



The Effects of Environmental Orientation on Firm Performance and a Mediating Role of Employee-Based Brand Equity: A comparative study.

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ABSTRACT

The studies striving to investigate the interrelationships between environmental orientation-company's performance, and its mediator constructs remain fragmented. This study provides insights to illuminate the process through which environmental orientation transfers into business results. It proposes hypotheses based on Social Identity Theory and the Theory of Reasoned Action and empirically test it in a comparative, cross-cultural study. The findings observe that employee-specific idiosyncrasies influence business performance through employee-based brand equity. Thus, the study suggests an increased role for management-induced practices to effectively transform brand values into a higher level of employee engagement and better business results.

Keywords - Firm Environmental Orientation, Employee Based Brand Equity, Environmental Conscious Behaviour, Firm Performance.

Introduction

The pressure for the businesses to practise sustainability and environmental orientation is immense. Not only they are pressured by the legislation and society, the practice of environmental orientation has also shown to affect firm's performance in a long run by achieving significant customer attraction and retention (Gadenne et al., 2009; Leonidou, et al., 2010) and brand reputation (Deluca et al., 2018). Others found that by practising environmental orientation, firms can advance their performance due to cost savings, increased consumer demand, risk mitigation and employee retention (Menon & Menon, 1997; Porter & van der Linde, 1995; Stone & Wakefield, 2000). Nidumolo et al. (2009) make the more extreme claim that sustainability and environmental orientation are no longer being questioned as passing trends among the firms but are now seen as imperative drivers for innovation. Firms are also forced to adopt a strategic orientation towards environmental activities. For example, legislation regulating environmental practice is becoming harsher by imposing severe penalties on firms not abiding by the law (Ervin et al., 2013; Patton & Worthington, 2003). Additionally, firms are pressured by social-responsibility and environmental movements that reward firms that undertake green initiatives but punish those that harm the natural environment (Langerak et al., 1998). Ultimately, this calls for creating, communicating and delivering environmental orientation that is seen to add value to customers. Firms have to balance their marketing strategy in such a way that customer needs are fulfilled while maintaining profitability, public interests and ecology (Vagasi, 2004). The ultimate goal is to save the planet we live on for future generations, which clearly indicates a long-term perspective for environmental orientation. From a business perspective, environmental orientation calls for the development of a strategy based on ethical and moral principles. Environmental orientation dictates business practices be assessed through economic, environmental and social dimensions (Aragon-Correa, 1998; Buyse & Verbeke, 2003; Polonsky, 1995).

However, the question remains: Given that the practice of environmentally friendly orientation is usually associated with less consumption and less abuse of the environment (Bansal, 2005; Leonidou & Leonidou, 2011; Van Dam & Apeldoorn, 1996), does the practice meet with the



approval of firms' employees? Indeed, if environmental orientation is promoted to save costs and improve the image of a firm, it will reduce employees' commitment (Chan & Hawkins, 2010). The reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) argues that individuals have a certain level of freedom when it comes to their behaviour. Consequently, when the threat to freedom is great, the resistance to adhere to it is also great (Brehm, 1966). Applying this concept to firms with an environmentally friendly orientation, we wonder if employees are inclined to use limited resources to achieve organisational goals. This is what this study aims to uncover. We found the effect of firm environmental orientation on employee-based brand equity has not been tested. Moreover, does a firm's environmental orientation enhance brand allegiance, brand endorsement and brand-consistent behaviour among employees? To the best of our knowledge, the relationship between firm environmental orientation and employee-based brand equity has not been given much attention empirically. Given the gap in the literature, our study offers to shed light on this issue. We propose to test the effect of environmental orientation on firm performance. We argue that the relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance is mediated by employee-based brand equity. The employee-based brand equity variable consists of three constructs: brand allegiance, brand endorsement and brand consistency. Since the practice of environmental orientation is usually associated with less consumption and less abuse of the environment, as claimed by Leonidou and Leonidou (2011) and Van Dam and Apeldoorn (1996), this practice should, intuitively speaking, only be popular among employees who are environmentally conscious. We believe the relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance and the relationship between environmental orientation and employee-based brand equity will be enhanced by employees who are environmentally conscious. Hence, we argue these effects are moderated by employees' environmentally conscious behaviour.

