

Entrepreneurial Marketing and Traditional Marketing: A Conceptual Re-Examination

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial marketing has grown into a substantive research area over the past three decades, yet its conceptual boundaries remain fluid. Scholars continue to debate whether entrepreneurial marketing represents a break from traditional marketing theory or an adaptive extension of established frameworks. This paper offers a critical re-examination of the relationship between the two domains by synthesising influential conceptual contributions, interrogating their underlying assumptions, and considering the implications for small and medium enterprises. Drawing on literature that spans marketing theory, entrepreneurship research, and SME scholarship, the paper argues that entrepreneurial marketing should not be seen as a rejection of traditional marketing but as a contextually driven reconfiguration. Entrepreneurial firms operate in environments defined by uncertainty, resource scarcity, and opportunity-driven behaviour. These conditions encourage practices that diverge from classical marketing models not because those models are obsolete, but because they were originally designed around the logics and capacities of large, stable organisations. The analysis highlights three areas where entrepreneurial marketing departs most significantly from traditional theory: opportunity orientation, resource leveraging, and the central role of the entrepreneur. The paper concludes by proposing a reframed conceptual relationship between the two domains, suggesting that entrepreneurial marketing is best understood as a behavioural and strategic response to entrepreneurial conditions rather than a fundamentally different paradigm.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial marketing; Traditional marketing theory; Opportunity orientation; Small and medium enterprises; Marketing strategy; Innovation; Resource leveraging; Marketing–entrepreneurship interface.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing has long been recognised as a cornerstone of organisational success, with its intellectual foundations stretching back to the mid twentieth century. Traditional marketing theory (TM), epitomised by Kotler and Armstrong's *Principles of Marketing* (2023), has historically emphasised structured processes such as market segmentation, targeting, positioning, and the marketing mix. These frameworks assume that organisations operate with relatively stable resources,

established hierarchies, and access to reliable market intelligence. Such assumptions have aligned closely with the realities of large corporations, where functional specialisation and long-term planning are feasible. However, the growing prominence of entrepreneurial ventures and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has increasingly challenged the universality of these principles, prompting scholars to question whether entrepreneurial marketing (EM) represents a distinct paradigm or a contextual reconfiguration of TM.

The shift from TM to EM has become more pronounced over the past decade, driven by structural changes in the global business environment and the expanding role of SMEs across developed and developing economies (Damer et al., 2023). Forces such as globalisation, evolving consumer behaviour, rapid advances in information technology, and intensifying competitive pressures have required marketing practice to become more pragmatic, adaptive, and opportunity-oriented. In this context, Yadav and Bansal (2021) argue that marketing perspectives must incorporate an entrepreneurial mindset in order to remain relevant, emphasising creativity, innovativeness, adaptability, and risk-taking as central to contemporary business activity.

EM emerged initially in the 1980s and 1990s as scholars sought to explain how smaller, resource-constrained firms engage with markets under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change. Early debates focused on whether EM should be conceptualised as a subset of entrepreneurship, a branch of marketing, or an independent field altogether. This conceptual ambiguity remains unresolved, with recent studies continuing to highlight the fluid boundaries of EM and its tendency to draw selectively from both entrepreneurship and marketing literatures (Lubinski & Tucker, 2025; Eggers et al., 2024). AbdulRahim, Wahab, and Saad (2015), alongside Feiz et al. (2025), position EM at the intersection of these two domains, arguing that it challenges the assumptions of TM by prioritising customer intimacy, opportunity recognition, proactiveness, creativity, innovation, and risk management. In contrast to the structured and plan driven orientation of TM, EM is commonly characterised as flexible, intuitive, sensing oriented, resource leveraging, and capabilities driven, with a strong focus on harnessing emerging opportunities (Sadiku Dushi & Ramadani, 2020; Nwankwo & Kanyangale, 2020; Chotisarn & Phuthong, 2025).

Insights from modern management theory further enrich the conceptual foundations of EM. Perspectives such as dynamic capabilities, effectuation logic, and organisational agility help explain why entrepreneurial firms rely on adaptive, opportunity driven marketing behaviours. Dynamic capabilities theory emphasises the ability of firms to sense, seize, and transform opportunities in uncertain environments, while effectuation highlights how entrepreneurs begin with existing means, mobilise networks, and co create opportunities over time (Farokhmanesh et al., 2024). These approaches frame EM not as a collection of ad hoc practices, but as a strategic response to environmental volatility and resource constraints.

