

## The Strategic Role of Entrepreneurial Marketing in Small and Medium Enterprises

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**Abstract:** Without proper adoption of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) as a business strategy, many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in both developed and developing economy would fail to survive. The aim of this conceptual paper is to elaborate the strategic role of EM in SMEs. To achieve this, the complexity of EM as well as the aspects of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) are discussed. The paper asserts that strategic roles of EM embrace eight dimensions which are cardinal for SMEs to adopt not only to ensure the long-term direction of the business, but also leverage resources and capability to sustain advantage over competitors.

**Keywords:** Strategic role; entrepreneurial marketing; SME; innovation; proactive; risk-taking; leveraging of resources; customer intensity; creating value; sensing the market and teamwork

**JEL Classification:** L26

### 1. Introduction

The need for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in any given economy is essential to the growth and development of such a nation. SMEs are pivotal as the backbone of the global economy not simply because they constitute greater percentage of all enterprises in different part of the globe, but also, they contributed to approximately 99% of all firms and about 70 % of jobs on average (OECD, 2017:6). In emerging economies, SMEs contribute up to 45% of total employment and 33% of GDP (OECD, 2017:6). However, the contribution of SMEs to the global economy cannot not be assessed without considering the key roles of business, namely marketing and entrepreneurship which further metamorphose into entrepreneurial marketing adopted by many SMEs stakeholders.

The pursuit of marketing activities with entrepreneurial mindset is pivotal for SMEs to survive and contribute to the economy (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020).

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Marketing is one of the greatest problems faced by SMEs in their operations globally, but at the same time one of the vital business activities for survival and growth. The key principles of marketing found in large enterprises are not universally applicable to the context of SME. It is less surprising that many SME stakeholders have unenthusiastic attitude for marketing ideas (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020). Stakeholders of SMEs give marketing activity a low priority compared to other business activities (Resnick, Cheng, Simpson & Lourenço, 2016). Despite this apparent low-key approach, studies reveal that marketing and entrepreneurial competency are crucial to the survival and development of SMEs (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). Scholars of marketing and entrepreneurship have developed interest to delve into marketing for entrepreneurs (e.g. new ventures marketing), marketing for entrepreneurial ventures (i.e., aimed at growth and innovation) or entrepreneurship for marketing (e.g. innovative marketing). The question of marketing in the context of SMEs has brought into the fore two cardinal issues for scholars of entrepreneurship and marketing. First is the notion of marketing carried out by entrepreneurs who are decision-makers in a context typified by simple systems and procedures that permit flexibility, immediate feedback, short-decision chain, better understanding and response to customer needs. This demonstrates the absence of the strategic role of entrepreneurs in marketing as SMEs lack marketing specialists. SMEs need not only entrepreneurial action but also marketing characterised by innovation, risk-taking, and proactiveness performed without resources currently controlled, if they are to survive in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous context (VUCA). Second, scholars have deciphered qualitative and quantitative aspect of entrepreneurial marketing (EM), which are fundamental in exploring the nature of marketing evident in SMEs (Effiom & Edet, 2018, p. 118). From the qualitative viewpoint, EM emphasizes marketing with an entrepreneurial mindset, which is pivotal for any enterprise irrespective of size, age or resources. Within the qualitative domain, EM is about marketing that diverges from mainstream marketing, to marketing activities in highly successful firms aimed at growth or marketing for entrepreneurial firms. Alternatively, the quantitative aspect of EM underscores that this type of marketing is for small or new venture. The quantitative standpoint of EM brings into the fore the danger of newness (e.g. lack of establishment of market partners relationships and lack of procedures in the firm) and smallness (e.g. limited financial and human resources, limited market power and a small customer base) as core to the context for marketing activities characterized by innovation, risk-management, and proactiveness. Ultimately, EM as an enterprise-size related phenomenon is cardinal for economies where SMEs comprise a significant part of the economy (Carter & Tamayo, 2017). To survive in the competitive arena, SMEs need not only the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers, but also engage in entrepreneurial marketing (Dimoji & Onwuneme, 2016).

While EM is a concept that emerged at the coalesce or intersection of two fields of marketing and entrepreneurship, this intermix has also attracted scholarly attention from economics, sociology, psychology and other disciplines (Ionita, 2012; Nwaizugbo & Anukam, 2014). In understanding the strategic role of EM, it is pertinent to underscore that EM is less about a single marketing approach and more about a marketing spirit that set apart from traditional marketing practices. It avoids several fundamental principles of marketing because they are typically structured for large enterprises. EM uses a toolkit of unconventional and new marketing practices to assist developing firms gain a foothold in competitive markets. Hence, EM is best defined by the types of enterprises that use it. This is made possible by differentiating these enterprises based on their forms and the awareness of its entrepreneurial spirit. While these enterprises start small, their goal is to grow rapidly and to become major players in their industry as quickly as possible. This is drastically different from enterprises who are not entrepreneurially minded and who may be content to stay small forever. Growth is the primary goal of entrepreneurship, and marketing is the primary means for growth. SMEs who adopt EM as a strategy does that for the benefit of long-term direction it gives to the organisation (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin & Regner, 2017). Therefore, SMEs is set to be growing astronomically and survive the competitive environment if it strategically designed within the EM roles which is often called EM dimensions (e.g., innovation, proactive, risk-taking, leveraging of resources, customer intensity, creating value, sensing the market, and teamwork). Over the past three decades, there are divergent efforts by scholars to examine the strategic place of EM in SME especially on the relationship between marketing principles, models and theories to account for successful entrepreneurial practices (Ismail, Isa, Alam & Ahmad, 2016). Hence the aim of this paper is to examine the strategic role of EM in the survival of SMEs. In pursuit of the aim, this conceptual paper starts by discussing the complexity of entrepreneurial marketing (EM), aspects of EM, and exploring differences between entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and traditional marketing (TM). Thereafter, the paper discusses EM in SMEs and its strategic roles before conclusion.