Our study is also responding to the call from Bartels and Reinders (2016, p. 445), who claim that 'the role of a person's identification within a group (i.e., environmentally conscious behaviour) in explaining sustainable behaviour is less well investigated'. Hence, this study provides additional insights for the literature into the environmentally conscious behaviour of employees. Specifically, our study addresses the following five research questions: (1) Does a firm's environmental orientation enhance organizational performance? (2) Does employee-based brand equity mediate the relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance? (3) Does an employee's environmentally conscious behaviour moderate the relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance? (4) Does environmentally conscious behaviour moderate the relationship between environmental orientation and employee-based brand equity? (5) Is the relationship among variables similar or different between data collected in New Zealand and Malaysia?

In this respect, our study makes three contributions to the literature on firm environmental orientation. First, as observed by Banerjee (2002), firms that practise environmentally friendly respect and responsibility for the environment set standards of ethical behaviour and long-lasting commitment, understand and respond to the needs of stakeholders and act as good citizens intending to sustain the environment. We expand this knowledge by empirically testing the impact of environmental orientation on firm performance. We believe the effect of environmental orientation on firm performance is mediated by employee-based brand equity. Our belief is supported by the fact that there is a cost involved in conserving the environment, which may (or may not) directly improve a firm's performance. Second, our study includes environmentally conscious behaviour as the variable that moderates the relationship between environmental orientation and employee-based brand equity and that between environmental orientation and firm performance. We believe employees who are environmentally conscious put more pressure on firms to adopt an environmentally friendly orientation. Third, we extend our study by fielding data from two different countries: New Zealand and Malaysia.

We base our conceptual model on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The reasoning theory supports the relationship between values and intent. It suggests that an immediate determinant of one's behaviour is one's intention to perform that behaviour. Translating this to a firm that practices environmental orientation, the ethical values of corporate environmentalism should influence the firm's intention to behave ethically towards the environment. This theory has also been used to explain a wide range of behaviour towards environmental orientation, including organic food consumption, dieting and the purchase of environmentally responsible products (Magnusson et al., 2003; Sejwacz et al., 1980). Tajfel (1972, p. 31) defined social identity as 'the individual's knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of the group membership'. This theory

suggests that the behavioural outcome of an individual is the result of strong identification within a group to which that individual may want to belong. Consequently, should a firm establish norms and culture with an environmentally friendly orientation, this would encourage employees to practice environmentally friendly behaviour. The combination of employees' ethical behaviour and the firm having established ethical policies towards the environment will form a corporate environmentalism.

Theoretical Framework

Environmental Orientation

The concept of environmental orientation can be traced back to the thirteenth. Since the 1970s, it seems to have become a desired goal in most areas of human activity and endeavour. The terminology used to describe environmental orientation varies in the marketing literature and includes such terms as green marketing, sustainability, environmental marketing, enviropreneurial marketing and ecological marketing (Bansal & Roth, 2010; Banerjee et al., 2003; Grundey & Zaharia, 2008; Kinoti, 2011; Menon & Menon, 1997). Several authors conceptualise environmental orientation as the creation, production and delivery of sustainable solutions with a higher net sustainable value along with the continuous satisfaction of customers and other stakeholders (Li et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2014). However, Menon and Menon (1997) have introduced the concept of enviropreneurial marketing, a reflection of a company's orientation and commitment towards the environment. They further argue no priority was given to environmental issues from 1970 to 1985. Since then, however, these issues have steadily grown in importance. Belz and Peattie (2012) have defined environmental orientation as planning, organizing, implementing and controlling marketing resources and programs to satisfy consumers' wants and needs while considering social and environmental criteria and meeting corporate objectives. In this study, we conceptualise environmental orientation as the 'recognition of the importance environmental issue facing the firm and the integration of those issues into the firm's strategic plan' (Banerjee et al., 2003, p.106). A firm's environmental orientation can be expressed in a mission statement, the company's internal values and standards (Banerjee, 2002). The aim of environmental orientation is to integrate social and environmental aspects in every step of the marketing process. Additionally, the system can include a firm's responsibilities, policies and procedures, as well as processes meant to achieve and maintain specific environmental behaviour that can reduce the impact of business operations on environment (Erdogan & Tosun, 2009). Environmentally friendly or ethical products and services are not the only outcomes of this concept. It also raises the awareness of consumers and influences people's attitudes and public opinion about the environmentally friendlier direction. Ultimately, the concept of environmental orientation marketing calls for creating sustainable customer value. Environmental orientation is about living responsibly; it is a collective effort, an economic, social and environmental issue. It is about consuming differently and consuming efficiently (Belz & Peattie, 2012). It may even stretch to mean sharing between the rich and the poor and protecting the global environment without sacrificing the needs of future generations. In other words, environmental orientation deals with enabling all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the quality of life of future generations. Today, environmental orientation has become an integral part of many companies' business strategy (Fraj-Andres et al., 2009; Li et al., 2016; Yen et al., 2013). The need to comply with a growing volume of environmental and social legislation and regulation; concerns about the cost and scarcity of natural resources; greater public and shareholder awareness of the importance of socially responsible financial investments; growing media coverage of the activities of a wide range of anti-corporate pressure groups; and more general changes in social attitudes and values within modern capitalist societies have been key drivers of this reconfiguration (Menon & Menon, 1997; Porter & van der Linde, 1995; Stone & Wakefield, 2000). One of the predominant links between marketing and environmental orientation is the way in which growing numbers of companies are looking to emphasize their commitment to environmental orientation to help to differentiate themselves from competitors. The goal is to enhance their corporate brand and reputation by integrating environmental orientation thought into the core brand. All in all, environmental orientation reflects the degree to which environmental values are integrated into a firm's culture, the behaviour and practice of its employees and the act of balancing this with stakeholders demands that may dictate the firm's competitiveness.

