

ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING CAPABILITIES AND VENTURE WELLBEING OF PALM OIL PRODUCING SMEs IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the entrepreneurial marketing capabilities and venture wellbeing of palm oil producing SMEs in Imo State. The objective is to find out how the entrepreneurial marketing practices of these small and medium enterprises have impacted on their wellbeing and the environmental care of their venture engagements; and highlight the findings for future and improved participation. The methodology is qualitative paradigm; and Content and Thematic Analysis were used for data analysis. The design is a descriptive one within the survey spectrum. The use of qualitative approach was to extract the actual feelings of these entrepreneurs on what they do and feel; and how to improve their practice. In-depth interviews, focused group discussions (FGD); and observation, were used to ensure face to face interactions and flexibility in word-of-mouth questioning to elicit appropriate responses. It was also appropriate here, considering the literacy levels of these SMEs operators; qualitative approach fits properly; because in using a documentary questionnaire, the constructs may need interpretation and explanation for them to understand. The findings showed (section 4), that though these entrepreneurs have no formal marketing education and training, but have great understanding by intuition and long years of apprenticeship; apply the brand of marketing blended with the personal traits of the entrepreneurs which can rightly be classified as entrepreneurial marketing. The application of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions have made a lot of contributions to their wellbeing, but funds leverage for expansion and volume are in short supply; and more good road network for ease of products transportation are needed. Government assistance is highly recommended to encourage sustainability. Thus this study is embarked upon to cover this gap in literature on venture wellbeing of SMEs in Rivers State; hence originality in its contents and process. The implication of this investigation is that entrepreneurial marketing is the best fit of marketing type for SMEs, especially in the rural setting of Rivers State.

Key words: Innovation-focused, Customer-intensity, Resource-leverage, Opportunity-driven, Value creation.

INTRODUCTION

The application of marketing concept involves a formalized setting with careful planning process, which is informed by market and marketing research results to guide the selection of target markets and the composition of a marketing mix with which to position the products competitively within the marketplace. As a follow-up, this will require financial strength, techniques within the planning framework, statistics of the target market and figures. Evidences abound which shows that the application of the marketing concepts and tools has assisted the entrepreneurs to achieve high level of success in the marketplace. Subsequently, there is a high rate of adoption of marketing in the entrepreneurial practices all over the world and the eventual development of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM), (Morris et al, 2002).

All over the world and particularly in Nigeria the emphasis is on small to medium size enterprises (SMEs), oiling their business practices with marketing principles. In Rivers State, it has been the same trend, as there are all sorts of products to offer and purchase. These current practices seem to have weathered all forms of business storms and fluctuations, though these entrepreneurs did not attend high institutions or possess high level degrees, yet they intuitively practice marketing. To

what extent do they apply the marketing concept, or is there a brand of marketing practiced by these palm oil producing SMEs in Rivers State.?

In Rivers State, the rush to start SMEs is very high as each entrepreneur has a skill or trade to bring to the marketplace. However as time passed-by one can see that they are all there in the marketplace doing well, namely: oil palm producers, palm kernel, exportation of oil products services; hotels, petrol filling stations, importation and sale of fairly used cars, supermarkets, fast-food restaurants, pharmaceuticals, inter-city transportation, fish-farming, just to mention these few. They tend to survive every economic melt-down, and navigate to thrive in their various businesses today. Entrepreneurial marketing seem to be the brand of marketing practiced by these SMEs, (Morris & Deacon, 2009; Stokes, 2000). Was this the same with SMEs in Rivers State, or any other different form from what the literatures has shown.

Entrepreneurial marketing practice in the 21st century is a tough one for professional marketing personnel, but the less educated in the society are doing it better. The marketplace is so dynamic that it is not enough to acquire the knowledge of the traditional marketing concepts. The trends are changing and the marketplace is so dynamic, thus marketing practices require something extra by way of entrepreneurship skills to complement it, benchmarking; a mindset for opportunity-driven and innovativeness. Today's marketplace presents SMEs and their entrepreneurs, who have little or no structural knowledge of marketing, yet are making tremendous progress in the marketplace through entrepreneurial skills (Anukam, 2009, 2021; Carson & Coviello, 1996). Thus, this phenomenon becomes a challenge worth studying to find out the philosophy, concepts and construct on which their successes were derived from. Furthermore, entrepreneurship practice seems to weather all marketplace storms with the application of its dimensions. Now, is it putting marketing concepts into entrepreneurial practice or vice versa that account for this trend? Therefore this study, aims at investigating and highlighting the findings of what makes the entrepreneurs survive in the midst of business fluctuations using the palm oil producing entrepreneurs' in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF EXTANT RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Framework

The understanding of the entrepreneurial concepts and their relevance will assist the reader acquire a quicker knowledge of their meaning relative to the study. Who is an entrepreneur? What is an enterprise? Their answers will help the reader to understand their relevance to the study.

i). Enterprise

The free dictionary.com: defines an enterprise as 'an undertaking especially one of some scope and risk' (www.thefreedictionary.com). Other online dictionaries on google.com use words and phrases like 'a bold, a difficult, a dangerous, an important, a business venture, a company, requiring courage, energy, dedication' to describe what an enterprise actually is.

Veblen, (2005) in his book, 'the theory of business enterprise' gives a subtler description of what an enterprise really is (in the business sense). He notes that 'the motive of business (an enterprise) is pecuniary gain; the method is essentially purchase and sale. The aim and usually the outcome is the accumulation of wealth'. This contention about the motive, the method, the aim and the outcome of an enterprise qualifies the former definition. The insight drawn from these phrases is that literally all establishments on the high streets today and all the ways in which people try to earn a living is one form of enterprise or another.

