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Explaining the role of decision makers' mental models in the success of organizations' marketing performance

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Abstract

Marketing performance reflects the organization's capability to increase sales, upgrade the company's competitive position, develop new product, improve product quality, reduce the time to delivery of goods or services to customers, expand market share, etc., compared to competitors in a given industry. Strategies and strategic decisions made by key managers and employees of the organization based on pre-formed mental models regarding market management, sales promotion and market share development are one of the most important and yet less focused factors affecting the success of any organization's marketing performance. Hence, the purpose of the present study is to identify the effect of decision makers' mental model on the success of organizations' marketing performance. The research statistical population is consisted of 358 marketing and sales senior managers and experts in Zarrin Ghazal Dairy Industries. A questionnaire was used to collect data which validity was confirmed by experts and its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The evaluation of variables effect in this study was conducted by KMO and Bartlett tests and the research hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. According to the research findings, there is a direct and strong relationship between decision makers' mental model and companies' marketing performance. Also, this relationship is influenced by two variables of decision makers' perception of reality and their strategic choice.

Keywords: mental models, marketing performance, decision makers, SEM

1.Introduction

Nowadays, senior managers from various industries and organizations have concerns about dealing with dynamic and changing environments and we are witnessing the beginning of an era of instability and disruption of the trends analysis patterns governing the managers' and employees' minds. In order to succeed and sustain in such an environment and meet the needs of their main customers, organizations should have a vision and distinct and superior strategies compared to their competitors (Tahvili, 2017). At the same time, an appropriate competitive strategy depends on the managers' thinking pattern, shaped by their mental models. This is because, there is an urgent need to form dynamic innovation in the organization in such circumstances in order to link decisions together in a coherent framework through achieving effective and effective mental models so that it is possible to reduce the disruption and increase the ability to achieve the desired results (Meyer, 2007). This requires understanding the patterns governing the mental transformation and the way of visualizing the future of the organization by managers, employees, and decision-makers.

Experts believe that the mental model of key decision makers shape their environmental perceptions and is effective in identifying strategic issues as the affective environmental opportunities and threats. Also, the decision makers' mental model affects the variety of strategies adopted in the organization. Hence, it can be said that the senior managers' mental models is the determinant of how the dominant logic of the organization affects the business strategies (Milliken, 2007).

Study on the managers' mental models is one of the research areas related to the characteristics of decision makers, which has recently received much attention. Researchers working in the field of mental models tend to examine the effect of managers' recognition based on their perceptual process on decision making because such recognition can be an early step in adopting the important decisions and organizational change processes

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(Brown, 2007). According to the researchers, there is no reason to say that all decision-making processes are based on statistical data; rather, most of the behaviors, observed in organizations, are based on incomplete mental models that has designed an representation of the real complex systems in mind while none of their assumptions have been tested. Then, according to the importance of the decision makers' mental model in policymaking and adopting effective strategies to operationalize the organizational goals and plans, particularly regarding the marketing and sales- related activities that are at the frontline of today's organizations in dealing with customers and achieving immediate and future earnings as well as identifying the customers' unspoken needs and helping the organization to survive, the key research question is that "what is the role of managers' and decision makers' key mental models in the success of an organization's marketing activities?

2. Research Theoretical Framework

Mental models, in the decision-making process, create a framework for filtering and interpreting new information, and also, provide an appropriate response to that information. Mental models, with accurate causal inferences, help decision-makers consider the most important environmental cues, effectively encrypt and retrieve information, and finally, guide the problem solving process in the best way (Kajanto, 2006). However, managers have limited capability to process highly ambiguous information and should develop their mental models to make strategic decisions in ambiguous environments; this is because managers' mental models are the basis of their strategic thinking and if they want to think about the future strategies of the organization, they use their mental models which are the simplified form of complex realities (Asgari, 2009).

As a representation or simplification of an individual's understanding, the mental model can be a simple concept or image in his or her mind, or may be a conceptual or abstract model based on more accurate understanding. Mental models affect the way of perceiving the world as well as our understanding of existing problems. These models are the framework that controls and direct the individuals' decision-making process (Mobaraki, 2012). Some scholars know the mental models as the basis of knowledge construct and among the main cognitive processes in change and learning. Others consider these models as the lenses used by organizations' members to observe and interpret world. Norman (1983) believes that mental models help individuals understand a system, correctly navigate in the system, and predict the system behavior in similar cases (Poorafkari, 2012).