Environmental Orientation and Firm Performance

Banarjee (2002) suggests that an environmentally oriented firm is a firm that expresses respect and responsibility for the environment, setting standards of ethical behaviour and commitment to protecting the environment, abiding by environmental laws, understanding and responding to external stakeholders and acting as a good corporate citizen. Given that environmental issues have become increasingly important for society, this is an admirable practice and can be a selling point for a firm. If a firm practices environmental orientation, we would expect this reputation to help attract and retain customers in the long run, which in turn should improve the company's performance. Past studies between environmental orientation and firm performance have also found a positive relationship between the two variables. This was achieved through firms' responsiveness to ecological issues such as recycling, energy and water savings and avoiding environmental penalties (Menon & Menon, 1997; Stone & Wakefield, 2000). Environmentally oriented firms also gain a competitive advantage by significantly lowering costs in the long run and differentiating products and services (Porter & van der Linde, 1995). Leonidou et al. (2016) also found a positive relationship in smaller manufacturing companies in Cyprus between firms having an eco-friendly orientation and their financial performance. Several meta-analysis studies have found significant positive relationships between environmental orientation and firm performance (Golicic & Smith, 2013; Orlitzky et al., 2003). Additionally, other studies have observed a positive relationship between the two variables (Annadale et al., 2004; Dangelico, 2015; Melnyk et al., 2003; Zhu and Sarkis, 2004). Therefore, we expect the following:

H1: Environmental orientation is positively related to firm performance

Employee-Based Brand Equity (EBBE)

We conceptualise employee-based brand equity (EBBE) as 'the differential effect that brand knowledge has on an employee's response to their work environment' (King & Grace, 2009, p.130). The concept dictates that a brand identity is something meaningful to employees' roles and responsibilities. It can be further argued that the concept of EBBE should reflect the existence of brand knowledge among employees and manner in which they transfer this brand knowledge to the market (King & Grace, 2009). Employee-based brand equity has three dimensions: (1) brand allegiance, (2) brand-consistent behaviour and (3) brand endorsement (King et al., 2012). Brand allegiance is employees' future intention to remain with the organisation. Brand-consistent behaviour is non-prescribed behaviour on the part of employees that is consistent with the brand values and organisation they belong to (Burmman et al., 2009; King et al., 2012). Punjaisru et al. (2009) argue that brand-supporting behaviour is imperative for organizational productivity. Brand endorsement is the extent to which an employee is willing to convey positive information about the organisation (brand) to others. The literature has recently given merit to the study of employee-based brand equity (EBBE) and its impact on firm performance (King & Grace, 2010; King et al., 2012; Poulis & Wisker, 2016; Sirianni et al., 2013; Tavassoli et al., 2014). King and Grace (2010) have observed the relationship between EBBE benefits and brand commitment, role clarity, knowledge dissemination and information generation, which resulted in employee satisfaction, positive word of mouth and brand citizenship behaviour among employees. We would argue these are dimensions of firm performance. In another study, Poulis and Wisker (2016) observed the direct positive impact of employee-based brand equity on companies' financial performance among FMCG companies in the United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom.