It could range from big businesses such as public companies through partnerships to family businesses and sole proprietorships. The event management industry for example is composed of several event management enterprises. These are mainly partnerships and private limited companies formed and managed with the goal of making profits. Examples include Anukam Event

Management Ltd., an Innovative Event Management enterprise. These comprise organizations where entrepreneur-minded individuals come together to provide a service to individuals and other businesses in return for a profit. Any undertaking, particularly a bold one, which results in the achievement of set objectives. It could be personal, organizational or governmental. An individual could be said to be very enterprising, which means he is hardworking and proactive.

ii). Entrepreneurs

Congruent with the definition of an enterprise, one can contend that an entrepreneur is that person who runs, manages or owns an enterprise. This statement however does not fully describe who an entrepreneur really is. Arthur and Sheffrin (2003) regard an entrepreneur as a person who possesses a new venture, a new enterprise or a new idea assumes responsibility for the risks involved in running such a venture or enterprise or pursuing his idea and enjoys the benefits and outcomes from such activity. The recurrent theme in Arthur and Sheffrin's view of an entrepreneur is 'new' which in the literature refers to innovation. As the subsequent discussions will indicate, Innovation is a central theme that runs through the entrepreneurship literature and practice. There are other views on this issues which will be expounded on shortly. The act of being an entrepreneur is referred to as entrepreneurship. Both terms are therefore closely related and there is no marked distinction in the literature between them. The discussion on entrepreneurs will therefore be culminated with entrepreneurship for simplicity and clarity.

The person who owns and controls, a commercial enterprise is an entrepreneur. He is the risk-taker and the profit-maker. He assembles the factors of production and supervises their combination. The term also connotes someone who has a brilliant idea and then finds the money to translate his ideas into tangible goods and services.

iii). Entrepreneurship

Baron and Shane (2008) contend that there is no single agreed definition of entrepreneurship either as an activity or a field of study. They acknowledged that the definition of entrepreneurship introduced by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) is one with high popularity. Shane and Venkataraman (2000), define entrepreneurship as a field of business aimed at understanding how opportunities for innovation in terms of new products, services, markets, production process, raw materials, ways of organizing existing technologies, arise and are discovered (or in fact created) by individuals (entrepreneurs), who develop and exploit these opportunities through different ways to produce a wide range of effects (Baron & Shane, 2008).

Baron and Shane, (2008) support this definition by emphasizing that entrepreneurship involves 'identifying an opportunity that is potentially valuable in the sense that it can be exploited in practical business terms and yield sustainable profits... and actually exploiting or developing this opportunity'. They extend this definition by emphasizing the need to be able to run the resulting business successfully after the opportunity is developed. Early entrepreneurs in the event management industry recognized the need for a service- event management. The history of humankind is marked with celebrations-'man is a social being'. People always come together, mainly temporary, to achieve certain goals under a time limit. This raised the need for effectiveness in these meetings which today is ensured by the event management industry.

Theoretical Framework

Morris, et al. (2002), provide an analytical frame by way of seven dimensions around which the concept of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) can be appreciably looked at. These consist of pro-activeness, calculated risk-taking, innovativeness, opportunity driven, resource leverage, customer intensity, and value creation. As defined in the various literatures, Entrepreneurial Marketing captures the interface between entrepreneurship and marketing, and serves as an umbrella for

many of the emergent vistas on marketing. The literatures reviewed thus far, indicate that EM is widely applied in the SMEs context.

The differences, and overlap of the components of the Entrepreneurship (EO) and Traditional Marketing (TM), are highlighted on table: 2.1 below:

Table: 2.1:
Marketing/ Entrepreneurship Interface in the Marketplace

Components	Marketing	Entrepreneurship
Philosophy	Facilitation of transactions and marketing control	Sustainable competitive advantage through value-creating innovation
Orientation	Marketing as objective, dispassionate science	Central role of passion, zeal, persistence and creativity in marketing
Context	Established, relatively stable markets	Envisioned, emerging, and fragmented markets with high levels of turbulence
Marketer's Role	Coordinator of marketing mix; builder of the brand	Internal and external change agents; creator of the category
Market Approach	Reactive and adaptive approach to current market situation with incremental innovation	Proactive approach, leading the customer with dynamic innovation
Customer Needs	Articulated, assumed, expressed by customers through survey research	Unarticulated, discovered, identified through lead users
Risk Perspective	Risk minimization in marketing actions	Marketing as vehicle for calculated risk-taking; emphasis on finding ways to mitigate, stage or share risks
Resource Management	Efficient use of existing resources, scarcity mentality-marketing budget/audit	Leveraging, creative use of the resources of others; doing more with less; actions are not constrained by resources currently controlled
New Product/ Service Development	Marketing supports new product/service development activities of Research and Development and other technical depts.	Marketing is the home of innovation; customer is co-active producer
Customer's Role	External source of intelligence and feedback	Active participant in firm's marketing decision process, defining product, price, distribution and communications approaches-network marketing

Source: Morris, et al, (2002) p.3

The application of entrepreneurship in a marketing context is well argued but the reverse should also be considered. Marketing covers a huge domain, whether as a discipline, concept, activity, process or any other manifestation of description (Carson & Gilmore 2001). It therefore makes sense that marketing should be observed not from a single viewpoint but from several: academic, practitioner and researcher, reflecting perhaps the different applications of the discipline to suit

specific proactive requirements (Carson, et. al, 1995). For example, Miles and Darroch (2006), found that EM processes could be used strategically to foster entrepreneurship within marketing processes, building and reviewing competitive advantage in large firms.

All these bring into focus the dimensions of EM. Morris, et al. (2002), developed seven core dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing. These are opportunity-driven, pro-activeness, innovation-focused, customer intensity, risk-management, value creation and resource leveraging. These core dimensions distinguish entrepreneurial marketing firm from administrative marketing, (Hills, Hultman, & Miles 2008). In their study of 59 firms in Sweden and USA, Hills et al. (2008), exhibit a different strategic orientation, commitment to opportunities, opportunity recognition mechanisms, control of resources and management of structure. For example, non-EM oriented firms would tend to use formal market research while EM firms tend to rely on experience, immersion and intuition. Further, EM firms are less constrained by budgets and have adaptive strategies, whereas non-EM firms are more oriented to using budgets and top-down corporate planning driven by financial metrics (Hill, et al. 2008).

