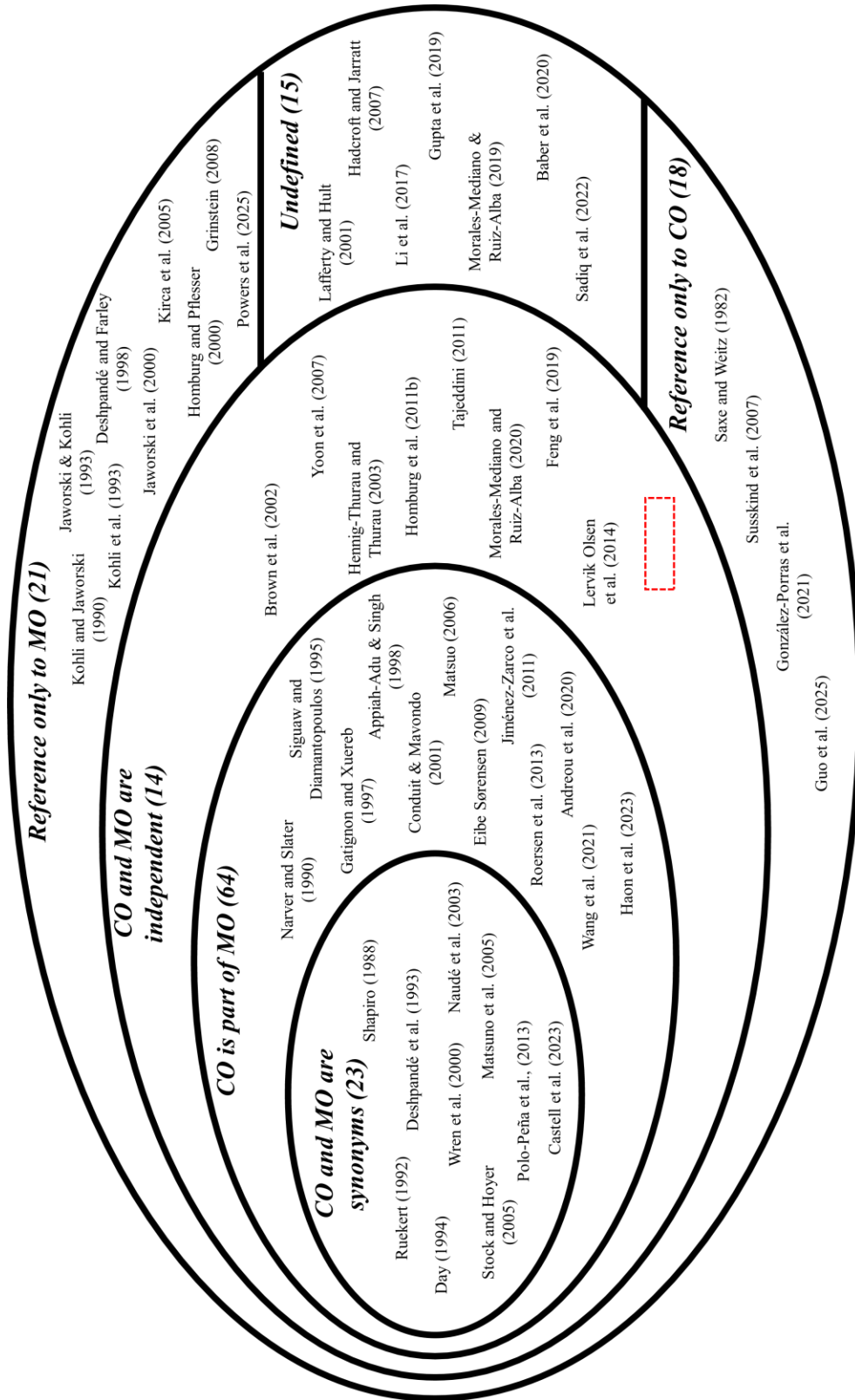


Note: The axes represent a qualitative assessment of how the market orientation (MO) or customer orientation (CO) construct is characterized in the literature. The horizontal axis denotes the level at which the orientation is implemented, ranging from individual to organizational. The vertical axis reflects whether the construct is interpreted from a cultural or behavioral perspective.