The literature on the direct impact of environmental orientation on firm performance is inconclusive as to their relationship. For example, although Fraj-Andres et al. (2009) observed that environmental marketing had a positive effect on operational performance, they found no effect from environmental orientation on commercial performance. They rationalise this by suggesting that a compromise made to establish an environmental orientation should be accompanied by effective and visible strategies to improve commercial performance. The finding observed by Fraj-Andres is hardly surprising because there is a cost involved in being environmentally responsible (Bansal, 2005; Porter & van der Linde, 1995). Another study involving environmentally orientated firms and salespeople found that environmentally oriented firms have directly influenced salespeople's efforts and commitment (Gebler et al., 2014). They argue that salespeople gain more value and feel more self-worth when working for an environmentally oriented firm and are thus motivated to work harder so as to increase that value. Interestingly, this congruence was also found to influence job satisfaction and the creativity of employees (Spanjol et al., 2015). These findings are rooted in social identity theory, which underlines the intrinsic motivation of people to act upon membership in a social group

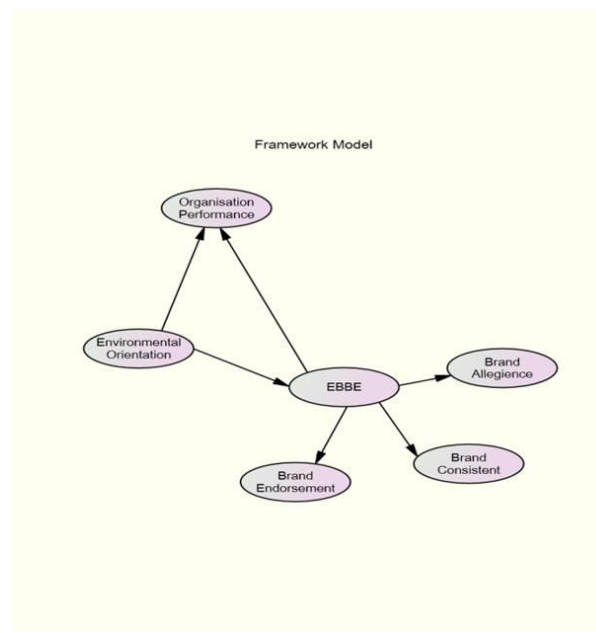
(Tajfel, 1974) in the workplace. Firms that are seen as being socially responsible can enhance employees' self-concept, which in turn improves their attitudes to their work (Brammer et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2001). Yen et al. (2013) surveyed over 300 employees in the hotel industry in Taiwan and noted a positive relationship between environmental orientation among firms (hotels) and employees' job satisfaction. Similarly, Winston (2009) observed that environmentally orientated firms can actually motivate their employees and concluded that this is a winning strategy. In contrast, we note a study by Chan and Hawkins (2010) that observed that if an environmental management system lacks grounding in a company's values and is executed merely as a cost-saving tactic or to fix the company's image, it might reduce employees' commitment. The extant literature on organizational identification provides evidence that employees who strongly identify with a company are more satisfied and perform better (Judge et al., 2001; Riketta, 2002). The employees' positive attitudes towards their company and subsequent brand-consistent behaviour should translate into positive outcomes for the company (Miles & Mangold, 2004). These positive outcomes include employee satisfaction and positive word of mouth (King & Grace, 2010), as well as lower turnover (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2006). Summarising the discussion thus far, we argue that firms' adoption of environmental orientation positively affects their performance through employee-based brand equity. Hence, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2: Environmental orientation is positively related to employee-based brand equity.

H3: The relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance is mediated by employee-based brand equity

Methodology

To test the proposed hypotheses, we carried out a multi-industry market research within major industries such as agricultural, production, forestry, retailers (consumer goods) and hospitality. Our study involves two research frames; Field Study 1 – New Zealand and Field Study 2 – Malaysia. We choose Malaysia and New Zealand because both countries are governed by the common law and have similar environmental impact assessment process (Makmor & Ismail, 2014). In both studies, we used a combination of online surveys and hand-delivered questionnaire. We gather data pertaining to the firm performance from the senior managers and financial executives. Following Banerjee et al. (2003) and Fraj- Andres et al. (2009) study's methodology, we established two selection criteria. First, the



target firms had to have at least 50 employees in the last year. This was enforced because firm size arguably has a positive influence on firm's environmental orientation (Fraj-Andres et al., 2009). Second, the firm's economic activities should relatively involve production process and tourism industries such as hotels because these sorts of businesses are usually under high pressure to practice sustainability (Benerjee et al., 2003; Patton & Worthington, 2003; Yen et al., 2013).