Table: 2.2. Below is Morris, et al. (2002), seven Entrepreneurial Dimensions on which this study based its' analytical framework. It shows that EM can be applied at three levels: Marketing, Strategic, and Tactical, in the marketplace depending on the circumstance the entrepreneur encounters.

Table 2.2:
Seven Dimensions of EM, and their application at Three Levels.

LEVEL AT WHICH ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING IS APPLIED			
Element of E.M	MARKETING	STRATEGY	TACTICS
Opportunity driven	A philosophy of continuous recognition and pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources controlled	Strategies focusing on new products and markets based on expanded opportunity horizon	Real-time, proactive intelligence to find untapped opportunities; Alternative methodologies to discover unmet needs; Rapid learning from market experiments so as to redefine opportunities
Proactiveness	Action orientation; Organization as agent of change, redefining industry practices and challenges assumption	Defining market positions; leadership of customer and market;	Speedy, development and launch of new products and marketing approaches; Ongoing experimentation with untested guerilla and viral tactics
Innovation-focused	Philosophy that promotes new and different solutions, leading the customer, and the firm as innovation factory, spirit of healthy dissatisfaction	Continuously redefining the product and market context; strategy to manage a portfolio of innovations	Active participation of marketing on teams developing major innovations; highly inventive approaches to new product and service development

Customer intensity	Reinforce passion for the customer; marketing as agent for the customer	Strategic customer-focused interaction, bringing the customer into the firm's planning and operations	Customization via segmentation and niche marketing, creative relationship management tactics; incentives to encourage organizational learning
Risk management	Comfort level with random variance and ambiguity	Managed risk through higher levels of innovation and more rapid organizational learning	Employment of initiatives to mitigate risks through alliances, test markets, trial launches, lead user research
Resource leveraging	Resourcefulness in doing more with less; marketer as middleman tapping a network of non-imitable competencies	Leveraging drives strategic decisions regarding core processes, outsourcing, strategic alliances	Exploit underutilized resources and skills; creative methods for contracting bartering, sharing borrowing, renting, outsourcing
Value creation	Vigilance in seeking novel sources of value throughout the firm	Value-based strategies designed around customer intimacy	Continuous exploration for novel sources of customer value in each element of marketing mix.

Source: Morris, et al (2002)

Entrepreneurial Marketing

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) is an amalgamation of two distinct management areas. Existing as distinct disciplines, marketing and entrepreneurship have evolved to capture many aspects of marketing that are often not explained by traditional marketing concepts and theories. Morris, et al., (2002), offered an earlier definition of entrepreneurial marketing thus:

"Proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation"

Incorporating the latest American Marketing Association (AMA) definition of marketing, Hills and Hultman and Miles (2008), extend this by proposing that entrepreneurial marketing (EM) is:

"...a spirit, an orientation as well as a process of passionately pursuing opportunities and launching and growing ventures that create perceived customer value through relationships by employing innovativeness, creativity, selling, market immersion, networking and flexibility"

From the above definitions, entrepreneurial marketing, which is the practice and acts of entrepreneurs, is a mindset and does not conform to the formal marketing practices. It is proactive and change-focused, introducing changes not reacting to it. It is the marketing of small firms and growing them through entrepreneurship. A brand of marketing practiced by the owner-managers of SMEs is entrepreneurial marketing in action.

Since there are many different conceptualizations for-entrepreneurship and marketing-therein exists myriads of definitions for entrepreneurial marketing. On the one hand, Morris et al., (2002), identify a stream of usage in which the term refers to marketing activities in firms that are resource-constrained and hence apply marketing in an unsophisticated and personal way. Thus by extension

there are collections of research work describing the unplanned, non-linear visionary marketing actions of the entrepreneur as EM.

The table: 2.3, below contains some definitions of EM, which the researcher considers significant to the study, because a thorough understanding of a phenomenon and its definitions will deepen the research work and enrich the study.

Table2.3:

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) Defined in some literatures:

S/No	Authors	Definitions
1.	Backbro & Nystrom (2006), p. 13	"Entrepreneurial marketing is the overlapping aspects between entrepreneurship and marketing; therefore it is the behavior shown by any individual and/ or organization that attempts to establish and promote market ideas, while developing new ones in order to create value"
2.	Bjerke & Hultman (2002), p. 15	"EM is the "marketing of small firms growing through entrepreneurship."
3.	Duus (1997), p. 297	"The distinguishing features of this new interpretation, which is essentially a market-oriented inside-out perspective, could be the development of the specific competence of the firm by entrepreneurial action with a view to serving future customers' latent demand for products that do not yet exist. This can be called ' the entrepreneurial marketing concept'."
4.	Hills & Wright (2000), p. 25	"A new stream of research describes the marketing orientation of small firms as 'entrepreneurial marketing'. This means a style of marketing behavior that is driven and shaped by the owner manager's personality."
5.	Miles & Darroch (2006), p. 488	"... firms adopting EMPs (entrepreneurial marketing processes,) will engage in marketing processes emphasizing opportunity creation and/or discovery, evaluation and exploitation."
6.	Morris, et al., (2000)	"The proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation." (p. 5) "EM synthesizes critical aspects of marketing and entrepreneurship into a comprehensive conceptualization where marketing becomes a process that firms use to act entrepreneurially." (p. 5)
7.	Shaw (2004), p.197	"... four themes relevant to understanding entrepreneurial marketing within a social enterprise context emerged: opportunity

		recognition (OR), entrepreneurial effort (EE); an entrepreneurial organizational culture (EOC), and networks and networking (N&N)."
8.	Stokes (2000a), p. 2	"Marketing carried out by entrepreneurs or owners-managers of entrepreneurial ventures."
9.	Stokes (2000b), p.13	"The entrepreneurial marketing concept is focused on innovations and the development of ideas in line with an intuitive understanding of market needs."

Source: Kraus, et al., (2009), p. 3-4

Looking at these definitions, some refer explicitly to marketing in small to medium enterprises (Hill & Wright, 2000); less explicit (Stokes, 2000a). Some make no explicit reference to firm size or age (Morris et al. 2002; Backbro & Nystrom, 2006), and others focus on qualitative aspects of EM such as innovativeness (Backbro & Nystrom 2006; Stokes 2000a), and value creation.