Empirical research increasingly demonstrates the practical importance of EM for SME survival and growth. Kakeesh, Al Weshah, and Alalwan (2024) show that an entrepreneurial marketing orientation

significantly enhances performance in service-based SMEs, particularly when mediated by competitive aggressiveness. Similarly, Tolossa, Singh, and Gautam (2024) link EM practices to sustainable competitive advantage and long-term firm performance. These findings underscore that EM is not merely a theoretical construct but a functional necessity for firms operating in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments (Sadiku Dushi, 2019; Petrylaite & Rusk, 2021; Feiz et al., 2025).

At the same time, TM retains enduring relevance, particularly in its emphasis on customer orientation and value creation. Kotler's frameworks continue to shape marketing education and managerial practice worldwide, offering structured approaches to understanding consumer behaviour and designing coherent strategies (Kotler & Armstrong, 2023). Yet, as Kotler (2024) acknowledges, marketing must evolve to remain meaningful in the face of technological disruption and entrepreneurial dynamism. Entrepreneurial firms often lack the resources to conduct extensive market research or implement elaborate promotional campaigns. Instead, they rely on intuition, experimentation, networks, and rapid feedback loops. While these practices diverge from classical TM models, they remain aligned with the underlying logic of delivering customer value.

The digital transformation of markets has further complicated the relationship between EM and TM. Chooseta and Sukhabot (2025) argue that conventional EM frameworks, largely developed in Western contexts, may be insufficient for SMEs in developing economies navigating digital platforms, social media, and globalised competition. Similarly, Eggers, Seifert, and Friske (2025) highlight how digital technologies are reshaping entrepreneurial marketing practices, reinforcing the need for EM to evolve alongside broader technological and societal shifts. These developments illustrate the adaptability of EM and its capacity to absorb new influences while remaining grounded in core marketing principles.

Conceptually, EM departs most clearly from TM in three areas: opportunity orientation, resource leveraging, and the central role of the entrepreneur. Opportunity orientation reflects the entrepreneurial imperative to identify and exploit market possibilities ahead of competitors. Resource leveraging captures the creative use of limited assets, networks, and social capital to achieve disproportionate outcomes. Finally, the entrepreneur's personal vision, risk tolerance, and decision-making style frequently shape marketing strategy in ways that are far less pronounced in large organisations (Worthington & Eggers, 2023). These differences do not render TM obsolete; rather, they highlight the need to reconfigure established principles to suit entrepreneurial contexts.

Despite growing scholarly interest, research on EM remains conceptually fragmented. Breit and Volkmann (2024) note the lack of consensus surrounding EM's definition, scope, constructs, and theoretical foundations when compared with TM. This fragmentation underscores the need for a renewed conceptual examination that revisits the foundations of TM while clarifying areas of overlap and divergence with EM. As markets become increasingly precarious and competitive, understanding how TM and EM intersect, complement, and diverge has become a critical concern for both academic and managerial stakeholders.

Accordingly, this paper offers a conceptual re-examination of EM and TM, positioning EM as a behavioural and strategic response to entrepreneurial conditions rather than as a rejection of established marketing theory. Synthesising insights from marketing, entrepreneurship, and management literatures, the study seeks to advance a more integrated understanding of EM as an adaptive extension of TM. Such a perspective not only enriches theoretical discourse but also provides practical guidance for SMEs seeking to navigate complex and evolving market environments.

2. TRADITIONAL MARKETING THEORY: ASSUMPTIONS AND BOUNDARIES

TM theory was developed to serve the strategic needs of large, established organisations. These firms typically operate with structured departments, predictable planning cycles, and access to comprehensive market data. The foundational models, such as McCarthy's 4Ps (product, price, place, promotion), were designed to guide systematic decision-making in environments characterised by stability and resource sufficiency (McCarthy, 1964). Over time, the theory evolved to incorporate concepts like market orientation (Narver & Slater, 1990) and relationship marketing, yet these developments remained grounded in assumptions that may not hold true for entrepreneurial ventures.

However, a growing body of scholarship argues that the dominance of TM theory has produced an unintended bias in how marketing effectiveness is conceptualised. Much of the early literature positioned large, resource-rich firms as the normative ideal, leading to frameworks that implicitly marginalise the realities of SMEs. As Carson et al. (1995) note, many assumptions embedded in these models - such as predictable demand patterns and access to formalised research - reflect only a narrow segment of organisational contexts. This raises questions about the universality of TM theory and suggests that its boundaries may be more structurally determined than conceptually justified.

