

## EXAMINING ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING BEHAVIOURS IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

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### Abstract

**Purpose of Study:** In this paper, the significance and justification for studying entrepreneurship, marketing, innovation and customer orientation (EMICO) in the context of social enterprises in Malaysia is discussed and elaborated.

**Methodology:** EMICO is an emerging framework developed by Jones and Rowley (2009) to explore the interface between each dimension in the context of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Past studies are reviewed to describe and explain the dimensions of the EMICO framework. In addition, literature relating to the characteristics of SMEs and entrepreneurs are reviewed to build the basis for studying their direct effects on the ventures' EMICO.

**Results:** The paper puts forward propositions to test and validate the relationship between the variables for future empirical research.

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Marketing, Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurs*

### INTRODUCTION

Marketing issues faced by entrepreneurs, particularly small to medium enterprises (SMEs) have been the subject of many previous studies. Most entrepreneurs do not understand marketing, and often underestimate the time and effort needed to complete marketing activities (Hisrich, 1992; Özmaden *et al.*, 2018). Entrepreneurs tend to put low priority on marketing as they feel it is more suitable for larger organisations (Jayawarna *et al.*, 2014). They might not use the word 'marketing' often, but marketing activities have played a crucial role in every stage of their business lifecycle (Lam and Harker, 2014). However, Hisrich (1992) argued that marketing is important to entrepreneurs to successfully start and grow their ventures. New ventures in particular, must emphasize on marketing to succeed (Bjerke and Hultman, 2002; Hultman and Shaw, 2003; Gruber, 2004). Reijonen and Laukkanen (2010) assert that one of the biggest problems SMEs face is marketing, and yet it is one of the most important and necessary activities for the firms' survival and growth. A study by Franco *et al.* (2014) concluded that SMEs do acknowledge the importance of marketing, however they do not follow formal marketing plans practised by large firms due to limited resources. This correlates with previous studies which found that new small firms do not usually prepare formal business or marketing plans (Gibson and Cassar, 2002; Patnaik and Pillai, 2017) and that marketing activities are carried out informally (Blankson and Omar, 2002; Woods and Joyce, 2003). SMEs entrepreneurs carry out marketing activities as simple, pragmatic and intuitively as possible (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003).

Small firm owners often face constraints in running their businesses and carrying out marketing activities. These limitations include poor cash flow, lack of marketing expertise, business size, tactical and strategic customer-related problems (O'Dwyer *et al.*, 2009) having few major clients (Jones and Rowley, 2011; Kolabi *et al.*, 2011) shortness of staff, lack of management knowledge (Fillis, 2002; Jutla *et al.*, 2002). Due to these limited resources, entrepreneurs focus more on short-term survival rather than long-term growth (Jayawarna *et al.*, 2014; Peters and Zelewski, 2018). An earlier study conducted by Reijonen (2010) also found that marketing in SMEs focuses on present needs.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship has characteristics like those of nonprofits and non-government organisations, and has the elements of entrepreneurship like innovation and risk taking (Ping, 2017). Traditional entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship have similar characteristics, thus the way to differentiate the two lies in the value of the returns. Although some entrepreneurs do not view profits as the major reason they start their ventures, we can agree that entrepreneurship is a profit seeking activity.

According to Timmons and Spinelli (2009) social entrepreneurs aim to address social and environmental problems by seeking creative and valuable solutions regardless of profit orientation. They are passionate in their social causes and are innovation oriented constantly bring fresh perspectives on existing social issues and create new paradigms (Burt, 2015).

Various scholars and practitioners have debated on which individuals or organizations can be considered as social entrepreneurs. Thus far, there has been no firm consensus on the definition of social entrepreneurship, as so many different fields, disciplines and organization types are associated with social entrepreneurship, ranging from for-profit businesses to hybrid models combining charitable work with business activities, to non-profit charities, voluntary sector organizations and non-governmental organizations

The social enterprise landscape in Malaysia is still young. There are just over 100 social enterprises currently. Among these are consumer-based associations, publications, social upliftment initiatives, youth engagement programmes, and animal protection and environment care bodies. However, the Malaysian legislation now does not fully support an entity that is a hybrid of non-profit and for-profit organizations which makes it harder for such companies to secure financial support from investors. This has limited the growth of number of social enterprises in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the current growth in the number of social enterprises in Malaysia still warrants a ranking of ninth place in the “Best Countries to be a Social Entrepreneur 2016” survey conducted by Thomson Reuters Foundation teamed with Deutsche Bank, UnLtd and the Global Social Entrepreneurship Network among the world’s 45 biggest economies.