## **2. Complexity of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM)**

An increasing body of literature focusing on the drivers of EM exists. The manifestations and connection of EM with performance, as well as its inherent complexity, however, remain an unresolved theoretical matter which demands attention. Scholars, such as Kilenthong et al. (2015) and Fiore et al. (2013), explicitly state that the EM phenomenon is not only underdeveloped but that it also lacks a unifying theory to guide coherent research. Thus, the need exists for theory-based EM research to illuminate entrepreneurial actions and processes which

connect entrepreneurship with marketing strategy and implementation. Given this lacuna, it is important to delve into the complexity of the EM phenomenon.

Toghraee et al. (2017, p. 289) concur that, despite scholarly effort over the past decades to answer the question of what constitutes EM, there is no objectively correct, or incorrect, conceptualisation of the phenomenon. There is thus a lack of consensus regarding the essential nature of the construct, its dimensionality, the nomological network within which EM exists as well as the appropriate definition of the construct. In the light of this uncertainty, it is important to understand the complexity of this phenomenon (Toghraee et al., 2017, p. 289). The concept of EM has been used to illustrate SME marketing activities (Kraus, Harms & Fink, 2010). Notably, these SME marketing activities are important for business survival and growth. This does not, however, mean that EM focuses on marketing activities and ignores the entrepreneurial mind-set, irrespective of a firm's size, age and legality. Many scholars view the EM concept as complex and vague. A closer look at the variety of EM definitions reveals that they can be categorised in accordance with three approaches. Firstly, the integrated approach embraces definitions of EM which seek to integrate entrepreneurial and marketing attitudes. Secondly, the process approach comprises definitions of EM as an individual or organisational process. Thirdly, the imbalance approach covers definitions of EM which deal with entrepreneurial behaviour or marketing attitude of an enterprise (Hill & Wright, 2000; Kurgun et al., 2011; Shaw, 2004) Each of these categories are discussed in the following section in an effort to reflect the complexity of the EM phenomenon.

#### *i. Entrepreneurial Marketing Definition: Integrated Approach*

According to the integrated approach, one of the notable aims of the definition is to integrate entrepreneurship and marketing constructs. Scholars, such as Bäckbrö and Nyström (2006), Bjerke and Hultman (2002), Morris, et al. (2002), Nwaizugbo and Anukam (2014), Stokes (2000a) and Whalen et al. (2016), concur that the ontology of EM reveals an integrative component. EM, as the crux of entrepreneurship and marketing, gives rise to a unique school of thought which stretches beyond either of these subsets (Kraus et al., 2012; Toghraee et al., 2017).

For example, Bjerke and Hultman (2002:15) simply defined EM as “the marketing of small business firms growing through entrepreneurship”. This definition is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it incorporates the essential attributes of entrepreneurship and marketing into one broad concept where marketing becomes a modus operandi of organisations to act entrepreneurially. This focuses on the non-linear, unplanned and visionary marketing activities of the entrepreneur or owner-manager. Secondly, it clearly situates EM as a size-related phenomenon. Thus, EM relates to the small business sector and the entrepreneurial way of marketing which allows this type of business to grow. This differs from SME marketing which deals only with marketing and excludes the entrepreneurial

approach of how marketing is practiced by SMEs. It is fundamental that the EM concept be understood as an integration of marketing and entrepreneurship, and marketing assumed via innovative, entrepreneurial and opportunity-driven approaches. It is also key to underline that not all scholars view EM in terms of enterprise size, age or resources but that some focus on the nature of value creating activities in an organisation. Some scholars thus define EM without any specific reference to the firm's age or size. For example, Morris et al. (2002, p. 5) define EM as "proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation". It is apparent that this definition integrates and pronounces the rudiments of entrepreneurship (innovativeness, opportunity, proactivity and risk taking) with marketing as a medium to create customer value (customer focus, guerrilla marketing, resource leveraging and value creation). It takes a certain type of behaviour to address a dynamic, fragmented and hostile business context. This integration approach is also evident in the way in which Whalen et al. (2016, p. 7) define EM as "a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-taking activities that create, communicate, and deliver value to and by customers, entrepreneurs, marketers, their partners, and society at large". Clearly, the challenge in the integration approach to defining EM is the question as to which aspect is considered dominant.