Legend: * focus on CO, + focus on MO, [red dashed box] indicates the position adopted in this article regarding CO, and [red dashed box with cross] indicates the position adopted in this article regarding MO.

Source: Own elaboration

Fig. 4. Mapping the market orientation (MO) and customer orientation (CO) research streams.



Note: "References only to..." category refer to either MO or CO individually, without explicitly addressing the relationship between the two constructs. While these works contribute to the conceptual development of one construct, they do not position it relative to the other. "Undefined" category includes articles where both MO and CO are mentioned, but the nature of their relationship is not clearly defined. The constructs may appear jointly in the text, yet without theoretical clarification regarding whether they are treated as overlapping, hierarchical, or independent. Dashed outline (-----) denotes the research stream adopted in this study.

Source: Own elaboration

Web appendix A. Methodology

The aim of this paper is to conduct an integrative review of the existing MO and CO literature to identify different lines of thought regarding the relationship between them. To identify the most appropriate research methodology, we must first turn to the purpose and nature of the study (Snyder, 2019). This study differs from typical systematic reviews in that it delves into mature topics that have long existed in the literature with the intent to critically review and potentially reconceptualize MO and CO (Torraco, 2005), requiring a certain level of analysis and creative skills (MacInnis, 2011).

We selected an integrative literature review approach, as it is best suited to the nature and purpose of this research (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020; Snyder, 2019). An integrated literature review is a “form of research that reviews, critiques and synthesizes the representative literature on a topic in an integrated way, so as to generate new frameworks and perspectives on the topic” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). It requires an early conceptual structuring of the topic in the form of competing models (i.e., different research streams in this case) to organize the articles so that the findings fit a recognizable pattern (Torraco, 2005). An outstanding feature of an integrative review is that it is not just a descriptive review but goes beyond to synthesize and critique the topic and develop new theoretical and conceptual insights (Post et al., 2020). In a nutshell, this study calls for a relatively concentrated review of two mature concepts (MO and CO) in need of a reconceptualization whose results should serve to segment the literature in distinctive streams (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020).

It should be noted that while there are various approaches to conducting an integrative literature review, researchers are expected to observe accepted protocols when documenting and reporting how the study was conducted (Torraco, 2005). In this sense, we adopted a mixed system based on Torraco’s (2005) general guidelines for integrative literature reviews and the PRISMA

2020 workflow methodology (Moher et al., 2009) as the one that best fits our study (Page et al., 2020). The protocol for data collection and synthesis, which is presented in Figure 1, comprised six steps: data source, identification of suitable journal articles, journal filtering, selection process, synthesis method, and findings.

- Insert Figure A1 around here -

1. Data source

The selection of an appropriate data source was a crucial first step in our study. While any of the well-known scientific article databases (i.e., Web of Science [WOS], Scopus, and Google Scholar) might provide authoritative, qualitative, and well-established sources, we selected WOS as our database due to the particular nature of this study that required the coverage of an extensive body of literature on MO and CO concepts spanning several decades and their significance in the context of firm strategy and performance (Valenzuela-Fernández et al., 2018). Although Google Scholar is the largest database and offers an extensive citation system, it was rejected because it does not include a rating system such as CiteScore, Scimago Journal Rank, or Journal Impact Factor (formerly known as Journal Citation Ranking; Bosman et al., 2006). Scopus was identified as a viable alternative source (Pranckutė, 2021), but our specific research objectives were more closely aligned with WOS for two primary reasons: (1) WOS offers expansive citation coverage and robust metrics such as Journal Citation Reports (JCR), facilitating a comprehensive evaluation of these concepts (Tunger, 2020); and (2) WOS has a long-standing reputation as a trusted information repository for literature reviews, extending back to the inception of our research themes several decades ago (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

2. Identification of suitable articles

Within the WOS platform, our selection criteria involved identifying articles that included the terms MO and CO in prominent positions, such as titles, abstracts, or keywords. This strategy ensured

that our chosen articles were directly pertinent to our research inquiry. The corresponding Boolean transcription of our criteria can be articulated as follows:

$$(TI=MO \text{ OR } AB=MO \text{ OR } AK=MO) \text{ AND } (TI=CO \text{ OR } AB=CO \text{ OR } AK=CO)$$

Where TI stands for title, AB for abstract, and AK for author keywords. Further refinement was achieved by applying additional filters. Specifically, we focused on articles falling within the domain of business economics and classified them as either articles or review articles. Our search was executed on January 10, 2023, yielding an initial pool of 544 articles.