Prior to providing the link to the survey, we emailed the head offices of firms systematically drawn randomly from country's national trade directories to ask for permission to access their personnel accompanied with a cover letter explaining the purpose and how to administer the questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete the survey within a month. To encourage participation, we mailed the respondents (in some cases personally delivered) a small gift; a pen. Although we encouraged their participation, it was explained that participation was voluntary. Additionally, in some cases with the help of research assistants, we hand delivered the questionnaire. Ultimately, we received a total of 109 responses from 253 (43.1% response rate) from the senior managers in New Zealand and 262 from 950 (26.6% response rate) in Malaysia. Ten randomly selected non-responding personnel were contacted by email in New Zealand and twenty in Malaysia to directly ascertain reasons for non-response. This revealed

the main reason was time constraints, which prevented participation in the survey. We also adopted time-trend procedure suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977) to identify possible existence of non-response bias. We grouped the responses into two; early and late respondents. The result from the t-test revealed no significant differences at 0.05 levels between early and late respondents indicating no non-response bias (Hair et al., 2011).

Measurement of Variables

We used established scales to measure the posited hypotheses. The scale includes a total 27 items; 11 items addressing environmental orientation, 11 items addressing employee-based brand equity and 5 items addressing perceived firm performance. We added 8 other items for demographic questions. Firm environmental orientation was measured by means of a scale developed by Benerjee et al. (2002). The scale consists of 11 items to which participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Sample items include; (1) Environmental issue is not very relevant to the major function of our firm, (2) At our firm, we make an effort to make every employee understand the importance of environmental preservation and, (3) We try to promote environmental preservation as major goal across all departments. The Cronbach alpha for the scale was 0.79. Employees based brand equity was measured using King et al.'s (2012) scale, which includes 11 items: 4 items addressing brand endorsement, 4 items addressing brand allegiance, and 3 items addressing the brand-consistent behaviour. These items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Sample items included "I talk positively about the organization (brand consistent-behaviour) I work for to others" (brand endorsement), "I plan to be with the organization for which I work for a while" (brand allegiance), and "I am always interested to learn about my organization's brand and what it means to me in my role" (brand-consistent behaviour). The perceived performance was measured using a five-point scale adapted from Li and Zhang (2007). The scale has five items: Compared to your major competitors, how well has your company performed in the last 24 months for sales performance, market share, profitability, customer satisfaction and new market entry? These items were measured on a five-point scale, ranging from much worse (1) to much better (5). The study also included several demographics questions such as the size of the company, industry type, length of service and several other personal data.

Data Analysis

We used structural equation modelling (SEM) to test our posited hypotheses. Following Byrne (2001), and Anderson and Gerbing (1988), we performed four major types of analyses; (1) correlation, (2) building baseline model and measurement model validation, (3) measurement of invariance between group samples; New Zealand and Malaysia, and (4) testing the posited hypotheses including mediation and moderation effects evaluations. The correlation results are shown in Table 1A and 1B.

Table 1A
Correlation Matrix Field Study 1 (New Zealand)

Constructs	1.	2.	3.
1. Environmental Orientation	1		
2. Employee Based Brand Equity	0.266**	1	
3. Firm Performance	0.206**	0.636**	1

Note: Correlations greater than 0.21 are significant at .01 level whilst correlations greater than .16 are significant at the .05 level.

Table 1B
Correlation Matrix Field Study 2 (Malaysia)

Constructs	1.	2.	3.
1. Environmental Orientation	1		
2. Employee Based Brand Equity	.213**	1	
3. Firm Performance	.166*	.449**	1

Note: Correlations greater than 0.21 are significant at .01 level whilst correlations greater than .16 are significant at the .05 level.

