

Editorial: Strategic marketing management in small and medium-sized enterprises

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Introduction

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) often face diverse strategic challenges and opportunities when operating in a variety of different industrial and geographical contexts. Traditionally the marketing concept and strategic marketing management were perceived as corporate management philosophies driven by the needs and capabilities of larger organisations. Within smaller organisations the intrinsic value of a traditional approach to marketing management is acknowledged but it is also recognised that there are context specific issues that have an impact on the nature of marketing capabilities and activities of SMEs.

Marketing management and decision making in SMEs has been of interest to researchers for at least the past 30 years. A number of conceptual frameworks have been proposed, for example the stages/growth model, the management style model, the management function model and the contingency approach. Each of these models has relevance to SMEs in different contexts or facing particular marketing challenges but none claim to fully capture the domain of strategic marketing for SMEs.

Initially SMEs start out with a new idea, concept, product or service and may behave in an entrepreneurial manner to try to compete and stand out in a dynamic, competitive environment. New SMEs have extremely high failure rates. Many fail in a relatively short period of time and the people who start them often make substantial financial losses— not to mention the considerable distress and worry incurred. Small business failure is regularly traced back to having an inadequate marketing strategy that led to poor or limited marketing activity.

Following a successful start-up phase, SMEs will then focus on growing, and this may lead to them becoming more administrative and operational. In so doing they become less entrepreneurial as management refocuses on tactical marketing

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activities. ‘Intrepreneurial’ and corporate entrepreneurship initiatives, including corporate venturing and strategic renewal have been developed as a way to renew entrepreneurship within an existing firm but the success of this depends on the ethos and nature of the organisational context. There is still more to be done to better understand how SMEs might encourage entrepreneurial initiatives at a strategic level and to renew their competitive position.

SMEs operating in competitive environments need to use marketing to create value and generate sales. Over time successful firms strategic planning may include innovative marketing, entrepreneurial marketing and internationalisation to drive performance, remain competitive and achieve growth.

This special issue aims to advance theoretical and empirical understanding of strategic marketing management in the context of SMES. By aiming to explore this theme we invited papers that would advance our theoretical understanding of the strategic processes in SMEs. We received papers from all over the world (15 countries). The papers that are included here were those most appropriate for the theme of this special issue having successfully progressed through the two stage, double blind reviewing process.

Paper one, entitled “Business orientation and innovation in small and medium sized enterprises” by Zortea-Johnston, Darroch and Matear (Austria, USA and New Zealand) investigates the capability of SMEs to drive and shape markets in relation to whether they have an entrepreneurial or marketing orientation.

The second paper is “Marketing and organisational development in e-SMEs: understanding survival and sustainability in growth-oriented and comfort-zone pure-play enterprises in the fashion retail industry” by Ashworth (UK). This study investigates the online strategies used by fourteen fashion retailers to secure sustainability.

The third paper is “Marketing in SMEs: the role of entrepreneurial sense-making” by Bettiol, Di Maria and Finotto (Italy). It focuses on the role of the entrepreneur within SMES and how his/her sense-making and communication impacts upon the marketing activity.

The final paper is from the USA by Eggers, Hansen and Wilson entitled “Examining the relationship between customer and entrepreneurial orientation on nascent firms’ marketing strategy”. The paper is about how customer orientation and entrepreneurial orientation impact upon the strategic behaviours of young firms.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue on this evolving field of research. Finally we would like to thank all the reviewers who contributed their time and expertise generously to this special issue. They are:

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