3. Journal filtering

To maintain a high standard of quality in our review, we included only those articles published in journals listed within the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) academic journal guide under the marketing field. The CABS ranking, encompassing a selection of approximately 1,700 top journals across diverse research disciplines, is a prominent and influential journal guide (Khan et al., 2020). The preference for the CABS list emanates from its unique methodology, which integrates journal metrics with insights from subject experts and scholarly associations to gauge the standing of journals within each subject domain (CABS, 2023). Following journal filtering, the number of relevant articles was reduced to 443. To ensure the dataset remained current, the list of analyzed articles was updated with a new search conducted on June 11, 2025, using the same suitability criteria and journal filtering. This update resulted in the addition of 32 new articles, which were subsequently reviewed and incorporated into the analysis.

4. Selection process

In the final phase of article selection, a team of three researchers conducted an analytical selection process. The initial pool of 475 articles was evenly distributed among the researchers for the abstract review. Subsequently, the articles designated to each researcher were split between their other two colleagues for a second review. Review of the abstracts was guided by established

eligibility criteria encompassing the explicit inclusion of MO or CO terms in the abstract or the presence of related concepts such as “market-oriented” or “customer focus.” Articles that lacked direct or implicit references to MO and CO constructs were considered eligible if their abstracts exhibited a clear focus on novel conceptual developments, research methodologies, or antecedents of both constructs and their interplay. Articles that did not align with this rationale were excluded based on the assessment of the two researchers.

In cases where discrepancies arose between the evaluations of the two researchers, the third reviewer intervened, and the researchers collectively deliberated to reach a consensus regarding the inclusion or exclusion of contentious articles. This meticulous process culminated in a final collection of 117 articles for in-depth analysis.

5. Synthesis method

The 117 articles of the primary dataset were evenly distributed among the three members of the research team, who conducted a thorough and comprehensive examination of their content over the course of eight consecutive weeks. During this period, each team member presented their research findings to the group, elucidating the major discoveries and initiating deliberative discussions. This approach aimed to mitigate individual biases and variances among the reviewers, thereby enhancing the robustness and confidence in our research outcomes.

Prior to embarking on the analysis phase, we established specific summarizing guidelines for our examination of each text, ensuring we generated relevant results that could effectively address our research inquiries. These guidelines included:

1. The examination of conceptualizations pertaining to MO and CO that were either compiled, scrutinized, or proposed within the selected articles.

2. An exploration of the measurement scales employed by the selected articles, especially when there was a disconnect between the conceptualizations and their corresponding measurements, as was observed in multiple instances.
3. The identification of any explicit or implicit indications of a relationship between MO and CO within the texts.

In addition, we carefully documented references within the initial set of 117 articles that were not included in our original dataset, yielding 160 additional articles for potential incorporation in subsequent rounds of analysis. Only those articles independently identified by at least two of the three team members, in addition to meeting the predetermined relevance criteria outlined in Section 2.4, were retained to ensure the relevance of the articles. This filtration process resulted in a final subset of 38 articles. Some of these additional articles focused on only one construct (i.e., MO or CO) but were deemed essential for understanding the conceptual development, measurement, or relationship of the concepts. These articles were subsequently analyzed using the same guidelines as the initial set of 117 articles. Our final dataset comprised a total of 155 articles, all of which underwent thorough examination and detailed analysis before forming the basis of our research findings.