2.1. Structured Planning

TM is inherently linear and methodical. It prioritises environmental scanning, competitor analysis, and

formalised strategic planning. Models such as SOSTAC® (Smith, 1995) and the marketing funnel reflect this structured approach, guiding firms through sequential stages of analysis, strategy, execution, and evaluation. These frameworks assume that organisations have the time, personnel, and financial resources to engage in long-term planning and iterative refinement. In contrast, entrepreneurial firms often operate under time pressure, with limited data and rapidly shifting market conditions. As a result, they may rely on intuition, experimentation, and informal feedback loops rather than formalised plans (Oxford College of Marketing, 2017).

Furthermore, contemporary market environments have intensified this tension. Increasing digital disruption, accelerated product life cycles, and heightened uncertainty challenge the feasibility of long-term planning even for large firms, let alone entrepreneurial ventures. Scholars such as Mintzberg (1994) have long criticised overly prescriptive planning models for their failure to capture emergent strategy formation. This critique remains highly relevant: the rigidity of traditional planning models risks producing strategic inertia in contexts where rapid opportunity recognition is essential. Thus, the structured nature of traditional planning may represent not only a misfit for SMEs but a broader methodological limitation in volatile markets.

2.2. Customer Orientation

Customer orientation remains a central tenet of TM. It emphasises the importance of understanding customer needs, preferences, and behaviours, and aligning organisational offerings accordingly. The concept of market orientation, as articulated by Narver and Slater (1990), integrates customer focus, competitor awareness, and interfunctional coordination. Relationship marketing builds on this by fostering long-term engagement and loyalty through trust and communication. However, these approaches often rely on structured mechanisms such as CRM systems, loyalty programmes, and data analytics, tools that may be inaccessible or impractical for smaller firms. EM, while still concerned with customer value, often prioritises opportunity recognition and innovation, sometimes placing visionary product development ahead of customer feedback (Valentin, 2025).

2.3. Resource Availability

TM theory presupposes access to substantial resources. Large firms typically have dedicated marketing teams, budgets for research and advertising, and the capacity to test and refine offerings before launch. These resources enable strategic segmentation, brand positioning, and multi-channel campaigns. Entrepreneurial firms, however, frequently operate with constrained budgets, limited personnel, and minimal infrastructure. Their marketing efforts may rely on guerrilla tactics, digital

platforms, and personal networks to reach customers and build brand awareness (JDR Group, 2021). This resource disparity shapes the feasibility of TM practices and highlights the need for adaptive strategies in entrepreneurial contexts.

A deeper critique concerns how resource-based assumptions reinforce structural inequalities in the marketplace. TM models implicitly privilege organisations with the financial capacity to invest in branding infrastructures, sophisticated analytics, and mass media advertising. This creates a theoretical asymmetry: firms that already possess market power appear more capable of "correctly" applying marketing theory, while smaller firms are framed as deviating from the ideal. Such assumptions risk constructing entrepreneurial practice as deficient rather than different, masking the fact that many EM strategies, such as bricolage, guerrilla tactics, or network-based promotion, are not inferior substitutes but alternative pathways to competitive advantage.

TM's linearity is based on classical organizational theory, especially Weberian bureaucratic structures that stress hierarchy, predictability, and formal workflows (Martynyshyn et al., 2022). This connects TM with rational analytical decision-making models. In contrast, entrepreneurial settings focus on limited rationality and quick decision-making (Kurpayanidi, 2021). Understanding these management views helps explain why traditional models often do poorly in unstable, resource-limited environments.

While TM theory offers valuable insights and remains foundational in many sectors, its assumptions create boundaries that limit its applicability to entrepreneurial firms. These boundaries are not exclusionary but contextual; they reflect the structural support that traditional models require. Recognising these limitations is essential for developing marketing frameworks that accommodate the agility, improvisation, and resourcefulness of entrepreneurial ventures.

3. THE EMERGENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL MARKETING

EM emerged as a response to the limitations of TM frameworks in capturing the realities of small, opportunity-driven firms. It foregrounds behavioural orientation, contextual agility, and strategic improvisation.