Senge et al. (1999) know mental models as assumptions, generalizations, or even images and shapes that have deep roots and affect our perception of world and the way of our action (Mashhadi, 2013).

According to Friedman (3), our mental models are the cause and effect relationships that are shaped by our values, beliefs, and cultures. They reflect people's personal view of how the world works and what behaviors are more appropriate to the environment. Indeed, mental models are the inner representation of the outside world.

Baron (2004) argues that the human cognitive system receives the needed information, knowledge, and images from the environment through perceptual feelings and processes, removes unnecessary parts and archives other parts. This selected information, knowledge, and images are then processed in future processes and finally, archived and encoded as "Cognitive Representation" and "knowledge structures" to be retrieved in the future from the individual's memory and used in cognitive processes such as decision making. Backer (2007) also believes that Cognitive Representation are the same experiences, expertise, memories and reflections of the environment in the decision maker's mind that directly influence the way information is processed in his or her cognitive system, helping him to perceive different environmental factors and create relationship between them. Furthermore, knowledge structures are the same prior knowledge and information that are stored and encoded in the individual's cognitive system, which facilitate the knowledge extraction and interpretation process for the individual, and generally, they form the individuals' perceptual maps or mental models (Mobaraki, 2012).

Bronze (2005) defines mental models as belief structures used to describe, explain, and predict situations.

Accordingly, the mental model is the description of the individual thinking process about how the real world works. These models are a representation of the world around us, the relationships between its different components, and a person's direct understanding of their actions and outcomes. Mental models can shape behavior and provide a way to solve problems (like a personal algorithm) and perform tasks (Doten, 1998). As with other cognitive attributes, the mental model is affected by several factors that can be classified into two categories of individual factors (experience, educational and professional status, skills, cognitive attributes, prior knowledge, and physical ability) and environmental factors (education, interaction with people, interface environment, etc.) (Daft, 1999). Hence, people select particular system with different mental models and assumptions. A priori knowledge structures have significant effects on the mental models of a retrieval system. In addition, these knowledge structures and

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mental models are not fixed and evolve according to the experiences and knowledge acquired by the individual (Bryson, 2004). In other words, the mental models are the representation of reality that decision makers use them to signify received information signals. By examining the mental models, one can see how the interpretation of information can influence the decision making process and limit the set of possible solutions. The problem becomes more complex when we understand that the mental models of decision makers are also their cognitive basis and determine the type of decision makers' interpretation of real events. As such, what we consider to be causal relationships interfering the decision-making process is not necessarily in reality but in the minds of decision makers (Tahvili, 2017).The important thing about mental models is that although the most important feature of mental models is the reduction of complexity, and the reduction of complexity allows action, the same feature can lead to shortsightedness if prolonged and not updated.

In other words, if the paradigms of the present strategy are perceived as immortal and avoided exploring new options and ideas for development (Crudge, 2004), then the organization faces a kind of shortsightedness that reduces its speed in the face of environmental change as well as compatibility with the organization's strategies for keeping up with the business environment. The most important factors that could be the possible causes of ineffective decision making include the following according to Friedman (2004): (1) cognitive bias; (2) mental models and patterns; (3) feelings; (4) insistence on ineffective beliefs.

2.1 Mental models and marketing activities performance

The literature review shows that the mental models governing decision makers in the organization have a dual application and affect the performance of the organization in different areas through the decision makers' perception and the impact on the quality of the decisions made by them. This is because decision-making is one of the most important responsibilities of managers in different organizational domains, and the decision-makers' perception about environmental reality influences the assessment of the business environment and the recognition of market opportunities and threats (Mashhadi, 2013). However, managers' perception of environmental realities is itself as a result of the interaction of their cultural values, social concepts, and personal experiences (Brigam et al. 2003), which information is stored in their mental models and used when necessary. Hence, it should be noted that perception is a complex cognitive process and expresses an individual's unique image of the world around. Therefore, the essential point in understanding perception is that individuals' unique interpretation of organizational positions does not necessarily matches with reality. In other words, it is always possible that the interpretation of reality is different from reality itself. Nonetheless, individuals within the organization act on the basis of their perception of reality rather than reality itself, and thus, there is a gap between perception of reality and reality itself.

Another important point on the relationship between the mental models and the organizational performance in general and marketing activities performance in particular, is the role of the decision makers' mental models in selecting the appropriate strategies for their decision-making domain. Accordingly, in addition to have a mental model of the whole value-generating system, a strategic decision maker needs to be able to properly understand the relationships between its components (Qrbankhani, 2015), in order to be able to adopt the appropriate strategy in his field of activity.