According to the survey, Malaysia ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the public understands what social entrepreneurs do and ranked 10<sup>th</sup> in government policy supports social entrepreneurs. Malaysia did not even rank for it is easy for social entrepreneurs to attract staff with the required skill and ranked 26<sup>th</sup> for social entrepreneurs can make a living from their work in my country. However, Malaysia ranked 8<sup>th</sup> for social entrepreneurship is gaining momentum and not ranked for it is easy for social entrepreneurs to access investments. From this survey, we can see that social entrepreneurship is gaining momentum at a healthy rate and government policies are encouraging social enterprises.

### Entrepreneurial Marketing

Entrepreneurial marketing is a relatively new concept devised to address the interface between marketing and entrepreneurship. The term was first introduced in 1982 at a conference organised by the International Council for Small Business and American Marketing Association. It gained attention from researchers which culminated in the publication of the Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship in 1999 (Ioniță, 2012). Entrepreneurial marketing (EM) integrates the common concepts shared by the fields of entrepreneurship and marketing, (Carson, 1998; Morris *et al.*, 2002; Fillis and Rentschler, 2005; Webb *et al.*, 2011) which includes an innovative approach to management, a focus on customers and an assumption of risk (Hills and LaForge, 1992). EM has been described as actions adapted from traditional marketing theory to suit the particular needs of SMEs (Beverland and Lockshin, 2004; Becherer *et al.*, 2006). However, EM is not only limited or related to SMEs. Stokes (2000) associated EM with entrepreneurs of entrepreneurial ventures, while Kraus *et al.* (2010) suggested that EM can be carried out by anyone with an entrepreneurial mind set, regardless of the size or age of their firms. Boonchoo *et al.* (2013) argued that EM could exist in larger firms as they have the advantage of having access to various resources (financial, human capital etc.) to try out new methods. EM has been considered as an alternative perspective to traditional marketing as it is associated with innovative marketing techniques (Rahim *et al.*, 2015; Puteri, 2018). Moreover, traditional marketing theories are not able to properly explain marketing practiced in SMEs (O'Donnell, 2004; Reijonen, 2010). This is due to SMEs having several characteristics that are different from large firms like size, objectives, management style and marketing (Carson, 1990; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). As such, Jones and Rowley (2011) suggested that marketing in SMEs should be explained by referring to their activities, behaviours and their approach to customer engagement, innovation and planning.

Entrepreneurial marketing is characterised by the unstructured and haphazard style of marketing often found in SMEs (Hill and Wright, 2000; Morris *et al.*, 2002). Kilenthong *et al.* (2016) described EM as having six dimensions which are:

- Growth orientation – When conducting marketing activities, entrepreneurial marketers are likely to aim for growth of sales via long-term relationships
- Opportunity orientation – Entrepreneurial marketers often proactively search for and pursue new opportunities regardless of the available resources
- Total customer focus – Entrepreneurial marketers place a high priority for their customers
- Value creation through networks – Networking is an important aspect of EM. Entrepreneurial marketers usually rely on personal networks for information and potential customers. These can include suppliers and competitors too.
- Informal market analysis – As mentioned previously, marketing activities are often conducted informally, where decisions are made intuitively by the entrepreneurial marketers.
- Closeness to the market – As EM places great emphasis on customer relations, most of the decision making process involve interaction with customers via feedback, face-to-face conversation etc.

### Entrepreneurial Marketing and SMEs

Various researchers have described that small firms approach marketing differently from large firms (Hill, 2001; Bjerke and Hultman, 2002; Bettiol *et al.*, 2012). Having restricted resources and capabilities prevent SMEs from carrying out marketing activities employed by their larger counterparts (Carson and Gilmore, 2000). Thus SMEs are more likely to engage in EM compared to large firms (Kilenthong *et al.*, 2016) and it has proven to yield effective results (Franco *et al.*, 2014). Due to the small size of SMEs, they are prone to be more flexible in making decisions. Entrepreneurs can improvise, react quickly to changes in the environment, spot and grab viable opportunities and be more innovative (Chen and Hambrick, 1995; Collinson, 2002; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). The smaller organisation structure of SMEs allows all of their personnel the opportunity to directly interact with their customers (Carson and McCartan-Quinn, 1995).