From the reviewed literature two standpoints emerged: - namely the definitions that see EM quantitatively as an aspect of the firm as marketing for small enterprises, and the second one highlights the qualitative aspect of EM by defining it as marketing with an entrepreneurial spirit. These can be seen as two sides of the same coin, as the quantitative characteristics (smallness and newness) seems to be a context which favors' marketing activities which are driven by an entrepreneurial spirit, (innovative, risk-management and pro-activeness) these are qualitative characteristics.

Palm Oil Producing SMEs in Imo State

Palm oil is produced from the fruit of *Elaeis Geniuneesis*, (oil palm tree), that originated in West Africa. After the fifteenth century, it was introduced to other parts of Africa, South Asia and Latin America along the Equatorial belt, (Oches, et al. 1961). Furthermore, Rahman, (1998) stated that the natural distribution of the palm oil is tropical West Africa, between 13° N and 12° S latitude and found between the rain forest and savannah region. The present center of production in Africa stretches from Senegal along the coast to the Republic of Benin and Nigeria.

Palm oil has a distinctive colour which varies from an orange yellow to a fat-soluble aryteneoids', which are responsible for the high vitamin A content of palm oil, (Apapa & Aba 1978). Palm oil and its products are used in numerous food and non-food application. They can be used for domestic cooking, frying, candle making, margarine, shortenings, soap, alchemical and other domestic products, (Rahman, 1998). Marketing is the performance of all business activities involved in the flow of products from the point of production until the products gets to the hands of the final consumers, (Kotler, 1999,). Palm oil marketing includes production, processing, storage, grading, sorting, packaging, transportation and pricing. The structure of Palm oil market is one of the most important aspects of the marketing segment of this study. The structure relates to the power of relationship between buyers and sellers and the influence of competitive conduct of buyers and sellers in the market, and the structure is used to determine how well the market performs, (Moro, 1999). The structure of the producers, wholesaler and retailers in the LGAs', was difficult to identify because of the conflicting nature of structural determinants which includes the degree of seller concentration, degree of product differentiation, condition of entry and exit in the business among other variables. These variables appear to be same in categories of the markets. Because of the conflicting nature of the structural determinants of the producers, wholesalers, and retail markets in the LGAs'. This constitutes a serious problem of ascertaining the exact category of the market whose business opportunities were yet to be fully exploited.

Marketing channels are intermediaries and markets through which products from producers go to the consumers; and many people are engaged as marketing intermediaries in most tropical African market, (Moro, 1999). The palm oil processors rarely sell their products directly to the consumers. Usually, there are several stages in the marketing process and it is generally characterized with different activities or functions carried out by middlemen, hence it is difficult to estimate the cost of added value of palm oil product. The general objective of the study is to identify the structure, conduct, channels and price spread of the palm oil market. The results of this study will assist the investors, and policy formulators have adequate information on how to assist these women benefit from their efforts and improve production process and facilitate policy execution to ensure improved entrepreneurial marketing practices and economic growth of the LGAs.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the application of the Entrepreneurial Marketing principles in a rural setting, we take a qualitative approach to study the SMEs practices of the Palm Oil Producing SMEs in the Local Governments of Rivers State. This was because the researcher has observed that it seemed to be the dominant approach for now in investigating an emerging phenomenon like entrepreneurial marketing or new trends in marketing, especially in a rural setting, (Moriarty, et al. 2008). Qualitative approach is the dominant state of the art in researching the Entrepreneurial Marketing phenomenon, (Cason & Coviello, 1996), because of its emergent nature, and it is understandable that a majority of the work range from exploratory to explanatory papers and conceptual to contemplative reviewed in the related literature.

The use of qualitative approach was a recommended method for researching Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Marketing and this study has its precedent in Mankelaw and Merrilees (2006). Schndehutte, et al. (2008) employed case studies to illustrate how trajectories can be identified in the dominant strategic orientations within firms as they evolve. In this study, the sampled members of the SMEs and their activities were studied looking at how the concept of marketing was being applied by them and the traces of Entrepreneurial Marketing in practice. The choice of Rivers State was because the area is dominant in entrepreneurship practitioners and SMEs palm oil producer operators, just like other state of South-South Nigeria, whose enterprises originated from small economic base. The study then assesses the applicability of the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (opportunity-focus, pro-activeness, innovativeness, calculated risk-taking, resource leverage, customer intensity and value creation), in sustaining their wellbeing and to identify the internalized applications, which activate entrepreneurial marketing actions.

In order to achieve this, the study adopts a qualitative research method and the research design is both exploratory and descriptive. As Moriarty, et al. (2008) points out that exploratory design which aims at identifying a problem is used more widely in qualitative research method. Furthermore, researchers in the entrepreneurial marketing literature point out that it would be more appropriate for the issue to be handled in a qualitative way, (Stokes, 2000b; Martin, 2009; Hills & Wright, 2000, Carson & Coviello, 1996; Moriarty et al. 2008).

The researchers adopted Content and Thematic Analysis in data analysis, as the best fit for qualitative research, the topic and its emerging nature. Data in this study were analyzed via descriptive statistics using categorical aggregation and direct interpretation in qualitative researching (Stokes, 2000b, Martin, 2009, Hills & Wright, 2000, Carson & Coviello, 1996, Moriarty et al., 2008, Stokes, 1999). In the focused-group discussion, Content Analysis and Critical Incident Techniques (CIA), were extensively used to get the participants' talking and the result from the interviews were interpreted relative to the research questions. Thus, their responses were analyzed using content analysis technique to ascertain problems convergence or divergence in the entrepreneurial marketing practices in the LGAs' marketplace. The responses from the interviews, and focused-group sessions were superimposed on the seven dimensions of EM and 8Ps' of traditional marketing in the section 4, to show the extent of convergence and divergence in the concepts application by the Rural Women Palm Oil Producer entrepreneurs. The responses were

compared and evaluated using extant literatures position to support the hypotheses acceptance or rejection.

