CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

8.1 Conclusions

The study maps the current status of the usage of IT in the supply chain by manufacturing organizations, assesses the contribution of IT to the creation of supply chain capabilities and the impact of such usage and capabilities on operational and strategic marketing benefits and ultimately its impact on competitive marketing performance. Using the RBV framework suggested by Barney (1991) and Collis (1994) and strategic management perspective from Porter (2001), this research tested a number of hypothesis and found support for all of them. The results indicate how a firm should utilize its IT resources in terms of competitive marketing performance.

Among the implications and contributions of this study, a key finding is that supply chain responsiveness and collaboration have emerged as key dimensions that lead to higher operational and strategic marketing benefits. Delivery performance on due date and information and inventory visibility are two key benefits that lead to competitive marketing performance. From the IT investment perspective, firms may prefer to invest in technology that enhances collaboration and supply chain responsiveness. Supply chain capabilities has been found to mediate the influence of IT resources on firm performance and firms need to focus on furthering such capabilities through technology, rather than on the technology itself, to understand and appreciate the impact of IT resource deployment in the downstream supply chain.

8.2 Future Research

In this research study it has been established that investment in IT in the downstream supply chain has a positive impact on Competitive Marketing Performance. This section identifies some directions for future research, based on the consideration of research potentials in the current research.

Future research should first revalidate measurement scales developed in this research by using similar reference populations. Such a validation can confirm the measurement instrument and create generalizability for it.
Future research should apply multiple respondents from multiple functions from each organization for obtaining data. The use of a single respondent to represent what are supposed to be intra/inter organization wide practices in the supply chain may generate some inaccuracy. Future research should use multiple respondents from multiple functions of the organization in order to enhance the reliability of the research findings. Such data can also analyze the perceptual differences on the IT impact on downstream supply chain from managers in the different functions.

Future research can test the hypothesized structural relationships across industries and examine for possible industry-specific IT in SCM performance issues that can be identified. A comparison of the performance of firms can be undertaken industry wise to identify the best performers among different industry sectors within the manufacturing sector. Capturing practices that enhance the capabilities of supply chains can be attempted. Moreover comparisons can be made between supply chains to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each supply chain and also the best common SCM practices across the supply chain. The results will serve as benchmark practices for other industries. Further recommendations can thus be made to improve the overall competitive marketing performance of the supply chains.

Future research should examine in detail the effects of various practices not considered in this research on competitive marketing performance. For example logistical practices of organizations were not integrated in this study. Financial performance indicators could be included to assess firm outcomes more holistically than from the marketing viewpoint alone as done in this study. A longitudinal research on the financial benefits of usage of IT in downstream supply chain can be undertaken to track the pay-off to organizations in the long run.

This research expected the impact of IT in direct distribution channels to be superior compared to that of indirect channels due to supply chain complexity. The results have shown that in indirect channels IT impact is more significant than in direct channels of distribution. This can be explored further to discover practices that are contributing to superior performance in indirect channels as well as practices that need to be improved in direct channels.
Finally, future research can expand the current theoretical framework by integrating new constructs from within and outside the field. For example, it will be interesting to study the effect of pure e-commerce initiatives on supply chain performance. Particular emerging technologies, like RFID usage which is emerging, can be taken up and their impact on downstream supply chain performance can be assessed. Impact of mass customization through flexible manufacturing operations and outsourced manufacturing practices are other interesting areas to be explored for assessing the effect of such practices on the downstream supply chain and its impact on competitive marketing performance.
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