2.2 Research background

A review of the literature shows several researches on the significance of the mental model and its implications, that some of the most relevant results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Research Background

Achievements	researcher
Incorrect mental models can easily justify market results with rational reasoning and affect how a competitor's learning is affected.In addition, this learning process does not stimulate companies to make convergent choices. Also, a company with a less accurate mental model performed better than a company with a more accurate one.	meton & yaw (2017)
The organization will incur heavy costs of not doing or re-doing inefficiencies and redirecting resources and skills, and will see people lose confidence and lower incomes due to lack of innovation. But with continued learning and commitment to it, the profits of the organization increase and individuals become the capital of the organization rather than the workforce.	Azug (2016)

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The mental models are always well formed. In some cases, relationships between the structures of a mental model must exist that do not exist, and in other cases, relations between the structures of the mental model exist that do not exist in reality. Such mental models affect managers' remembrance of the effectiveness of their choices.	Martington (2012)
Employees at every level of the organization collaborate differently in strategy development. At the highest organizational level, the highest level of strategic thinking is needed and the proportion of the strategic level is also reduced by the proportion of the organizational level.	Malan (2010)
In analyzing diverse strategic ideas in one firm, they found that cognitive mapping helps managers create a common framework for strategic thinking in the organization, and managers become familiar with each other's perspectives and develop their own mental models. In this study, too, the resulting consensus role provides the same framework for managers.	Ozen &Alengine (2007)
In examining the characteristics of strategic issues that affect the management of these issues and organizational performance, they find that perceived value at risk and perceived uncertainty play an important role in the quality and impact of strategic decisions.	Kajanto (2006)
Managers of a company use a common mindset in strategic thinking, which can be due to their shared communication and work experience. In addition, by comparing the common mental model in the two firms, no meaningful similarity was found in their thinking process, but there were similarities between the mental structures of the managers of the two companies.	Nadafi (1397)
Identifying the factors influencing users 'mental models can help digital library software designers design icons that are more in line with different users' mental models and ultimately provide user satisfaction.	Rahravani (1396)
Managers' mental characteristics include risk taking, perceived costs, perceived benefits and their commitment to influencing the export of a company's products.	Basiri (1396)
Status and personal factors (frequency of interactions, managerial support, and job stress, and internal self-evaluation) are effective in triggering mental imaging management behavior. Internal self-assessment and managerial support have a positive impact on mental image management and the frequency of interactions and job stress; and a combination of situational and personal factors are able to predict mental image management behaviors in the organization.	Damghanian (2016)
Decision makers have different cognitive styles because of different mental models and knowledge structures. This difference in turn is due to the information analysis itself and the choice of decision makers because of different mental models and knowledge structures, different cognitive styles.This difference is in turn the analysis of information and the selection of individuals based on the most familiar and accessible option, as well as on the attitudes, beliefs, and beliefs, the overriding rules, the biases, and the cognitive constraints that all have a cognitive basis.Therefore, many rational criteria such as minimizing costs, maximizing profits and maximizing utility may not be addressed.	Montazeri (2016)
The manager's sense-making process of issues (understanding what he or she understands about a problem and should communicate it in a different way) is effective in identifying strategic issues. Also, the managerial context, organizational context and context of the problem affect managers' cognitive processes.	Abedini (2015)
In their research, seven mental models have been defined in terms of goal-orientation, unity, politics, stability, equilibrium and architecture.	dAnaye fard (2010)

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2-2. Conceptual model and research hypotheses

Based on the theoretical background and the theoretical foundations proposed, the conceptual model of research has been extracted:

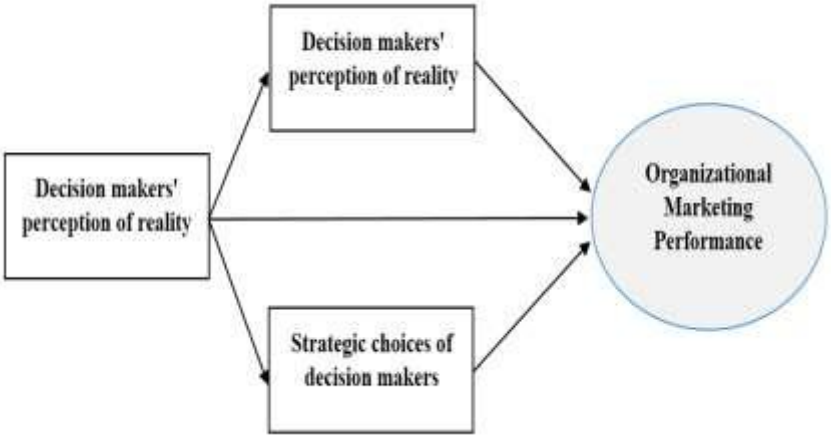

Figure 1: Conceptual model of research

Therefore, according to the conceptual model of research, the hypotheses of this research are:

2-3. The main hypothesis:

- The mental models of decision makers have a significant impact on the marketing performance of the organization.