#### *ii. EM definition: Process Approach*

Another group of scholars, including Becherer, Haynes and Helms (2008), Hacıoglu et al. (2012), Kraus et al. (2010), Miles and Darroch (2006) hold a different view of entrepreneurial marketing practice. To them, EM remains a process, irrespective of who, when and how the activity is performed. Hills and Hultman (2011:3) consider "EM as a complex process as well as an orientation for how entrepreneurs behave in the marketplace". For example, Hacıoglu et al. (2012, p. 871) defined "EM as a process with an entrepreneurial spirit (marketing by founder entrepreneur)". In accordance with this definition, EM is considered a marketing process initiated by a founder with an entrepreneurial attitude. In this regard the individual, as entrepreneur, plays a key role in the EM process. Other scholars do not focus on the individual but rather on the organisational level of the EM process. For instance, Kraus et al. (2010, p. 9) define "EM as an organisational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organisation and its stakeholders and that is characterised by innovativeness, risk-taking, pro-activeness, and may be performed without resources currently controlled." This definition does not only focus on entrepreneurship (innovation, risk, proactive) but also on marketing (creating, communicating and delivering value). It is important to highlight that the definition of Kraus et al. (2010) focuses on value to customers, stakeholders and the organisation and addresses customer

relationships and entrepreneurial processes which are not limited by available resources. Entrepreneurial marketers are thus not defined by available resources but pursue opportunities in the belief that the necessary resources can somehow be obtained. Hills, Hultman, Kraus and Schulte (2010, p. 11) stress three aspects which elucidate an understanding of EM. They note that EM is “a (1) spirit, an (2) orientation as well as (3) a process of pursuing opportunities and launching and growing ventures that create perceived customer value through relationships, especially by employing innovativeness, creativity, selling, market immersion, networking or flexibility”. As most studies focus on EM outcomes, rather than the process, Toghraee et al. (2017) implore researchers to adjust their approach to simultaneously focus on process, context and outcomes. It is necessary that the role of context is clearly defined when exploring EM as a process.

*iii. EM definition: Imbalance Approach*

Kurgun et al. (2011), Jones and Rowley (2011), Beverland and Lockshin (2004) together with Hill and Wright (2000), advocate the imbalance approach which tries to present EM in ways where neither marketing or entrepreneurial attitude are not fully visible in the definitions. Thus, EM is described in terms of entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours which are embedded in the way in which marketing practices are formalised and donned (Kotler, 2013). In this regard, Kurgun et al. (2011, p. 342) define EM “as the exploration of ways in which entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours can be applied to the development of marketing strategy and tactics”. Three major stages of marketing practice are highlighted as firms expand. EM is found in the first developmental stage where the level of entrepreneurship is high, and the level of marketing practice formalisation is low. This life-cycle oriented view reinforces the notion that EM is a size-related phenomenon relevant to small and less formally structured enterprises. In the second and third stages, marketing practices become more formulated. Therefore, as small firms achieve success and survive, they inevitably move toward a more formulated marketing approach (Kotler, 2013). Some definitions clearly illustrate that the individual’s personality is the entrepreneurial force which drives the marketing system. Hill and Wright (2000, p. 25) define EM “as a style of marketing behaviour that is driven and shaped by the owner-manager’s personality”.

While the three approaches are instructive, they are in no way exhaustive. For example, some definitions focus on the business level to highlight the fact that EM is an unconventional attitude which embraces innovation, proactiveness and risk-taking to identify and anticipate, but also to satisfy profitably as well as the needs of customers and/or organisations. This definition takes cognisance of the competitive dimension of the marketplace as one of several EM outcomes. EM addresses the state of the ever-changing business environment. In this way, EM is

not simply about entrepreneurial and marketing dimensions, but rather the business as a whole. Overall, it is vital that business practitioners structure their entrepreneurial behaviour to help satisfy consumers' needs and thus gain the competitive edge.

Since there is no commonly accepted definition of EM, the current study agrees with the integrated approach. Bjerke and Hultman (2002) caution that not all SMEs are entrepreneurial, but that entrepreneurship is necessary for the growth and survival of the SME. Marketing in SMEs can facilitate said growth and survival. EM is more frequently encountered in smaller rather than larger firms since established firms face stronger internal barriers to the entrepreneurial marketing approach (Toghraee et al., 2017). In other words, in smaller firm's decision-making is often more visible and plans and policies can be implemented quicker than in the case of larger firms (Morrish & Deacon, 2011). While no specific definition of EM is adopted in this paper, it is important to reiterate that a variety of core aspects which characterise this phenomenon can be delineated from literature. Drawing from the variety of definitions discussed above, the following table reflects the core aspects of the integrative view of EM adopted in this paper.