EM developed in the late twentieth century as scholars began to observe that the marketing behaviours of small and new ventures did not align with the structured, resource-intensive models dominant in TM theory. These firms often lacked formal departments, long-term planning cycles, and access to comprehensive market data. Instead, they relied on intuition, rapid decision-making, and informal networks to engage with customers

and seize market opportunities. Stokes (2000) was among the first to articulate this divergence, noting that entrepreneurs tended to prioritise action over analysis, and relationships over segmentation. His work highlighted the need for a marketing framework that reflected the realities of entrepreneurial contexts.

Nevertheless, early EM literature has been criticised for romanticising entrepreneurial behaviour, sometimes equating informality with inherent superiority. Jones and Rowley (2011) argue that early EM research lacked a critical stance, often portraying entrepreneurial traits - such as intuition or risk-taking - as universally positive without sufficiently examining failures, biases, or inconsistent outcomes. This highlights the need for a more balanced conceptualisation that recognises both the strengths and limitations of entrepreneurial decision-making.

The behavioural orientation of EM was further developed by Hills and Hultman (2011), who argued that EM is shaped by the entrepreneur's personality, values, and opportunity-driven mindset. This perspective shifted the focus from organisational structures to individual agency, recognising that marketing decisions in entrepreneurial firms are often made by founders themselves, based on their lived experience, risk tolerance, and strategic vision. The entrepreneur's central role in shaping marketing strategy distinguishes EM from traditional models, where marketing is typically a specialised function within a larger organisational apparatus.

A significant theoretical advance came from Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge (2002), who proposed a multidimensional framework for EM. Their seven dimensions (proactiveness, innovativeness, risk management, resource leveraging, customer intensity, opportunity focus, and value creation) provided a conceptual foundation for understanding EM as a distinct strategic orientation. These dimensions emphasise behavioural tendencies rather than formal processes, reflecting the improvisational and adaptive nature of entrepreneurial firms. For example, resource leveraging captures the creative use of limited assets, while customer intensity reflects the deep, often personal engagement with customers that characterises many small businesses. This framework has since been widely adopted and empirically tested across diverse contexts (Sadiku-Dushia et al., 2019).

Despite its influence, the seven-dimension model has also faced critique for lacking empirical precision. Some scholars argue that the dimensions are conceptually overlapping - particularly proactiveness, opportunity focus, and innovativeness - leading to measurement challenges (Kraus et al., 2021). Moreover, the model largely reflects Western entrepreneurial norms, raising questions about its applicability across different cultural

or economic contexts. These limitations suggest the need for more nuanced frameworks that capture variation in entrepreneurial behaviour rather than presenting EM as a uniform construct.

Importantly, EM did not emerge as a competing paradigm to TM, but as a recognition that smaller firms operate under fundamentally different conditions. The assumptions underpinning TM (stability, structure, and resource sufficiency) do not hold in entrepreneurial contexts. As such, EM represents a contextual adaptation rather than a theoretical rupture. It draws selectively from TM principles, such as customer orientation and value creation, but reconfigures them to suit environments defined by uncertainty, rapid change, and constrained resources.

Recent scholarship has reinforced this view, positioning EM as a hybrid construct that integrates insights from both marketing and entrepreneurship. Hills, Hultman, and Miles (2008) emphasise the evolutionary nature of EM, noting that it continues to adapt in response to technological shifts, market volatility, and changing consumer behaviours. Empirical studies have demonstrated that EM practices contribute positively to SME performance, particularly in dynamic and competitive environments (Sodhi & Bapat, 2020). These findings suggest that EM is not only conceptually robust but also practically relevant.

At the same time, the rapid digitalisation of markets raises urgent questions about whether existing EM constructs adequately capture contemporary entrepreneurial behaviour. Many EM frameworks were developed before the dominance of social media, influencer ecosystems, algorithmic advertising, and AI-driven analytics - tools that reshape how small firms identify opportunities and interact with customers. As a result, there is a growing need for updated theoretical models that integrate digital-first entrepreneurial practices rather than retrofitting older constructs onto new realities.

4. POINTS OF CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE TWO DOMAINS

EM is often positioned as a departure from TM, yet this framing risks overstating the conceptual distance between the two. While EM introduces distinct practices and orientations, it does not reject the foundational principles of marketing theory. Instead, it adapts and reinterprets them in response to entrepreneurial conditions. Several areas of convergence demonstrate that EM grows from, rather than replaces, established marketing thought.