SMEs often use networking, particularly in making marketing decisions. New ventures in particular, gain customers through the entrepreneurs' personal network (Gruber, 2004). Network marketing is done via interaction and participation in social, business and commercial activities (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). SMEs develop their competencies by gathering information, testing ideas and gaining advice from their personal as well as their business networks (Carson and McCartan-Quinn, 1995; Gilmore *et al.*, 2001; Hill, 2001).

Customers are crucial to SMEs as any gain or loss of one can greatly affect the SMEs' survival (Becherer *et al.*, 2008). SMEs have a variety of methods to engage with customers and promote their products and/or services, most popularly through word-of-mouth (Hogarth-Scott *et al.*, 1996; Gruber, 2004). As mentioned before, SMEs have closer relationships with the customers thus word-of-mouth have become an important method of promotion (Stokes, 2000; Stokes and Lomax, 2002). SMEs that practice EM prioritise their customers by allowing them to be active participants in the firms' marketing decision process (Kilenthong *et al.*, 2016).

### Entrepreneurial Marketing and the Entrepreneur/Founder

Founders and entrepreneurs are often used interchangeably in literature (Begley, 1995; Busenitz and Barney, 1997). The entrepreneur is described as a person who has founded his or her own firm (Begley and Boyd, 1987) started the venture from scratch instead of taking over an existing business (Begley, 1995). Founders are known to be more entrepreneurial than non-founders due to higher qualities they possess like self-efficacy in creating innovation, entrepreneurial competency and commitment, need for achievement, risk-taking propensity and tolerance of ambiguity (Erikson, 2002). Due to volatile changes in the environment, entrepreneurs are known to make decisions based on assumptions. Entrepreneurs control the overall business, and as such, they tend to undertake various business activities and make most management decisions (Franco *et al.*, 2014). Their management style and personality can shape the characteristics of their firms (Reuber and Fischer, 1999; Stokes, 2000; Hills and Hultman, 2011) thus can directly influence their firms' EM orientation (Becherer *et al.*, 2008; Franco *et al.*, 2014). Stokes (2000) states that EM is based on the actions of the entrepreneurs and this is echoed by Carson and Gilmore (2000) who affirm that the entrepreneurs' characteristics can strongly influence their firms' EM activities.

Carson and McCartan-Quinn (1995) found that SMEs are unlikely to have a designated marketing resource. Most of the time, it is the owner or founder of the small firms that act as the "salesman" and thus the ability to market depends solely on the entrepreneur's traits and approaches to marketing (Jones and Rowley, 2009) and is influenced by his or her decision making process (Franco *et al.*, 2014). In his research on the entrepreneurial marketer, Fillis (2010) calls for more creative ways of understanding entrepreneurial marketing by positing that the entrepreneurial marketer is "an artist who is prepared to deal with factors such as ambiguity and uncertainty, rather than ignore them." He also described the entrepreneurial marketer as someone who is flexible in problem solving due to occasionally facing severe resource limitations.

Entrepreneurs need to possess a number of capabilities including marketing (Stokes, 2000). This is especially true for SMEs as they often lack marketing specialists and marketing decisions are made by the entrepreneurs themselves (Franco *et al.*, 2014). As such, the choice of marketing approach adopted by SMEs is influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of the entrepreneur (Becherer *et al.*, 2001; Phua and Jones, 2010; Guido *et al.*, 2011).

Morris *et al.* (2002) suggested that EM characteristics associated with entrepreneurial behaviour such as imagination, vision, cleverness and originality can be applied to marketing activities which is opportunity driven and opportunity seeking in nature. Other authors have also suggested the development of more appropriate marketing practices that capitalises from entrepreneurial strengths (Stokes, 2000; Fillis, 2002).

### DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND CONSTRUCTING HYPOTHESES

After reviewing EM and its relevance to SMEs, this paper proposes a conceptual framework to study the relationship between the variables. The focus will be on Malaysian social enterprises and their ventures' EM orientation.