The measurement model is built to assess the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on five latent variables and 27 indicators (comprised of 11 indicators for environmental orientation, 4 indicators for brand allegiance, 4 indicators for brand consistent-behaviour, 3 indicators for brand endorsement, and 5 indicators for firm performance. The measure of Maximum Likelihood was chosen, and the parameters were freely estimated. Results are shown on Table 2A and 2B. Then we test the measurement invariance across groups (Byrne, 2000); a set of parameters are put to the test in a logically ordered and increasingly restrictive way where it involves comparison of models by sequentially constraining various matrices to be invariant (equal) across groups. Of importance for testing metric invariance is the difference in goodness-of-fit chi-squares (χ^2 values) between all constrained estimated parameters and metric invariance. If the imposition of additional constraints results in the significant differences, it indicates that some equality constraints in the measure do not hold. Overall, we found support for the measurement invariance. Therefore, the results suggest that the measurement aspect of the model is invariant across the New Zealand and Malaysia samples at the structural level. These results permit a meaningful comparison of structural parameters for the firms in New Zealand and Malaysia.

Then we tested posited hypotheses including the effects of mediation concurrently. We adopted Byrne (2001) procedure for testing mediation using SEM in AMOS 18. We established the effect of mediation using Zhao et al.'s (2010) mediations and non-mediations concept. They categorize the mediation effects into five; (1) complementary mediation: mediated effect ($a \times b$) and direct effect (c) both exist and point in the same direction; (2) competitive mediation: mediated effect ($a \times b$) and direct effect (c) both exist and point in opposite directions; (3) indirect only mediation: mediated effect ($a \times b$) exists, but no direct effect (c); (4) direct effect only non-mediation: direct effect (c) exists, but no indirect effect and (5) no-effect non-mediation; neither direct effect nor indirect effect exists (*for further please see Zhao et al., 2010, p. 201*). To sum up, we found strong mediation effects of employee-based brand equity on firm performance for both samples; indirect mediation for New Zealand and complimentary mediation for Malaysia. Results are shown in Table 3A and 3B.

Table 3A
Regression Weights –Field Study 1 New Zealand

Hypothesis	Path	Std (β)	UnStd (β)	C.R. (t- value)	p- value	Status
H1	Environmental Orientation →Firm Performance	.03	.08	2.383	.00	Rejected
H2	Environmental Orientation → Employee Based Brand Equity	.46**	.32**	2.978	.00	Accepted
	Employee Based Brand Equity →Firm Performance	.73**	.85**	.934	.00	Accepted
H3	The relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance is mediated by employee-based brand equity					Accepted (Indirect mediation)

Fit Statistics: chi-squared to d.f. $\chi^2 = 216.95$; df = 111; ($\chi^2/\text{d.f.}$) = 1.955; Normed Fit Index (NF1) = .901 Non-normed Fit Index (NNF1) = .873; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .933; Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .050.

Table 3B
Regression Weights –Field Study 2 Malaysia

Hypothesis	Path	Std (β)	UnStd (β)	C.R. (t- value)	p- value	Status
H1	Environmental Orientation → Firm Performance	.19*	.18*	3.116	.05	Accepted
H2	Environmental Orientation → Employee Based Brand Equity	.35**	.29**	2.978	.00	Accepted
	Employee Based Brand Equity → Firm Performance	.48**	.72**	1.889	.00	Accepted
H3	The relationship between environmental orientation and firm performance is mediated by employee- based brand equity					Accepted (Complimentary mediation)

Fit Statistics: chi-squared to d.f. $\chi^2 = 342.95$; df = 201; ($\chi^2/\text{d.f.}$) = 1.06; Normed Fit Index (NF1) = .913 Non-normed Fit Index (NNF1) = .889; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .942; Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .048.

Discussion

This study sought to address important questions about processes involved in transmitting organisational environmental orientation to organisational performance. As such, the study offers several theoretical and practical implications for academics and practitioners to broaden their scope of thinking about the practice of environmental orientation. Our study has observed an inconclusive direct effect of environmental orientation practice on firm performance. This result agrees with those reported by Fraj-Andres et al. (2009), Chan and Hawkins (2010), Hahn et al. (2010) and Li et al. (2016): simply adopting environmental orientation as a means to promote a firm's reputation is not enough to improve firm performance. As a note of caution, however, we measure firm performance as opposed to competitors' performances in the last two years. The direct effect of environmental orientation on performance may also be felt in the long term. Intuitively, we believe that environmental orientation enhances organisational performance in the long run; nonetheless, this could be an area for future research.