2-3-1. Subsidiary assumptions:

- Decision makers 'mental models have a meaningful effect on decision makers' perception of reality.
- The mental models of decision makers influence the strategic choices of decision makers.
- Decision makers' perception of reality has an impact on the marketing performance of the organization.
- Strategic choices for decision makers have a significant impact on the marketing performance of the organization.

3. Research methodology

The present study is in the category of exploratory studies and is a descriptive-analytical research in terms of data collection. The statistical population of this research is 358 senior managers and experts of marketing and sales of Zarin Ghazal Dairy Industry Company engaged in production and distribution of dairy products with two brands Daiti and Apadha. The statistical sample size of this study was determined using Cochran formula for limited communities of 193 persons:

$$n = \frac{Nz^2pq}{Nd^2 + z^2pq} = 193$$

where in:
N: community size;
96/1 = Z
p = q = 5/0
d: allowed error value (error value).

The data collection tools in this study were library resources (including specialized articles in scientific centers, published books and the Internet) to collect information on research literature and use of field research (questionnaire distribution).The experts were asked to confirm the validity of the questionnaire and after receiving expert advice and corrections, the ambiguities of the questionnaire were resolved and its content validity was confirmed. Also, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. For this purpose, the questionnaire was randomly distributed among 30 statistical samples of the research. Data analysis was done at two levels of descriptive (frequency distribution, mean percentage and coefficient of variation) and inferential (factor analysis, correlation and means comparison) using SPSS software.

Table 2: Calculate Cronbach's alpha

Total coefficient	Cronbach's alpha	Number of questions	Variable	row
0/931	0/841	7	Decision makers' mental models	1
	0/815	5	Understanding decision makers from reality	2
	0/823	6	Strategic choices of decision makers	3
	0/817	5	Organizational Marketing Performance	4

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According to the results of Table (2), since the Cronbach's alpha for all variables is greater than 0.7, so the questionnaire has good reliability.

3-1. Exploratory Factor Analysis of Research Variables

In the present study, exploratory factor analysis was used to measure the effect of decision makers' mental model on organizational marketing performance. For this purpose, KMO method and Bartlett test were used.

Table 3: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis the Impact of Decision Making on Modeling Organizational Marketing Performance

0/823		KMO test
0/000		Bartlett test
All greater than 0.5	Number of agent subscriptions	
4	Number of agents assigned	
57/179	The total variance explained	

The KMO test is an index that compares the observed correlation values with the partial correlation values. The value of this index must be greater than 0.7 so that the correlation between the pairs of variables can be explained by other variables. Also, the significance level of Bartlett's test is less than 0.5 so that the correlation matrix is a single matrix for analysis. In this study, the value of Bartlett test is 0.000. In addition, according to Table 3, the results of the total variance calculations show that the variables can be transformed into several factors, which account for a few percent of the variance in question.

4. Research findings

In this step, we present the research findings in two parts: descriptive findings and inferential findings.

4-1. Descriptive findings

In order to gain a better understanding of the contextual context of the statistical population and the research variables, the demographic data of the sample members are described in Table 2 before analyzing the statistical data.

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Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics

Frequency	Number	Index	Variables
0/24	47	Female	Gender
0/76	146	Man	
0/25	49	Less than 30 years	age
0/39	76	Between 30 and 45 years	
0/30	57	Between 46 and 60 years	
0/06	11	Over 60 years	
0/50	96	Bachelor	education
0/43	83	MA	
0/07	14	Doctorate	
0/20	38	Senior Managers	Organizational position
0/34	65	Marketing and Sales Managers	
0/46	90	Marketing and sales experts	

According to the findings in Table 4, 24% of the respondents are female and 76% are male. Most respondents are in the age group of 30 to 45 and 46 to 60 years. The most educated are undergraduate and postgraduate respondents, and the highest percentage of organizational positions belong to marketing and sales experts and managers.