#### EMICO

The EMICO framework was devised by Rosalind Jones and Jennifer Rowley to explore EM in SMEs. A variety of research from the field of EM and SMEs were used in the development of this framework. Constructed using EM theory and other scales found in EM literature, the framework's scales focus on entrepreneurial orientation (EO), market orientation (MO), innovation orientation (IO) and customer orientation (CO). The authors applied this qualitative framework to study on small technology firms, specifically firms that produce educational software. The outcome of their study implied that marketing was considered as extremely important to these firms, but their marketing activities were different compared to those of larger firms. This empirically tested framework confirmed many EM characteristics identified in EM research, which are:

- The founders/owner-managers are the salesperson of the firm, and central to marketing activities
- As founders/owner-managers are the face of the firms, their marketing approach was based on their "personal reputation, trust and credibility".

- The firms' marketing methods are customer-focussed – customers take an active role in the development of the software, sometimes as co-creators.
- Marketing decisions were usually based on frequent contacts with networks, and that customers play a vital role by word-of-mouth recommendations.

The framework was tested empirically by Reijonen (2012) and the results indicated that the model was supported. It confirms that EO, MO, IO and CO, serve as determinants of EMO. Therefore this paper proposes that this framework is suitable to study animation technopreneurship since it is rooted in SMEs and technology firms. The table below outlines the EMICO framework in detail.

**Table 1 EMICO Research Framework**

<b>Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)</b>	
<b>Dimensions:</b>	<b>Descriptors:</b>
Research and Development	Level of emphasis on investment in R&D; technological leadership and innovation.
Speed to Market	Stance of the firm; competitive, collaborative; follower; leader; defensive.
Risk Taking	Calculated risk-taking; preparedness to seize opportunities; preference for both incremental and transformation acts; reliance on intuition and experience.
Pro-activeness	Commitment to exploiting opportunities; inherent focus of recognition of opportunities; passion, zeal and commitment.
<b>Marketing Orientation (MO)</b>	
<b>Dimensions:</b>	<b>Descriptors:</b>
Exploiting Markets	Vision and strategy are driven by tactical successes; planning or lack of, in short incremental steps; proactively exploiting smaller market niches; flexible; customization approach to market; marketing decisions linked to personal goals and long term performance.
Market Intelligence Generation	External intelligence gathering; informal market research generation; gathering marketing intelligence through personal contact networks (PCNs) and web-based networks.
Responsiveness towards Competitors	Reactive to competitor's new products (NPDs); niche marketing strategies; differentiation strategy using product quality; software innovation; quality and responsiveness of software service support; competitive advantage based on understanding of customer needs.
Integration of Business Processes	Closely integrated functions, R&D, marketing etc.; sharing of resources; product/venture development is interactive; formal processes; project planning, project management; marketing that permeates all levels and functional areas of the firm.
Networks and Relationships	Resource leveraging; capacity for building network and business competence; use of personal contact networks (PCNs); creation of value through relationship/alliances; intra-firm networks; market decision making based on daily contact and networks.
<b>Innovation Orientation (IO)</b>	
<b>Dimensions:</b>	<b>Descriptors:</b>
Knowledge Infrastructure	Formalised IT-based knowledge infrastructures; formal and informal policies, procedures, practices and incentives; gathering and disseminating information.
Propensity to Innovate	Processes for sustaining and shaping the organisation's culture to stimulate and sustain creativity and innovation; covering all innovation types- new products, services, process and administration.
<b>Customer Orientation (CO)</b>	
<b>Dimensions:</b>	<b>Descriptors:</b>
Responsiveness towards Customers	Responsiveness to customer feedback and behaviour; speedy reaction to shifts in customer preference.
Communication with Customers	Strives to lead customers; formal and 'informal' feedback gathering mechanisms; ongoing dialogue with customers to build long-term relationships; successful delivery to customers that builds customer confidence, with marketing based on personal reputation, trust and credibility.
Understanding and Delivering Customer	Organisation driven by customer satisfaction; understanding of how



Value	customer value products/services; closely linked to innovation practices; often two-way marketing with customers; customer knowledge often based on market immersion/interaction.
Promotion and Sales	Organisational focus and sales on promotional activities.

Source: Jones *et al.* (2013).