**Table 1. Aspects of EM  
EM Phenomenon**

<i>Basic premise</i>	Entrepreneurial (e.g. proactive behaviour, calculated risk-taking, innovation) opportunity-seeking and creation of value as driver of sustainable competitive advantage in the market Unconventional aspects of marketing
<i>Orientation</i>	Centrality of passion, zeal, persistence and creativity in value creation Do more with less
<i>Value creation approach</i>	Vigilance in continuous exploration for new sources of customer value
<i>Entrepreneurial marketer's role</i>	Proactive searcher of superior understanding of market and customers; passionate and creative networking in finding and exploiting unmet needs; promoter of rapid learning from market experiments
<i>Commitment to seize opportunities</i>	Proactively identify unnoticed market positions (unarticulated) within or outside current market rather than focus on established customers in existing market (articulated). Seizing opportunity by leading customers with continuous innovation
<i>Opportunity recognition skills</i>	Intuition, experience, immersion rather than formal market research
<i>Resource management</i>	Leveraging, creative utilisation of other firm's resources, less constrained by budgets and resources presently controlled

<i>Ontology of customer needs</i>	Unarticulated, discovered through social interaction with lead user in emerging, fragmented and turbulent market Customer is co-active participant and producer in marketing decisions
<i>Risk perspective</i>	Calculated risk-taking, stress on finding novel ways in the marketing value chain to mitigate, stage or share risks Comfort with ambiguity and managing risks through innovation
<i>Management structure</i>	Resilient, flexible and adaptable

*Source: Author*

Having reviewed a variety of definitions and isolated core aspects of EM, it is prominent to underscore that this concept is also better understood when contrasted with traditional marketing.

### **3. Exploring Differences between Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) and Traditional Marketing (TM)**

The differences between EM and traditional marketing (TM) or otherwise called administrative marketing can be helpful in further understanding EM based on differences in context, approach to the market, focal point, risk perspective and marketer's role among other dimensions. SMEs have a different context compared to large enterprises (Hills & Hultman, 2006; Hills, Hultman & Miles, 2008). On the part of practice, EM has been differentiated from TM in terms of how marketing is done (i.e. actual process), based on the argument that entrepreneurs practice marketing differently compared to managers/administrators. In terms of market decisions, TM often rely on a formal plan which specifies goals and decision rules (Kilenthong et al., 2015). In contrast, marketing decisions under EM do not often rely on formal planning process, as marketing plans are developing and adjusted at the time of implementation. It is arguable that entrepreneurial marketers do not always act in a logical and chronological manner. Instead, entrepreneurial marketers are immersed in the market to have a thorough understanding of the problem their customers are facing and to find solutions that customers seek. Entrepreneurial marketers use an informal decision-making process that is closely linked to customers and markets (Kilenthong et al., 2015).

According to Toghraee et al. (2017), EM "is non-traditional marketing which often deal with conditions such as lack of economies of scale; severe resource-constraints; a limited geographic market presence; a limited market image; limited brand loyalty or marketing share, little specialized management expertise and decision-making under imperfect information". EM is proactive and change focused as it introduces rather than react to change (Toghraee et al., 2017). Other scholars focus on the fact that EM refers not only to firms marketing activities that

are resource constrained, but also apply marketing in personal, unsophisticated, and unconventional ways. It is key to remember that while there is no accepted or single definition of EM, many scholars focus on marketing assumed in an unconventional way, opportunity-driven way of thinking and acting regarding market behaviours. On the other hand, traditional marketing is a rather broad category that incorporates many forms of advertising and marketing (Abraham, 2016). It includes many forms of marketing activities which fall into four main classes, namely: broadcast, direct mail, print and telephone (Marketing-Schools in Manley, 2015, p. 203). A study of the top five marketing tools that were utilised by SMEs in South Africa identified e-mails, business cards, social media, pamphlets and websites (Manley, 2015). Increasingly, SMEs also utilises E-marketing to deliver value, convey information, and build relationships with one's customers in such a manner as to benefit the organisation and investors. Digital marketing is a valuable asset for SMEs if they take the time to engage their customer base from every possible angle (Ndubisi, 2016, p. 114). Digital marketing is low cost and low risk. With the emergence of digital, traditional marketing is no longer a priority for smaller businesses, with the majority favouring cheaper, online methods to promote their businesses. Kilenthong et al. (2015, p. 4) assert that "instead of being driven by the market, entrepreneurial marketers are market drivers who constantly lead the market with innovation and explore new markets with new products". The innovative aspects are not only limited to products, and marketing strategy, but also logistics, distribution and customer service just to mention a few (Kilenthong et al., 2015, p. 4). Entrepreneurship offers the means for building market value through innovation of new products, experiences, services, and strategies that satisfy customer needs. A detailed comparison of EM and TM is key to enhance our conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of EM. Table 2 reflect fourteen dimensions which depict the differences between EM and TM.