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2-4. Inferential Findings

In this step, using the Golmograph-Smirnoff test (K-S), we examine the assumption that the data are normal. Accordingly, if the level of significance is greater than the error value, the null hypothesis is confirmed, and if the level of significance is smaller than the error rate, then hypothesis one is accepted. In this study, the hypotheses of zero and one are:

H0: Variable data i have normal distribution.
H1: Variable data i have no normal distribution.

Table 5: Normality of dependent variables normality test

Result	Hypothesis	Error rate	Significance level	Z statistic	Variables
It's normal	H0	0/05	0/319	0/521	Decision makers' mental models
It's normal	H0	0/05	0/653	0/087	Understanding decision makers from reality
It's normal	H0	0/05	0/092	0/129	Strategic choices of decision makers
It's normal	H0	0/05	0/228	0/471	Organizational Marketing Performance

Based on the results in Table 5, since the significance level of all the components is greater than the error level of 0.05, it can be stated that the variables have normal distribution and parametric tests are used to test the hypotheses.

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4-3. Testing hypotheses

In this study, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. Structural equation modeling is a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about the relationships between observed variables and present variables. This method is one of the main methods of analyzing the structure of complex data and one of the new methods for investigating cause and effect relationships that show the simultaneous effects of variables in the theory-based structure. Through this method, one can demonstrate the validation of theoretical models in specific communities using correlation, non-experimental and experimental data.