## Entrepreneurial Marketing and characteristics of the firm

### Entrepreneurial Marketing and firm age

Past studies have found that younger firms behave more entrepreneurially and are likely to practice EM than older firms. Younger firms are often more flexible and creative in making decisions. This allows them to be more innovative in utilising their resources (Kilenthong *et al.*, 2016). Younger firms are more technology-savvy than older firms (Nooteboom *et al.*, 2007) thus they are inclined to innovate more than their older counterparts (Withers *et al.*, 2011). They are not bound by rigid structures and routines, and this enables them to quickly react to changes in the market and spot opportunities to launch new products or services (Naldi and Davidsson, 2013). Their flexibility often means they do not follow a strict marketing plan and are more likely to improvise when finding solutions (Zahra *et al.*, 2006). By promptly adjusting to customers preferences, they are inclined to be more customer-oriented than older firms. As evidence suggests that firm age has an impact on their EM behaviours, this study puts forward the following proposition:

P1: Younger social enterprises are more inclined to practice EM than older social enterprises

### Entrepreneurial Marketing and firm size

As mentioned previously, smaller firms are more likely to engage in EM activities than their larger counterparts. This is due to smaller firms having limited resources- be it financial or manpower to engage in marketing activities practiced by larger firms (Carson and Gilmore, 2000). Smaller firms are more flexible and serve small niche markets. They often conduct informal market planning and usually focus more on local markets. While smaller firms tend to be less market-oriented they are likely to emphasize on networking activities. Networking allows small firms to access resources they lack (Bjerke and Hultman, 2002). Thus this study posits that:

P2: Smaller social enterprises are more inclined to practice EM than larger social enterprises

### Entrepreneurial Marketing and firm offerings

In her study, Reijonen (2012) stated that EMO brings more benefits to production firms than service firms. Therefore the study proposes:

P3: Social enterprises that offer products are more inclined to practice EM than those that offer services

## Entrepreneurial Marketing and characteristics of the founders

Various researches in the past have concluded that SMEs practice marketing differently compared to larger firms. This is due to constraints like the firms' limited resources and the entrepreneurs'/founders' limited capabilities. Marketing activities in SMEs are almost unplanned, unstructured and informal, where the entrepreneurs themselves take up the role of marketers. As such, the firms' EM activities are heavily influenced by their founders who control all of the decision-making process (Becherer *et al.*, 2008; Franco *et al.*, 2014). In these situations, the firms' EM orientation will rely on the skills, knowledge and competence of the founders. Becherer *et al.* (2008) also stated that the founders' prior experience in business will influence how EM is practiced in their firms. Therefore this study puts forward these propositions:

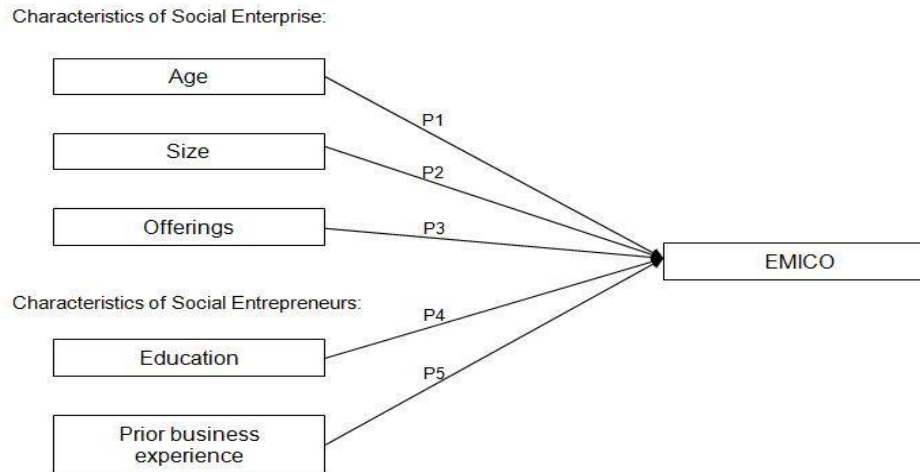
P4: Social entrepreneurs with education background in business are more inclined to practice EM

P5: Social entrepreneurs with prior business experience are more inclined to practice EM

Figure 1 below illustrates the conceptual framework to visually explain the relationship of each variable and propositions.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the study is to explore the relationship between social enterprises and their inclination to practice EM. While most EM studies explore the comparisons between the size and age of firms, there is limited research done on comparisons between production and service firms. Therefore this paper hopes to address the paucity by adding this variable to the study. As SMEs marketing activities are primarily driven by the founders/entrepreneurs, it will be interesting to see whether social entrepreneurs' education background and prior business experience influence their inclinations to practice EM. This study adopts the EMICO framework as the dependent variable. The framework is devised by Jones and Rowley (2011) to measure EM activities in firms and has been tested empirically by Reijonen (2012). Finally, a conceptual framework is presented to propose future empirical researches.



**Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the relationship between the social enterprises and EM**

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