**Table 2. Differences of Traditional Marketing and Entrepreneurial Marketing**

	<b>Traditional marketing</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial marketing</b>
Marketing concept	Customer-orientated: product development through reactive approach about the external environment.	Innovation-oriented: encourages idea-generation and intuitive assessment of market needs (external environment).
Context	Establishment of market that is relatively stable.	Envisioned, fragmented and emerging markets with high turbulence levels.
Market approach	Reactive and adaptive method to current market position with incremental innovation (marketing striving to follow customers).	Proactive method, leading the customer with dynamic innovation

Focus	Managing efficiently the marketing mix.	New value-creation for customers through alliances, relationships, resource management, and marketing mix approaches.
Risk perspective	Minimization of risk in marketing actions.	Marketing as a vehicle for calculated risk-taking. That is, marketing is a means to reducing, share risks.
New product/service development	Marketing supports development of new product/service through research & development and other functional areas.	Marketing is the shelter of a firm's entrepreneurial process and the shelter of innovation (customer is co-active producer).
Marketing overview	Marketing facilitates transactions and controls the market.	Marketing as a cross-disciplinary and inter-functional pursuit, facilitates adaptability, speed, change, and agility.
Marketer's role	Coordinates the marketing mix, builds brand; promote and communicate customer.	Acts as the agent of internal and external change.
Customer's role	External medium of intelligence and feedback.	Participate actively in firm's marketing decision process, defining product, price, place and promotion.
Resource management	Efficient and effective use of existing scarce resources (scarcity mentality).	Leveraging, creative use of other's resources; actions are not constrained by resources currently controlled; and doing more with less.
Customer needs	Articulation, assumption and expression by customers through survey research.	Unarticulated, discovered, identified by customers through lead users.
Market intelligence	Heavy reliance on survey research; Formalized research and intelligence systems.	Skeptical use of conventional market research; adoption of alternative procedures; informal networking and data gathering.
Strategy	Top-down segmentation methods, targeting and positioning of customers and other influence groups.	Bottom-up methods of targeting of customers and other influence groups.
Method	The marketing mix (four/seven marketing P's).	Interactive marketing methods (word-of-mouth, network marketing).

*Source: Adapted from Morris, Coombes, Schindehutte & Allen, 2007.*

It is noteworthy that in business context, traditional marketing or otherwise called the conventional marketing is described by customer orientation while EM is described by innovation and entrepreneurial orientation (Toghraee et al., 2017). In this instance, TM usually requires an evaluation of market needs before developing a product while EM frequently starts with an idea and then trying to discover a market for it (Toghraee et al., 2017). Equally notable is the prevalence of top-down approach in TM where a clearly defined arrangement of activities, like segmenting, takes place, targeting and positioning. On the other hand, EM adopts a reverse process from the bottom-up as an entrepreneur tests an opportunity through a trial-and-error process.

At the tactical level, EM adopts an interactive marketing approach driven by the preference for direct and personal contact with customers. At the point, the entrepreneurs appreciate the significance of scrutinising the marketing environment. However, they use informal means like personal observation or collecting information through their networks of contacts. Many at times, entrepreneurs state that they do not employ marketing mainly because they consider marketing as related to advertising which they cannot meet up with due to high costs of communication. It is also key to highlight that entrepreneurs seem to be worried about operational issues, current trend and ignore long-term matters. However, the key issue is that entrepreneurs practice a different type of marketing as they are flexible in terms of tactics but also always concerned about how to provide long-term customer value (Kilenthong et al., 2015, p. 4; Whalen & Akaka, 2016). Given the above comparison, the question of how EM is contextualised or situated specifically in SMEs is very instructive.

#### **4. Entrepreneurial Marketing in SMEs**

In situating EM in SMEs, it is critical to recognise theoretical lens, methodological diversity and key findings. First, it is noteworthy that research on EM in SMEs lacks strong grounding in an academically sanctioned theory or theoretical perspective. Scholars such as Nwaizugbo and Anukam (2014), Olaniyan, Ogbuanu and Oduguwa (2017), Olannye and Eromafuru (2016) have investigated the phenomenon of EM. These scholars have not fully explained how EM enhance the sustainability and survival of SMEs.

Creating customer value is the fundamental objective of both marketing and entrepreneurship (Hills et al., 2010), hence the harmonising roles of marketing and entrepreneurship is salient in the SMEs. Small and medium entrepreneurial venture operates with limited resources (Ifekwem & Adedamola, 2016) with the major role of marketing resting on the efforts of the owner-manager (Octavia1 & Ali, 2017). This implies that the way an entrepreneurial firm function has great connection

with entrepreneur's personality (Suardhika & Suryani, 2016). EM in SME is very important because the way marketing planning is undertaken in many organisations is highly informal (Al-Lawati, 2017). Miles and Darroch (2006) argued that the relationship between marketing and entrepreneurial orientation in SMEs is caused by environmental uncertainty. Matsuno, Mentzer and O'zsomer, (2002) maintained that being too engrossed in serving and understanding an established market might cause owner-managers to resist being proactive, innovative, and risk-taking. However, marketing practice is fundamentally entrepreneurial if it involves assuming calculated risks, coping with the unknown, being proactive, and offering innovations relative to competitors (Oparah, Aghara, Ndubisi & Chidozie, 2018).