6. Findings

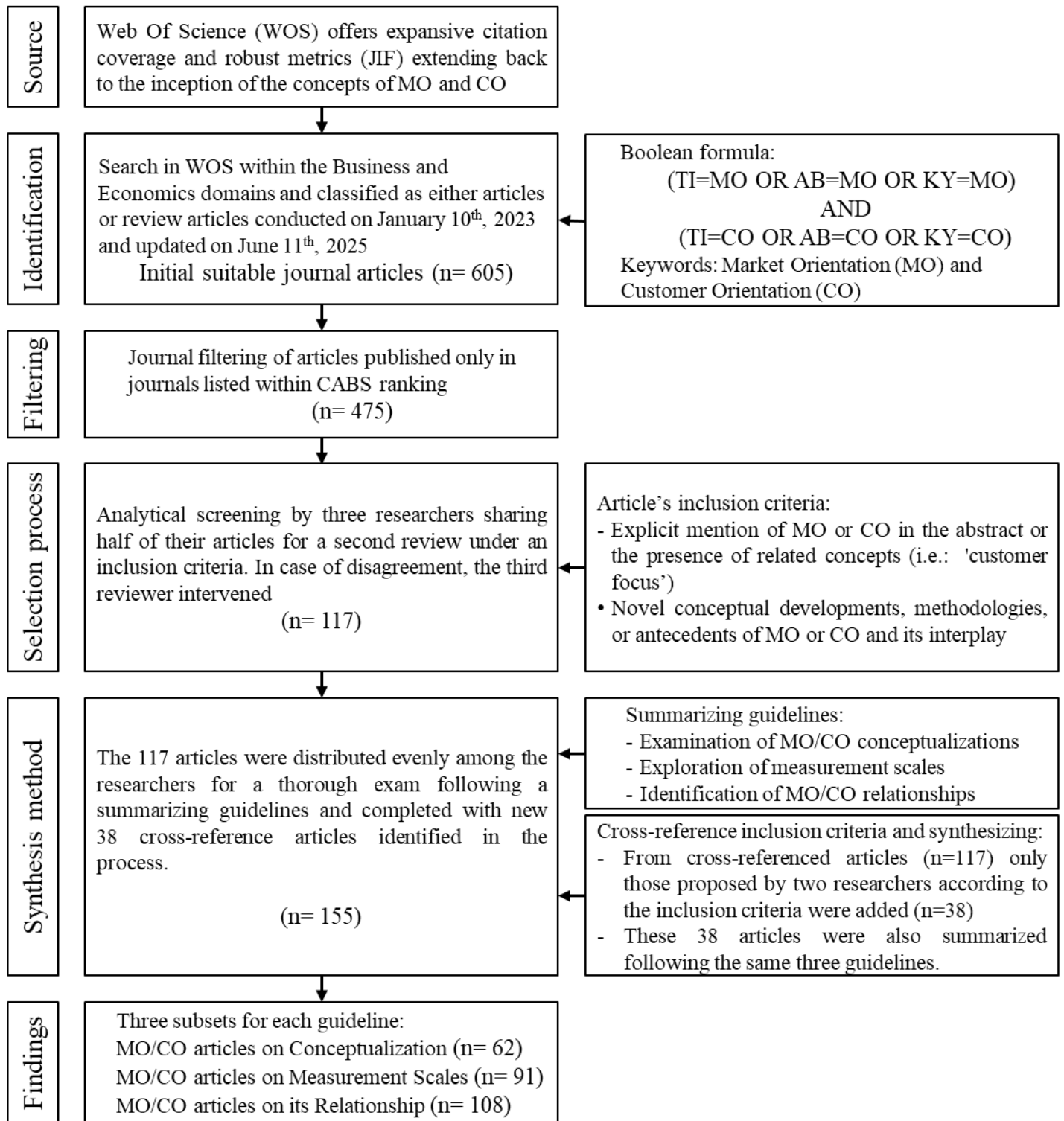
Applying the summarizing guidelines to the final dataset resulted in three analytical subsets, each corresponding to a key dimension of the MO–CO literature:

- 62 articles focused on the conceptualization of MO and/or CO, offering definitions, theoretical models, or frameworks.
- 91 articles contributed to the discussion or development of measurement scales, highlighting both consistencies and gaps between conceptual and operational treatments.

- 102 articles examined the relationship between MO and CO, either explicitly (e.g., treating them as synonymous, hierarchical, or independent) or implicitly (by addressing only one construct or leaving the relationship undefined).

These subsets are not mutually exclusive: many articles contributed to more than one category. Consequently, the total number of references across the three subsets exceeds the 155 unique articles in our final dataset. Together, these findings provided the basis for the integrative conceptualizations developed in Section 6. The full list of articles is provided in web appendix B.

Fig. A1. Article review process.



Note: MO = market orientation; CO = customer orientation.

Source: Own elaboration based on Moher et al. (2009)

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