FINDINGS

This study is an empirical one, which investigates the entrepreneurial marketing (EM) practices among rural women palm oil producers in LGAs. The data presentation and analysis below illustrate this position.

Table: 4.1:
Demographic Data of the Rural Women Palm Oil Producers (25 SMEs Cluster contributed 10 participants each, hence 250) Sampled:

FACTORS	OPTIONS	FREQUENCY
PERCENTAGES Age:	25-30years	16
	31-40years	14
	41-50years	101
	51-above	<u>119</u>
	<u>47.6%</u>	250
		100%
Sex:	Male	15
	Female	<u>235</u>
<u>94%</u>		250
100%		
Educational Qualifications:	No Formal Schooling	31
	FSLC	116
	WAEC/GCE	78
	OND	18
	BSc/HND	7
	MSc/MBA/ PhD	<u>000</u>
<u>000%</u>		250
100%		
Organizational Pattern:	Employee	187
	Sole Proprietorship	74.8%
	Partnership	<u>11</u>
20.8%		250
<u>4.4%</u>		100%

Ownership Pattern:	Owner-manager	63	
	Employed	187	
		250	
		100%	
Occupational Designation:	Salesmen/Salesgirls	130	52%
	Sales Coordinator	57	
	Owner-Manager	63	
		250	100%
Products Offered:	Tangible Products	63	
	Service Providers	187	
		250	
		100%	
25 SMEs No. of Employees:	5-15 employees'	15	
	15- Above employees'	10	
		25	
		100%	

Source: Field Survey 2023

The table 4.1, above show that the entrepreneurial practices in this area is female dominant (94%), male participation is 6%. The concern of the study is the female participation, but the few male were included, because there were responses that required their input. It is a demanding practice in the marketplace that requires extra strength and vigor. The level of education of practitioners in terms of entrepreneurial marketing concepts knowledge, weighed heavily on the lower side of the scale, hence the personal characteristics dimension of marketing practices that is entrepreneurial. The age of the practitioners also shows that experience and maturity is a requirement for self-employment.

Customer orientation and intensity are all focused toward customer satisfaction, repurchase intention and consistent patronage; bearing in mind that they are the main stay of any business enterprise. To this extent, the study shows TM and EM are similar in focus, but different approaches as shown in table 4.2, below.

The findings from the 250 participants studied in the of Rivers State from the cluster of 25 firms; were consistent with literatures and previous studies by Morris et al. (2002, 2004), Kurgen et al. (2011), Stokes (2009), Collinson and Shaw, (2001), Kraus et al. (2009), Hills and Hultman, (2011a); that entrepreneurial marketing is appropriate for Small and Medium scale Enterprises, and this was the brand practiced by these Palm Oil Producing SMEs in Rivers State.

There are inferences in some of the literatures that this marketing type undertaken by entrepreneurs and small business owners is only like this (EM), because of inadequate resources and therefore inferior to the more traditional marketing carried out by larger organizations. Not so because entrepreneurial marketing (EM) need not be second-rate as this study has shown. Rather, it was the type of marketing concept that was more appropriate in the rural setting like the LGAs.

Analysis of the Palm Oil Producing SMEs application of EM and Hypotheses Development and Tests

Data gathered in the interviews, and focused-group discussion were evaluated and interpreted in relation to the seven (7), dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing and the related marketing concepts. The results presentation and discussion framework was to explain and state that the respondents' views in their application of the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing were found not at variant with the various literature positions.

Table: 4.2:

25 SMEs Cluster & Entrepreneurial Marketing Practice Analysis

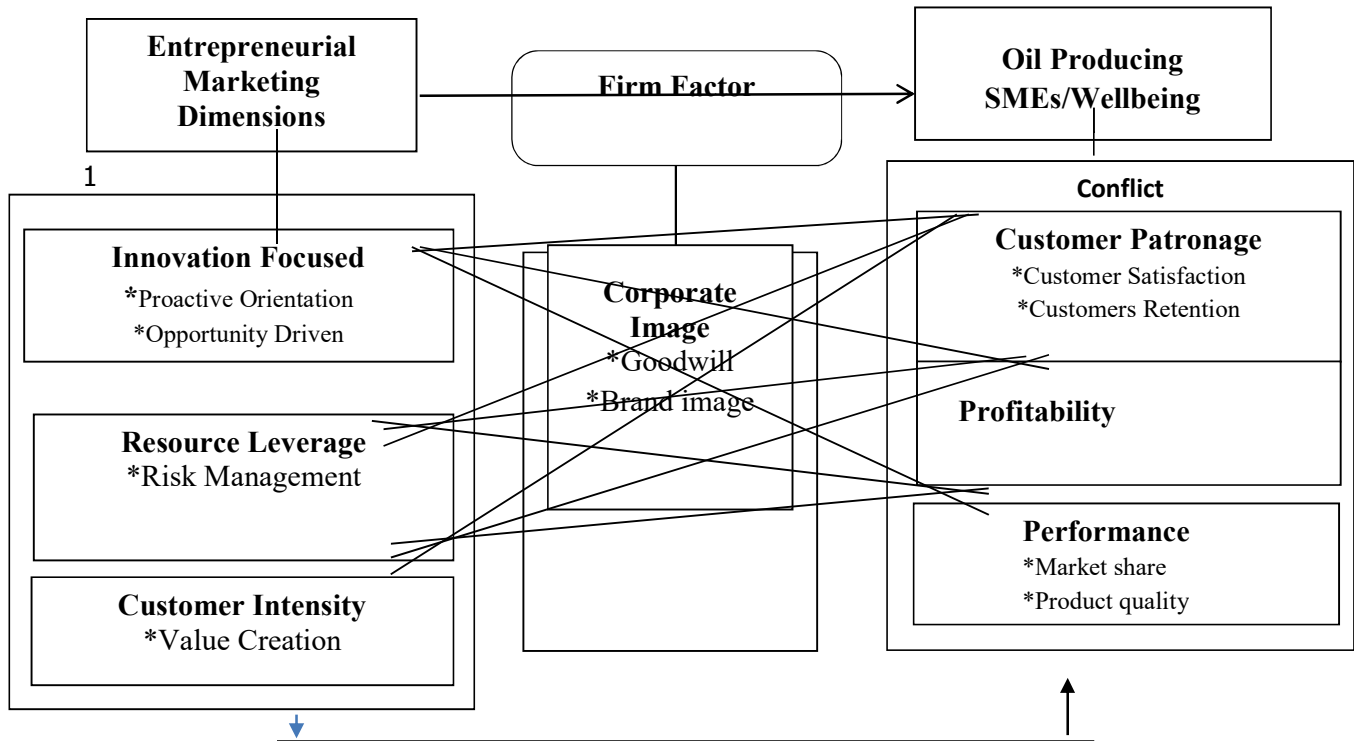
	Dimension of Traditional Marketing	TM Actual Practices		Dimension of Entrepreneurial Marketing	EM Actual Practices	
		%	Nos. of Respondents		%	Nos. of Respondents
4.1.1	New Product Development	52%	13	Innovativeness	100%	25
4.1.2	Marketing Research	48%	12	Pro-activeness	100%	25
4.1.3	SWOT Analysis		64% 16	Opportunity Focused	100%	25
4.1.4	Marketing Budget/ Audit	40%	10	Resource Leverage	100%	25
4.1.5	Forecast/Prediction	68%	17	Calculated Risk Taking	100%	25
4.1.6	Customer Orientation	100%	25	Customer Intensity	100%	25
4.1.7	Organization Culture	80%	20	Value Creation	100%	25