## **5. The Strategic Role of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) in SMEs**

In every competitive business environment, SME tend to survive the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous context (VUCA) if such venture is built within the framework of EM dimensions. The eight EM dimensions which constitute an integrative model of EM for SMEs survival provide insights into the strategic role of EM. These dimensions are innovation, proactive, risk-taking, leveraging of resources, customer intensity, creating value, sensing the market, and teamwork.

Johnson et al. (2017, p. 4) asserts that a firm is strategically oriented if it pursues the long-term objectives. According to them, the long-term direction has two major benefits. First, the long-term direction of a firm can include both deliberate, logical strategy and more incremental, emergent patterns of strategy. Second, long-term direction can include both strategies that emphasises difference and competition, and strategies that recognise the roles of cooperation and even imitation. Strategy scholars are mindful that strategic decisions are characterised by not only emphasizing the long-term direction of an organisation. A strategic decision is also about but the scope of organisation's activities, gaining competitive advantage, and addressing changes in the business environment. Strategic decisions are also about building capacity and values and expectations of stakeholders (Johnson et al., 2017). Profoundly, the strategic EM dimensions are helpful in the long-term survival, direction and organisation of the firm's resources. The section below elaborates on how each of the dimensions are cardinal in the strategic role of EM in SMEs.

### ***a. Proactive***

Proactiveness is defined as an opportunity-seeking, forward-looking perspective characterised by the introduction of new products, services and ideas ahead of the competitions and acting in anticipation of future demand (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin & Frese, 2009, p. 763). In fact, a firm that is proactive has a better

understanding of market dynamics and quickly responding to market indications (Brege, 2018). Implementing a proactive business method allows the firm to identify and appraise new opportunities as well as keep an eye on the market trends, and thus place the business in a superior level to utilise identified market opportunities before of the competition (Neneh & van Zyl, 2017). Proactiveness is fundamental to firms because it allows them to act in advance, thus giving them the opportunity of setting the pace and reaping the rewards (Du, Bhattacharya & Sen, 2010). Kerr, Kerr and Xu, (2017) maintained that proactiveness has a significant relationship with firm business growth. More specifically, Gürbüz and Ayko (2009) observed that proactiveness is strategic when it is significantly related to the growth and response to the external environment of the small business.

Core to the concept of proactiveness is the willingness, passion and being anticipatory to be the first to make entrepreneurial moves in the marketplace (e.g. introducing new product or process before the competitors do in anticipation of change). In the strategic context of EM, proactiveness is defined as the ability of owner-manager to identify and satisfy inherent, unfelt or unnoticed needs which are not anticipated by customers. This agrees with Taghipouriana and Gharibb (2015) that proactiveness is about implementation of new things, doing what is essential to anticipate and act upon an entrepreneurial opportunity. Nwaizugbo and Anukam (2014) also claimed that a firm's offering is not purchased based on the price of the products, but on service innovation, differentiation, and qualified employees who are proactive in meeting the needs of customers and the business with an anticipatory mind.

### ***b. Innovation***

The “word innovation is derived from the Latin word *innovare*, which means new” (Stenberg, 2017, p. 2). The simplest definition of innovations is doing something different (Farniha, Ferreira & Gouveia, 2016). Innovation can also be described as a method and technology for new markets, new product methods and identification of new customer groups (Baskaran & Mehta, 2016). This implies that firms, irrespective of their size, need to innovate, to promptly respond to changing customer needs and market conditions and capitalize on emerging opportunity (Baregheh, Rowley, & Seabrook, 2009; Linton, 2019). It is noteworthy that the scope of firm's innovation is broad and includes products, service, processes, operations and people.

Innovativeness is a component of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) that allows the owner-manager to focus on new ideas that would lead to new markets, products, or processes. The rate to which a successful firm emphasizes innovation in its market actions can range from the highly innovative new market creator to the incremental market builder (Becherer, Helms & McDonald, 2012, p. 2). Innovativeness is defined as “a firm's ability to engage in creative processes, experimentation of new

ideas, which may result in the institution of new methods of production and/or bringing new products or services to current or new markets” (Taghipouriana & Gharibb, 2015, p. 3). SME owner-managers continually champion new ways to create value (e.g. methods to segmentation, pricing, brand management, packaging, customer communication and relationship management, credit, logistics, and service levels, among other operational activities). From a strategic viewpoint, the “innovativeness aspect of entrepreneurial orientation would promote change and creative behaviors, which encourage active exchange of ideas, increase information flows and novelty in new product development and management of relationships” (Morrish, 2011, p. 115).