In both samples, we found a strong positive effect of environmental orientation on employee-based brand equity. Past studies have shown that environmental orientation provides a competitive advantage and source of attraction in the market (Cantele & Zardini, 2018; Leonidou et al., 2016; Menon & Menon, 1997). Our finding shows that environmental orientation also assists in retaining employees. This result aligns with Carnahan et al. (2016) and Yen et al. (2013), who observed that corporate social responsibility contributes positively to the attraction and retention of employees, who are likely to want to be associated with positive organisational value. This implies that environmental orientation is itself a brand that creates value among employees resulted to firm performance.

This study has found that the effect of environmental orientation on firm performance was mediated through employee-based brand equity in both samples. Overall, our study has observed the important role of employee-based brand equity (EBBE) in firm performance. Indeed, in one sample, the study observed full mediation (indirect-only mediation), which shows the strong interaction of a mediation variable in the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Thus, our study confirms and extends findings reported by Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos (2014). More importantly, this indicates the crucial role that employee-based brand equity plays in enhancing firm performance. Employees are a brand equity (King & Grace, 2009; King et al., 2010). They are the firm's ambassadors, who market the brand. In the concept of external marketing, if consumers have a high level of trust in a particular brand, not only will they be loyal to that brand but they will also likely promote the experience and ultimately recommend the brand to others (de Oliveira et al., 2015). Thus, if an employee is loyal to the brand that he/she belongs to, we would expect them to play a role in communicating and marketing the brand promise to their customers. As King et al. (2012) observe, an employee who has a higher level of brand allegiance should show behavioural loyalty and attitudinal attachment and stay longer with that particular organisation, which results in cost saving in terms of recruitment and training. Additionally, if an employee behaves consistently

with brand values, he/she may arguably internalize the brand's desired attributes and naturally express those attributes in his/her behaviour, ultimately meeting customers' expectations about a particular brand (Gelb & Rangarajan, 2014).

The practice of environmental orientation among firms has improved performance through employee-based brand equity. Employees stay longer, behave consistently with brand values and speak positively about the firm. Firms that adopt and implement environmental management practices are favoured by employees. This can be a selling point for firms, to help them maintain efficient employees. Businesses have to be creative in their approach to environmentally friendly orientation. In today's competitive business environment, the practice of environmental friendliness for a greener future is arguably one of the most prominent needs of market(s) across the globe. In order to successfully attract, recruit and retain worthy employees, a company needs to be not only technically sound and product oriented but also environmentally sensitive. Given the green movement worldwide, employees are increasingly eager to contribute to environmentally friendly projects and wish to be associated with brands and firms that pursue them. The environmental needs of internal customers and markets can no longer be neglected and are crucial for long-term firm performance. It can be argued that a firm's choice to focus on social and environmental investments can serve as a strategy to gain the support of not only external customers but also its own employees. Most importantly, environmental orientation is a way to build relationships with employees while letting them know that both they and future generations are important. This has become an important piece of marketing strategy. There are several steps that companies could take to engage employees in environmental orientation marketing. First, they can make sure that it is accessible for all employees. The inclusion of web and mobile components and multiple languages, for example, is key to widespread adoption, especially for multinational companies. Next, they can align the components of the environmental orientation programme with the company business strategy and reflect them in the company goals. Finally, the content and programmes need to be updated regularly and targeted strategically towards employees, based on their job function or geography, to keep engagement high and relevant. Environmental orientation goals can be a part of each employee's performance objectives and be measured periodically. Compensation benefits in terms of bonuses when environmental orientation goals are achieved will also be very effective in engaging employees. Environmentally conscious behaviour can also be achieved through proper education and training. All in all, it is crucial to integrate environmental orientation into every employee's job and turn an environmentally oriented business model into business as usual.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that may provide opportunities for future studies. First, we collected data from two countries, New Zealand and Malaysia. Results could be more generalised if data was collected from a wider range of countries and markets. It would also be interesting to draw comparisons about environmental orientation and employees' environmentally conscious behaviour between firms in mature and emerging markets. Second, the measures of organisational performance and environmental orientation are based on managers' self-reported perceptions. Self-reported performance and self-reported environmental orientation can be subject to various distortions, including the faking of answers and elements of bias.