Source: Field Survey 2023

The contingency tables: 4.1. & 4.2: the responses of actual practices from the participants. Though some members of the interviewed agreed to the practices of TM but accepted to practice more of the EM dimensions as the better strategies to attract and retain their buyers. The 4.2, further shows that marketing concepts oils entrepreneurship practices and that the brand of marketing, practiced by these rural women palm oil producers (SMEs) weighs heavily toward entrepreneurial marketing. The respondents' levels of education account for the extent of application of the marketing concepts, which weighs toward the marketing-type that is characterized by owner-manager personality, (EM). Below are the contending dimensions that guided the study interviews and FGD:

Figure: 4.3:

Operational Framework of: ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING CAPABILITIES AND VENTURE WELLBEING OF PALM OIL PRODUCING SMEs IN IMO STATE.



(Source: (Stokes, 2000b; Martin, 2009; Hills & Wright, 2000, Carson & Coviello, 1996; Moriarty et al. 2008).)

i). Innovativeness interface with Patronage, Customers Satisfaction and retention.

The respondents expressed parallel ideas regarding innovativeness to those in the literatures. (Table: 4.2/4.1.1). All the participants agreed to have introduced some innovation within the last 6-month or one year. For instance, they regularly travel out to Lagos, Abuja, Aba among others, to see what others are doing to attract, and retain customers; and whatever new ideas they got, they adopt to their situations and these have been working well for their businesses. "Changes in goods and services are made in accordance with customers' feedback", said one of the respondents.

Regarding innovativeness, Davis, et al. (1991), pointed out that entrepreneurship plays an important role not only in new products development, but also in finding creative and unique solutions including developing new technologies that will serve executive and organizational functions. Miles and Darroch (2006) expressed the role of entrepreneurial marketing's innovativeness dimension in creating superior value.

H1: Innovatively-focused orientation, have no relationship with customer patronage, satisfaction and retention customers.

Resolving this hypothesis above, which is herein rejected; using Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis tools of qualitative research approach, it was found that direct relationship between innovativeness by the respondents and customers' satisfaction and retention exist and have helped them to grow a strong customer-base, giving them sense of worth and wellbeing.

ii). Pro-activeness interface with Profitability.

Leading and pioneering the market in terms of creating new products and adopting and offering new technologies bring dynamism to marketing approaches of businesses. For instance, the respondents (Table 4.2/4.1.2), activities which has to do with pro-activeness includes: creating a social atmospheres that will bring together customers; organizing socio-cultural activities to help the staff with their self-improvement and develop their customer perception; green marketing; offering home-cooked meals to customers.

A summary of 'niche marketing' approach by Dalgic and Leeuw, (1994) suggests that targeting is achieved by attracting all initial customer bases and then looking for more of the same. Entrepreneurs may target market at these other markets, which go beyond conventional definitions of the term 'customer'. In this sense, entrepreneurial marketing resembles aspects of relationship marketing which emphasizes the need to create and develop a supportive network in which the firm can thrive (Gummesson, 1987).

H2: Pro-activeness in the SMEs EM application has no relationship with profitability and patronage.

This hypothesis is rejected because the analysis shows that a direct relationship exists between proactive practices of the rural women palm oil producers and customers repurchase intention and patronage. The analysis of the respondents' views, using Thematic and Content Analysis supports this result. Customers repurchase intention will usually result in consistent patronage, this they enjoyed overtime.

iii). Opportunity-Driven interface with SMEs Performance and Patronage

In answer to the question, how the firms find and select opportunities, the participants (Table 4.2/4.1.3), stated that they organize social tours (pick-nicks, trade-fair sponsorship, exhibitions and the likes) analyze the market and watch their competitors' advertisements closely, visit other firms on similar line of business and interact with them. They are also very alert on technological changes that may affect their businesses. This alertness on customers' preferences and reaction has at one point or the other revealed opportunities, which were profitably taken before competitors' interference. "We also bench-mark in larger firms to conceive opportunities" said the sampled members. Furthermore, the interviewees gave the following examples on how they exploited the opportunities in the marketplace:

"We are trying to create a more cultural restaurants and rest places that appeals to customers, creating a market-oriented atmosphere of love image, drawing the attention of the market with modern and highly technological packaging, having a transportation system that are less costly and laborious and creating a new atmosphere for relationship marketing".