### *c. Taking of Risk*

The concept of risk-taking has long been applied in academic literature. Niklas Luhmann, a sociologist considers the term ‘risk’ as a neologism that transited from traditional to modern ideology. Allah and Nakhaie (2011, p. 76) recount that in the Middle-Ages, the term *residuum* was used in substantially defined circumstances to describe all sort of sea trade and its resultant legal problems of damage and loss. In the 16th century, the words *riezgo* and *rischio* were used to describe “loss and damage” (Aven 2014, p. 21). However, when the term risk started gaining ground, it changes the older notion of loss, damage and bad fortune (Bijloos, 2017, p. 25). Risk-taking is defined as the tendency of engaging in behaviours that have the potential to be dangerous or harmful yet provides the opportunity for outcome that can be perceived as positive and helpful (Allah & Nakhaie, 2011). Kapepa and Van Vuuren (2019, p. 7) defined risk-taking “as the tendency to take bold decisions such as venturing into unknown new markets, committing a large portion of resources to ventures with uncertain outcomes and/or borrowing heavily with a chance to fail”. Risk-taking is regularly used to explain the uncertainty that brought about entrepreneurial behaviour (Olaniran, Namusonge & Muturi, 2016).

Risks are related to several factors like: unsupportive policy and regulatory environment, political instability, and information asymmetry, which may obstruct the achievement of a firm’s goals. Olaniran et al. (2016, p. 40) agree that firms operating in less developed business support services and weak regulatory environments, experience less protection. Most often this induce unethical behaviour, such as corrupt transactions in order to legitimize business. Literature has long linked risk-taking with firm performance. Tang and Murphy (2012) assert that in a high-risk firm’s business environment, few individuals are willing to try new ideas. Individuals who are eager to do so are more likely to make more profit, and enhances the business’s growth, if their organisations succeed. This entails that there is a positive relationship between risk-taking and a firm’s growth as observed in the developed economies (Kapepa & Van Vuuren, 2019). Calculated and rational risks are taken by firms who are entrepreneurial rather than traditional in

the way they conduct their businesses. EM adopters are not gamblers but risk accepters who understand that innovation in the current business environments is inherently uncertain and requires rational betting on long shots (Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020). Therefore, risk taking as part of strategic role of EM is not only the readiness to take a chance on an opportunity, but also the ability of the firm to use calculated approaches to abate the risk intrinsic in the opportunity.

#### ***d. Leveraging of Resources***

Leverage is a business terminology that refers to how a firm obtains new assets for start-up or expansion (Idemobi, 2016). For instance, if a firm is “leveraged”, it simply means that the firm has borrowed a given number of resources to support its growths. The concept of leverage in business is associated with the principle in physics which denotes that a lever can give the user a mechanical benefit of being able to lift or move objects that could not have been moved. In the same vein, firms can use leverage to propagate firm’s growth and development through the acquisition of resources, something that could not be done without the added benefit of additional resources. Holmes and Jorlöv (2015) describe resources leveraging as the use of a firm’s available resources creatively and effectively to achieve challenging goals. Morris, et al. (2002) is explicit that leveraging means “doing more with less”.

In academic literature, the concept of resource leveraging has often been considered as unique and separate from the orientation of EM. With the strategic role of EM in mind, resources leveraging is a key ingredient to EM activities which seek to build and nurture capability for long term business survival and efficiency in the creation of value. In this respect, resources leveraging is about the creative and effective use of a firm’s available resources to achieve challenging goals. More importantly, SME’s owner-managers cannot leverage tangible and intangible resources, if they are not entrepreneurial in conducting their businesses. So, possessing entrepreneurial orientation skill does not only mean that an individual must be proactive, innovative, risk manager, being independent, and being aggressive, but also must be creative in the way they manage and utilize the limited, valuable, rare, and inimitable resources within their disposal.

#### ***e. Customer Intensity***

Customer-intensity is a business operator’s tendency to build marketing relationships that address individual customer needs/desires/preferences and relate to customers on a more personal level (Fiore, et al., 2013, p. 70). The concept of customer intensity or customer centricity has been debated widely in marketing literature. For instance, Deshpandé, Farley, and Webster (1993, p. 27) describe it as the set of philosophies that puts the customer’s interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders such as owners, managers, and employees to develop a long-term profitable enterprise. Customer intensity is the way firm do

business with their customers to provides a positive customer experience before and after the sale, to drive repeat business, customer loyalty and profits. It is an approach that is based on putting your customer first, and at the core of the organization objectives. Additionally, Shah, Rust, Parasuraman, Staelin and Day. (2006, p. 115) proposed that the true benefits of the customer-intensity paradigm lie not only on how to sell a company's products, but on creating value for the customer and, in the process, creating value for the organization. Customer-intensity in SMEs is the ability of owner-manager to build marketing relationships that deal with individual customer needs, preferences, or desires which is further related to customers on a more personal level (Nwaizugbo & Anukam, 2014). In another vein, Spence and Essoussi (2010) maintained that for firms particularly SMEs to maintain its position in the marketplace, such firms must be aware that their image in the public reflects the way and manner the consumers perceive them. In the strategic domain, customer intensity dimension is based on what is frequently seen as the key compelling force of marketing in the SME's "customer-centric" orientation, using innovative methods to create, grow, and sustain customer relationships. Customer intensity is strategic in gaining competitive advantage over competitors but also meeting or exceeding values and expectations of stakeholders.

