

From Market Acceptance to Competitive Advantage: A Conceptual Framework of Order Qualifiers and Order Winners in Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial ventures operate in increasingly competitive markets where merely satisfying basic customer expectations may not be sufficient to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This conceptual research paper examines the strategic distinction between Order Qualifiers (OQs) and Order Winners (OWs) and explores their relevance to entrepreneurial decision-making and new venture performance. Order qualifiers represent the minimum attributes that a product or service must possess to be considered acceptable by customers and basic service standards. In contrast, order winners represent distinctive attributes that influence customers' purchasing decisions and provide a venture with a basis for differentiation from competitors.

This paper develops a conceptual framework explaining how entrepreneurs can balance market-entry requirements with differentiation strategies. The proposed model suggests that order qualifiers establish market legitimacy and acceptability, whereas order winners contribute to customer preference, competitive differentiation, and venture performance. The paper further proposes that entrepreneurial orientation, customer insight, innovation capability, resource availability, and technological capability may influence an entrepreneur's ability to develop and sustain effective order winners. The conceptual framework highlights that order qualifiers should be embedded as fundamental operating requirements, while scarce entrepreneurial resources should be strategically directed toward developing distinctive value propositions. The paper concludes with implications for entrepreneurs, educators, and researchers and proposes future empirical research to validate the relationships presented in the framework.

Keywords: Order qualifiers, order winners, Entrepreneurship, Competitive Advantages