They stated that their constant watch on marketing environment, and alert on technological changes has often revealed many opportunities for oil products and services demand. Serendipitously too, opportunities tends to offer themselves to be taken; like when the respondents said they attended a wedding ceremony and discovered a need that can help celebrants have hatch-free ceremonies at reduced costs. A visit to a tertiary institution when taking his children back to school that revealed a need for a restaurant in the area, which he immediately took by building a restaurant that is today making profits and is expanding.

H3: Palm oil producing SMEs are opportunity-seeking oriented; however it has no relationship with performance, product quality and market-share.

The analysis shows something to the contrary which is that direct relationship exists between opportunity-driven dimension and customer satisfaction and patronage as seen from the sampled responses. This has positive impact and thus rejects the hypothesis.

iv). Resource Leverage interface with patronage, Customer satisfaction and Retention

Agreeing with literature, the respondents (Table 4.2/4.1.4), accepted that they usually made use of limited resources. For instance, a respondent stated that:

"Depending on the situation, we all use sourcing and outsourcing. We make decision considering our current situation and potential benefits of this decision".

In some cases a firm has a job-contract to provide certain drums of palm oil, and services and have not sufficient resources to fund the job, it will usually perform the ones its' resources can take and then outsource the others. Conversely, the neighboring firm does the same to the first one. This way the job-contract is not lost or revoked by the customers.

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Morris, et al. (2002) opined that at its most basic level, leveraging refers to doing more with less. The palm oil producing SMEs in Rivers State, (Entrepreneurial marketers), are not constrained by the resources they currently have at their disposal, they are able to leverage resources in a number of different ways including: (i) stretching resources much further than others have done before; (ii) putting to profitable uses resources that others are unable to utilize; (iii) using other people's resources to accomplish one's own purpose; (iv) complementing one's resources with another to create higher combined value; (v) using certain resources to obtain other resources. Entrepreneurial marketers develop a creative capacity for resource leveraging. The ability to recognize a resource not being used optionally, and see how the resource could be used in a non-conventional way, and to convince those that control the resource to let the marketers use them, involves insight, experience and skill, (Morris, et al. 2002).

H4: Resource Leverage gives the SMEs some latitude to expand their business, but this have no direct relationship with patronage, customer satisfaction and customer retention.

From the above analysis, resource leverage has direct relationship with customers' retention and patronage, and this has impacted positively on their marketing activities, thereby rejecting the hypothesis.

v). Calculated Risk-Taking interface with Profitability

Risk-taking based on experience over the years is consistent with entrepreneurial marketing. In observing the participants during this study, (Table 4.2/4.1.5), it was discovered that they do this with flair. It has become part of them, there is no other way. On the overall, they hardly fail as one of them opined that:

"if you want to succeed in business you must take a risk. Another stated that risks are opportunity in disguise and until you take it up, you will never know what it can offer you".

Risk management is consistent with the entrepreneurial marketing practices of the firms studied. Risks are reflected in the various resources allocation decision made by the firms, as well as in the choice of palm products, services and markets to be sold. Entrepreneurship is associated with calculated risk-taking, which mitigates or shares those factors. Entrepreneurial marketing, defines an explicit role for marketing in managing the firms' risk profile (Hills, et al. 2008).

"Resources are managed in ways that they can be quickly committed to or withdrawn from new projects thereby enhancing their firms' flexibility. For instance, collaborative marketing programs

with other firms; joint development venture, test markets and staged product roll-outs; working with lead customers, strategic alliances, outsourcing of key marketing activities, and resources expenditures that are tied to performance”.

The majority of the respondents mentioned that: *“they acted entrepreneurially in risk-taking and took calculated and predictable risk in their investment decisions”* This is parallel to the literatures reviewed that the condition for being successful being innovative, customers’ intensity, proactiveness and opportunity-focused market, were closely rooted to risk-taking propensity of an entrepreneur. They furthermore emphasized that risk-taking approach should be handled with a calculable balance between entrepreneur’s viewpoint on risk and level of risk to be taken.

“H5: Risk management has no direct relationship improving the profitability and wellbeing of palm oil producing SMEs.

A positive relationship exists which has impact on the wellbeing of these women. Risks of all kinds are to be prepared for, remedies Thus the hypothesis is hereby rejected.

vi). Customer Intensity interface with Performance

The respondents (Table 4.2/4.1.6), explained that they were customer oriented and reinforced their customer focus with a proactive perspective. In order to gather data on the level of their customers’ patronage and responses, the oil palm product dealers use network approach and interaction with their customers, and observations of happenings in their competitors’ firms. For instance, an owner-manager responded to a question on customer creation and retention thus:

“Customers’ demands and needs are of crucial importance for us. We follow and capture these demands and needs via both surveys and face-to-face interview and continuous interaction. Customers’ feedback, reaction, complains and responses enable us to realize some the innovations inputs we have made so far”.

Another group of owner-managers responded that:

“The producers and salesgirls are constantly receiving feedback from our customers in every contact point with customers such as breakfast point (mama-put), roadside chats side and so on. Besides, customers’ surveys are utilized for this purpose”.

Other ways the oil palm producers keep track of their customers were sending e-mail on special occasions, making phone calls at certain intervals, accompanying the customer when he/she leaves the firm or hotel/rest-place to his/her destination and calling him/her after a while. Most of them also keep a database for customers with them after they were gone. The respondents’ approaches to customer-intensity were very much consistent with earlier extant studies by Kurgun et al. (2011), Morris et al. (2002, 2009) and Stokes (1999).

H6: Customer intensity has no relationship with SMEs performance and market-share.