#### *f. Creating Value*

The central idea of EM is innovative and continuous value creation, on the belief that value creation is a precondition for transactions and fruitful relationships. The creation of value is an important construct to a firm's survival (Kotler & Keller, 2016), despite that, practitioners and academics recognize that it is still inadequate to clarify the concept of value in business (Anderson & Narus, 1998). The stiff competition experienced in recent time requires that a firm must ensure value in its goods and services (Sousa-e-silva, Moriguchi & Lopes, 2015). This needs to be done mindful that there are different kinds of value that exist. There are two ways of customer value creation. First, the notion of creating customer value refers to a series of activities performed by the customer to achieve a particular goal (Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008, p. 86). Trinh, Liem & Kachitvichyanukul (2014) concur that customers in their daily undertakings create value through processes when products are needed to perform certain activity. It is widely advocated that customers are exposed to firm's activities at different points in time, provided the customer and firm's processes (or activities) matches, for mutual value generation to take place (Trinh et al., 2014). In a different vein, customer value creation is understood in terms of routinized actions, which are orchestrated by tools, physical space, know-how, images, and a subject who is carrying out the practice (Korkman, 2006, p. 27). In understanding the strategic role of EM, it is imperative to uphold both the external creation of customer value in terms of a series of activities performed by the customer to achieve a particular goal and also the

internal, routinized actions, which are interdependent to ultimately produce value for customers.

#### ***g. Sensing the Market***

Sensing the market represents a firm's ability to scan the environment and identify entrepreneurial opportunities. It is the ability that enables the firm to be innovative in anticipating, monitoring customer needs and tendencies of the market ahead of its competitors (Dias, 2013). Market sensing enhances the importance of opportunity identification and refinement as a basis for launching new businesses either from individual or corporative perspectives (Rasmussen, Mosey & Wright, 2011). This is strategic as sensing of the market is key to influence not only the scope of services, products and activities, but also how to gain advantage over competitors. Mu (2015) defined market sensing as the ability of a firm to forestall future evolution of markets and detect emerging opportunities based on information gathered from its business ecosystem. Jaworski, Kohli and Sahay (2000, p. 51), in agreement with Osakwe, Chovancova and Ogbonna (2015, p. 34), also buttress the need for understanding the unattended needs in the market. Market sensing embrace a set of processes that assist the firm in understanding the external market in a better way (Piercy, 2008). It is essential to specifically identify latent needs which are not apparent in the new or existing market. The entrepreneurial way of how firms identify specific market demands deserve further attention by researchers. van Vuuren and Wörgötter (2013) state that market sensing is different when approached from a market-driving perspective compared to a market-driven perspective. Reaction to changes in the market characterise market-driven perspective. In other words, market sensing is key for the long-term direction of the organisation and clarity of the scope of the market, when carried out in a market-driving method. This refers to proactive learning and understanding about the existing market and how to change it or create a new one.

#### ***h. Working as a Team***

Working as a team otherwise called "teamwork" is a mental and emotional preoccupation in individuals or group situations which motivate them to help each other to achieving group goals and to participate in the work responsibility (Ghorbanhosseini, 2013, p. 1020). Teamwork could also be defined as an adaptive, dynamic, and episodic process that encompasses the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors among team members while they interact toward a common goal (Rousseau, Aube & Savoie, 2006, p. 542). Cameron and Quinn (2011) opined that teamwork within the organisation is an instrument for increasing creativity, which indirectly results to the consolidation of job satisfaction. For organizations to effectively and efficiently achieve their set goal, there is need for a working team with teamwork spirit (Khan & Al Mashikhi, 2017). Thus, the way and manner of collaboration and activity of team members is essential in the success or failure of

any teams. Teamwork needs to be institutionalised in the business before to the formation and establishment of working teams (Johnson, Macpherson, Smith, Block & Keyton, 2016; Outram et al., 2015). Institutionalizing a working team is attainable through promotion of communications, team-spirit, corroboration and recognition that would be realizable through training and enhancing principles of teamwork. Additionally, having the principles of teamwork and criteria, elucidating and applying them in the daily routine of the employees and executives is a sure way of realising effective and efficient working team. It is important to underscore that teamwork is any collaboration existing among colleagues/partners aimed at achieving a common purpose, either by means of combined decision making or taking responsibility for a task. Teamwork is strategic when it builds capability to address dynamic changes in the business environment, but also execute decisions which are complex in nature, and involve considerable change in a situation of uncertainty.

## 6. Conclusions

The problem of SMEs in both developed and developing countries is their inability to identify the right business strategy that would resolve a variety of challenges and help sustain SMEs in the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment. EM has shown to have strategic power to drive SMEs to greater height through some innovation, proactive, risk-taking, leveraging of resources, customer intensity, creating value, sensing the market, and teamwork when used in a strategic manner. These strategic means otherwise called the strategic roles of EM are cardinal if SMEs adopt them not only to ensure the long-term direction of the business, but also leverage resources and capability to sustain advantage over competitors in a VUCA world. This paper calls for a scholarly shift by viewing EM in SMEs as serving not a tactical, but rather strategic role.

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