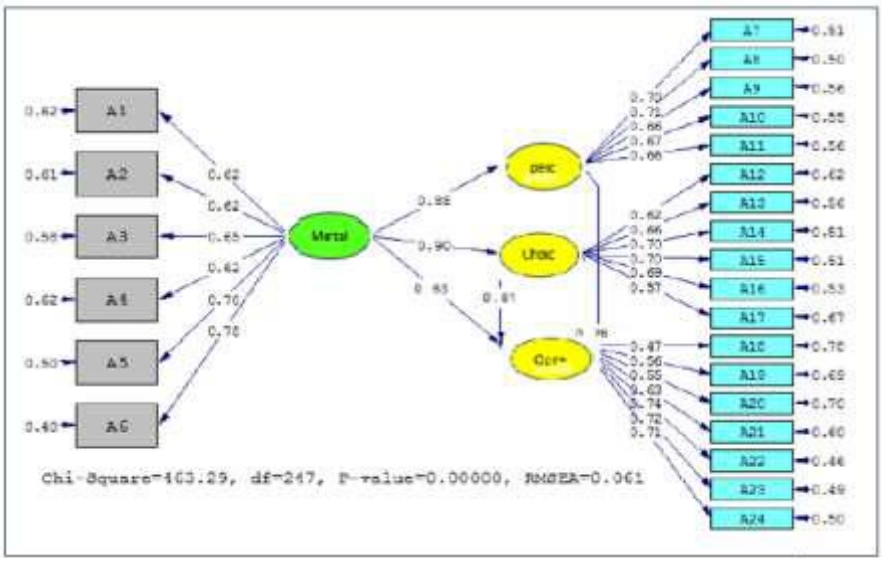

figure 2. Structural Model of Research in Standard Estimation

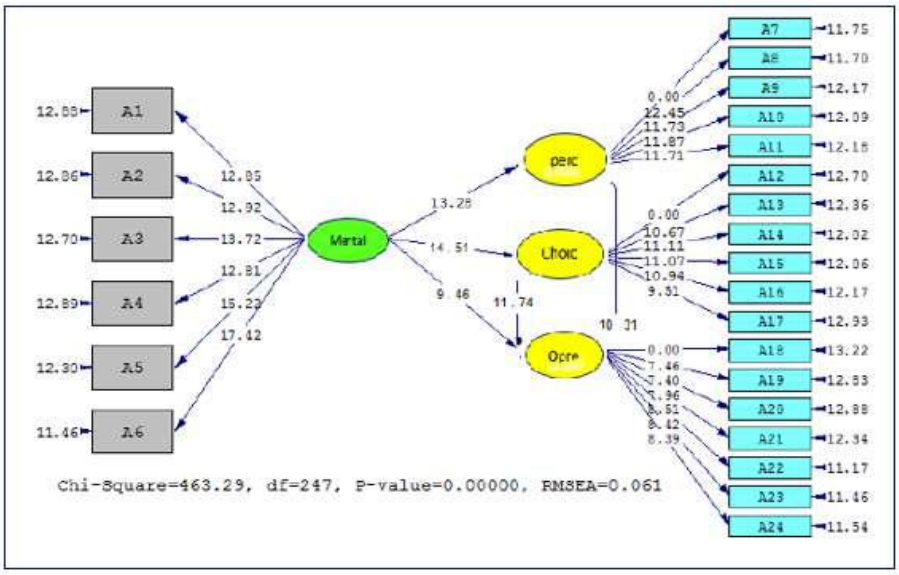

Figure 3. Structural Model of Research in Significant Number State

The results of statistical tests show a positive and significant effect of decision makers' mental model on the marketing performance of the organization. By observing the results of the tests of hypotheses in Tables 6 and 7, it can be concluded that the main hypothesis is confirmed. The results of this hypothesis are in line with the findings of Kajanto (2006), Dayton (2004), Montazeri (2015) and Abedini (2015) on the effect of decision makers' mental models on organizational marketing performance. Also, according to Tables 6 and 7, the subsidiary hypotheses of the study are also confirmed and are in the positive direction. These results are also in agreement with the findings of Nadeph's research (1979) and Alan Ozgelin (2007).

Table 6. The results of testing the research hypotheses in the general structural model of research

Result	T	Path coefficient	Route direction
Confirmation	9/36	0/63	Mental Models of Organizational Marketing Performance → Decision Makers
Confirmation	13/28	0/88	Decision makers' mental models → Understanding decision makers from reality
Confirmation	13/51	0/90	Decision makers' mental models → Strategic choice of decision makers
Confirmation	10/31	0/76	Understanding decision makers from reality → Organizational Marketing Performance
Confirmation	10/73	0/81	Strategic choice of decision makers → Organizational Marketing Performance

Table 7. The effect of decision maker's mental model on organizational marketing performance

How it works	Path coefficient	Route direction
Direct	0/63	The mental model of decision makers → Organizational Marketing Performance
indirect	0/67	
indirect	0/73	
Total	2/03	

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

Today, one of the most important concerns of executives in for-profit organizations is achieving high marketing performance as an indicator of achieving

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organizational success in three components of market management, sales promotion and increasing market share. Based on the research conditions, researchers have used different and different criteria in relation to marketing marketing performance measurement (Khalifa Soltani, 2016).However, most of these indicators and variables appear to be objective and financial in nature and measure marketing performance with other criteria such as profitability indices, customer satisfaction, market share, etc. The minds are left unaware. Therefore, the present study was conducted to identify the impact of the mental model of key decision makers on its marketing performance. Based on the findings of the study, the main research hypothesis was confirmed that there is a direct and strong relationship between two variables of the key model of the key decision makers of the organization on its marketing performance. Also, the research hypotheses about the direct effect of decision makers' mental models on their perception of reality and their strategic choice were confirmed. In addition, the findings confirm a direct relationship between decision makers 'mental models of organizational marketing performance through two variables of decision makers' perception of reality and their strategic choices. Therefore, based on the results, the following practical suggestions are suggested to improve the marketing performance of the organization through the mental models of key decision makers of the organization:

- Given the relevance of decision makers' mental models to marketing performance through two variables: their perception of reality and their strategic choices, the feasibility and prioritization of issues that are relevant to managers and decision makers regarding their urgency, impact intensity and scope. Key stakeholders in the area of the organization's strategic capacity to address new issues related to new markets, product development and development, etc. are suggested.
- Considering the importance of mental models on the marketing performance of an organization when identifying strategic issues, it is suggested that dimensions such as cultural context, value system, decision making approach, type of experience and experience of decision makers influence their identification and understanding of Their position and decision-making process is influential, emphasized and examined.
- Given that decision makers' perception of the situation is influenced by their mental model and is one of the factors influencing these mental models of environmental conditions, it is suggested that, along with the factors mentioned, component identification Other issues, such as information leaks by competitors, lobbyists, strategic group coalitions, and other issues that may affect the effective selection of appropriate strategies for the success of a company's marketing performance.

5-1. Proposal for future research

- ✓ this study is conducted at a specific time and place in a particular industry (dairy industry), the results cannot be fully generalized to other time and place conditions and other industries. Therefore, in order for the results of this study to be more generalizable and external validity, it is advisable to do so in a wider time and space.
- ✓ Examine other effective variables not included in this study.
- ✓ Using a more comprehensive model that measures the impact of other factors on the performance of a company's marketing activities.

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