Table 2A
Measurement Model Results – Field Study 1 (New Zealand)

Constructs	Scale Item	Std Loadings	t- Value	(α)	AVE	Means	(S.D)	Means	(S.D)
Environmental Orientation			*	.79	.62	3.596	1.70		
	EO1 r	.78	3.83					3.664	1.87
	EO2	.71	3.58					3.633	1.82
	EO3	.69	4.34					3.766	1.89
	EO4	.75	4.12					3.310	1.99
	EO5	.80	4.52					3.288	1.98
	EO6	.69	4.21					3.786	1.81
	EO7 r	.72	4.63					3.668	1.88
	EO8	.68	4.21					3.671	1.91
	EO9	.71	3.49					3.571	1.80
	EO10	.81	4.11					3.518	1.88
	EO11	.68	4.17					3.686	1.79
Environmental Behaviour	Conscious		*	.81	.54	3.468	0.866		
	ECB1	.85	5.28					3.646	0.83
	ECB2	.83	4.31					3.460	0.95
	ECB3	.79	4.58					3.553	0.79
	ECB4	.78	5.31					3.212	0.94
Brand Allegiance			*	.88	.61	3.343	1.16		
	BA1	.79	4.89					3.606	1.22
	BA2	.80	5.33					3.235	1.10
	BA3	.76	5.48					3.195	1.19
	BA4	.75	5.83					3.336	1.11
Firm Performance			*	.81	.56	3.926			
	FP1	.71	5.14					3.810	1.91
	FP2	.69	5.31					3.872	1.15
	FP3	.64	5.37					3.920	1.88
	FP4	.71	5.75					3.978	1.30
	FP5	.75	5.88					4.053	1.33

Fit Statistics: chi-squared to d.f. $\chi^2 = 294.055$; $df = 176$; $(\chi^2/d.f.) = 1.671$; Normed Fit Index (NF1) = .911; Non-normed Fit Index (NNF1) = .923; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .935; Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .048; p-Value $\leq .01$. * t- test - item fixed to set scale; r- reverse coded.

Table 2B
Measurement Model Results – Field Study 2 (Malaysia)

Constructs	Scale Item	Std Loadings	t- Value	(α)	AVE	Means	(S.D)	Means	(S.D)
Environmental Orientation			*	.84	.62	3.171	1.31		
	EO1 r	.88	4.88					3.119	1.35
	EO2	.73	4.18					3.131	1.21
	EO3	.68	5.64					3.239	1.25
	EO4	.69	4.28					2.810	1.12
	EO5	.83	4.56					3.114	1.48
	EO6	.73	4.21					3.286	1.32
	EO7 r	.76	5.63					3.226	1.33
	EO8	.81	5.21					3.271	1.38
	EO9	.77	4.49					3.311	1.66
	EO10	.78	5.11					3.177	1.19
	EO11	.73	5.05					3.201	1.54
Brand Endorsement			*	.89	.58	3.591	1.22		
	BE1	.79	6.44					3.551	1.89
	BE2	.83	6.21					3.476	1.02
	BE3	.81	5.92					3.712	1.21
Brand Allegiance	BE4	.79	7.10					3.626	1.18
			*	.88	.68	3.334	1.16		
	BA1	.79	5.08					3.591	1.22
	BA2	.80	5.21					3.111	1.10
Firm Performance	BA3	.76	5.12					3.231	1.19
	BA4	.85	6.10					3.401	1.11
			*	.79	.56	3.465	3.37		
	FP1	.71	5.63					3.481	1.91
	FP2	.69	6.31					3.542	2.15
	FP3	.64	5.67					3.321	1.88
	FP4	.71	5.73					3.112	1.67
	FP5	.75	5.58					3.399	1.49

Fit Statistics: chi-squared to d.f. $\chi^2 = 381.502$; $df = 229$; ($\chi^2/d.f.$) = 1.665; Normed Fit Index (NF1) = .901; Non-normed Fit Index (NNF1) = .928; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .948; Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .045; p-Value $\leq .01$. * t- test - item fixed to set scale.

Nonetheless, we have leveraged the effect by choosing firms that has more than 50 employees, as this would be sizeable enough to have a considerable impact on environmental orientation practice (Fraj-Andres et al., 2009). Third, the study uses King et al.'s (2012) concept of employee-based brand equity, thus limiting the constructs on employee-based brand equity to three: brand endorsement, brand allegiance and brand consistent behaviour. There are arguably several other constructs that make up an EBBE concept. Similarly, though many authors recognise several variables on environmental orientation, this study limits its conceptual basis to Banerjee (2002) and Banerjee et al. (2003).

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