The above response analysis disagreed with this hypothesis, because customer intensity have direct strong relationship with SMEs performance and market-share and have impacted positively on the wellbeing of the producers and their businesses. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

vii). Value Creation interface with Product Quality

In answer to the questions posed to the respondents (Table 4.2/4.1.7), to measure the extent of their value creation, the producers indicated that they measured customers perception of the value created by their comments and interaction with them; adding that such measures however come with certain limitations. While measuring the perception of value created on the eyes of customers; rest-place/hotels, transportation arrangements, eatery/restaurants; oil palm products dealers, took into account the opinions of loyal customers and first-time visitors and buyers through opinions shared with them by word-of-mouth. Networks among customers, partners and colleagues are also

sources of value creation measurement via their assessment of the firm's performance in oil palm products and related services offering. Hear some of their views on value creation:

"Truth sales", says one of the respondents, "and when the customers found you are truthful in your dealings with them, they will highly value the products and services you offer to them and will continue to patronize your firm"

Consistent with the literatures, Stokes (2000a), states that promotional activities in EM that serve to extend customer base rely heavily on word-of-mouth communication and customer recommendations. Morris et al. (2002), posit that the focal point of marketing historically has been transaction; and more recently, the relationship. The focal point of EM is innovative value creation, on the assumption that value creation is a prerequisite for transactions and relationship. The task of the marketer is to discover untapped sources of customer value and create unique combinations of resources to produce value.

H7: Value creation has no relationship with product quality and performance.

Relative to the above palm oil producing SMEs responses and extant literature positions, the hypothesis is rejected. Value creations have direct relationship to the product quality and firms market performance.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The aim of this study is to assess the entrepreneurial marketing practices among palm oil producing SMEs in Rivers, and to identify how this phenomenon has impacted on their venture wellbeing. These were constituted into small and medium scale enterprises, (SMEs) clusters of 250 of 25 cluster areas of Rivers State. Entrepreneurial marketing practices, has been observed among the selected sample, and the subject matter was well understood by the respondents as their practices and responses has shown; that this brand of marketing complements Traditional marketing (TM); just as TM concepts provides structures and basic understanding for EM practices capabilities of the participants..

EM does not seek to replace conventional marketing or conflict its activities, but provides limitless streams of opportunities for effective performance at the rural marketplace. For instance, pro-activeness and social network continue to provide data after marketing research have been concluded. Innovation creates new products and service offerings, which in turn create new markets and customers, in addition to what customer orientation and relationship marketing can provide. EM provides streams of transactional opportunities for profit, hence can withstand fluctuations and business storms as they come.

The appropriate application of the seven dimensional factors of EM, (Table 4.2), by the sample members distinguishes them from other forms of business practices. They see EM as philosophy of marketing, a way of thinking and acting; a perspective, an approach to achieve set goals.

The prospects of EM in Rivers State are very high as seen in the responses of the sampled members. There is no negative response or desire for bankrupt or divesting, rather each has a plan or strategy for expansion or continue innovation on services and products creation.

Just as advanced economies are sustained and propelled by SMEs in those economies, the same is trickling down to the Rivers State economy, considering the number of employment SMEs provides, the distribution of essential palm oil and related services offering, which the government cannot provide, dispersion of small scale industries, revenue generation and skill acquisition training (practical) SMEs provides for the youths. These prospects cannot be overemphasized; EM is fast becoming part of the economic life of Rivers State inhabitants.

Therefore, the challenge of the present-day entrepreneur is to fortify his knowledge base (continuous education, formal and informal), and internalize the seven dimensional factors of EM, as done with the marketing concepts, namely: innovativeness, pro-activeness, opportunity driven, resource leverage, calculated risk taking, customer intensity, value creation; and apply them in all

their activities. Business storms and fluctuations have no answer to these dimensions due to their flexibility as the studied sampled members have affirmed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based on the study findings:

- i.) That the present-day entrepreneurs should endeavor to upgrade their knowledge base or should employ marketing graduates to assist them, because an understanding of the entrepreneurial marketing concepts, oils the entrepreneurial machinery very efficiently for better performance in the marketplace. Every effort should be made to upgrade their knowledge base or engage the services of marketing consultants or academics as a way of improving and ensuring they have the best practice.
- ii.) Government intervention is urgently needed in providing adequate factory-like-structures to house the oil palm production process. Storage facilities are none existence for product storage and stock-piling for local marketplace and export.
- iii.) Considering the high percent of unemployment in the country, and the employment this sector provides, the government should hasten to give these rural women grants to expand their entrepreneurial marketing base, there and then employ more of the locals who are unemployed.
- iv.) Provision of good roads network will assist the transportation of oil palm products movement and improve their pricing strategies.
- vi.) Government should on the other hand; organize these women into a hub of business cluster and pay them adequately to produce more for export.
- v.) For institutions, training effort should transcend from teaching of marketing as a technology, or a set of principles, frameworks and techniques; to realities manifesting in practical skill acquisition for better performance at the marketplace with profitable results. Entrepreneurial marketing should be taught as a philosophy of marketing; as a way of thinking and acting, which will help students cultivate a mindset for entrepreneurship.
- vi.) Marketers should also adopt the EM dimensions to expand their strategic and tactical base in weathering the unseen stormy marketing environment when they become turbulent. These findings from the study, have sustained the sampled members over the years.

CONCLUSION

The appropriate application of the seven dimensional factors of EM, (Table 4.2), by the sample members distinguishes them from other forms of business practices. They see EM as philosophy of marketing, a way of thinking and acting; a perspective, an approach to achieve set goals. The prospects of EM in Rivers State are very high as seen in the responses of the sampled members. There is no negative response or desire for bankruptcy or divesting, rather each has a plan or strategy for expansion or continue innovation on services and products creation. Just as advanced economies are sustained and propelled by SMEs in those economies, the same is trickling down to the Rivers State economy, considering the number of employment SMEs provides. The distribution of essential goods and service offerings, which the government cannot provide, dispersion of small scale industries, revenue generation and skill acquisition training (practical), have impacted on the wellbeing of the women and youths in Rivers State. These prospects cannot be overemphasized; EM is fast becoming part of the economic life of Nigerians.

FURTHER RESEARCH AREAS

This study suggests that the area of further unconventional approach to marketing exists in rural areas such guerrilla marketing (GM) by SMEs, E-commerce (Electronic Marketing) by SMEs in the rural communities, and the effect of Word-of-Mouth (WOM), by SMEs; are worth researching on. These will help to deepen the knowledge base of this current phenomenon in complementing the traditional marketing practices. The issue of optimal level of EM in a firm, its determination in industrial market versus consumer markets; matured versus emerging industries; and products versus services firms are other areas worthy of investigations.

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