4.1. Value Creation

At the heart of both TM and EM lies the principle of value creation. Marketing, regardless of organisational

context, seeks to deliver offerings that satisfy customer needs and generate mutual benefit. TM achieves this through structured planning, segmentation, and positioning, often guided by formal market research and strategic analysis (Kotler & Keller, 2023). EM, by contrast, approaches value creation through experimentation, responsiveness, and iterative learning. Entrepreneurs often test ideas informally, adjust based on feedback, and refine their value proposition in real time (Morris et al., 2002). While the methods differ, the underlying goal remains consistent: to create meaningful value for customers. This shared orientation underscores the continuity between the two domains and challenges narratives that portray EM as a radical break.

However, the concept of convergence should not obscure the fundamental power imbalances between the two approaches. While both aim to create customer value, the mechanisms available to entrepreneurial firms differ significantly, and EM's reliance on experimentation may expose firms to higher levels of risk. Thus, although convergence exists at the conceptual level, it may be overstated at the practical level, where resourcing constraints fundamentally shape marketing outcomes.

4.2. Market Engagement

Both traditions recognise the importance of engaging with the market, though they differ in how this engagement is structured. TM relies on formal mechanisms such as surveys, focus groups, and analytics to generate insights and guide decision-making. These tools are well-suited to organisations with stable resources and established processes. Entrepreneurial firms, however, often operate without access to such infrastructure. They engage the market through informal conversations, community involvement, and direct observation. This approach allows for rapid feedback and adaptive learning, particularly in dynamic or resource-constrained environments (Stokes, 2000). Despite the methodological divergence, both approaches aim to understand customer preferences, anticipate demand, and respond effectively. The convergence lies in the commitment to market responsiveness, even if the pathways differ.

Both TM and EM share a key idea: value is not created in isolation but is co-created through meaningful interactions between the organization and its customers. This fits with service-dominant logic, which views value as something that forms through collaboration and ongoing engagement rather than through a one-sided delivery (Alshagawi & Mabkhot, 2024). A similar focus supports accountability-to-affected-populations (AAP) frameworks in humanitarian settings, where the success of programs depends on constant dialogue, adaptable feedback loops, and real responsiveness (Balint, 2021). In both areas, the focus is on listening, learning, and evolving, demonstrating a strong commitment to

understanding and meeting the needs of those being served.

4.3. Opportunity and Customer Need

A nuanced point of convergence concerns the relationship between opportunity recognition and customer need. TM typically begins with an analysis of customer needs, which then informs product development and positioning. EM often reverses this sequence. Entrepreneurs may identify a market opportunity based on personal insight, technological innovation, or environmental change, and then shape their offering to meet an emerging or latent need (Hills et al., 2008). While the starting points differ, both approaches ultimately converge around the creation of a market offering that addresses perceived demand. This convergence reflects a shared understanding that successful marketing requires alignment between the firm's capabilities and the customer's expectations.

These points of convergence suggest that EM is not a rejection of TM, but a contextual adaptation. It retains core principles such as value creation, market engagement, and customer responsiveness, while modifying their execution to suit entrepreneurial realities. Recognising these overlaps allows for a more integrated theoretical framework, one that acknowledges diversity in practice without fragmenting the discipline.

Building on this convergence, recent research shows that comprehensive customer-need knowledge can directly aid opportunity recognition. Firms' technological know-how and absorptive capacity increasingly blur the distinction between 'need first' and 'opportunity first' perspectives (Sipos, Rideg, & Al Najjar, 2025). At the same time, evidence from start-ups and SMEs demonstrates how digital and AI-enabled sensing tools accelerate the identification of concealed requirements and enable rapid, cost-effective experimentation to validate those needs, thereby tightening the cycle from opportunity recognition to market fit (Escoz Barragan & Becker, 2025; Kreiterling, 2023).

5. POINTS OF DIVERGENCE: WHY ENTREPRENEURIAL FIRMS BEHAVE DIFFERENTLY

The most meaningful differences between entrepreneurial and TM stem from the environmental and organisational conditions in which firms operate. Entrepreneurial ventures are typically characterised by uncertainty, resource scarcity, and the centrality of the founder, while TM theory assumes stability, structured planning, and access to resources. These contrasting contexts produce distinctive behaviours that mark EM as a contextual adaptation rather than a replication of established models.

5.1. Opportunity Orientation

Entrepreneurs often initiate ventures based on perceived opportunities rather than identified market gaps. Opportunity recognition is widely regarded as a defining feature of entrepreneurship, where individuals act on subjective perceptions of potential value even in the absence of clear market signals (Choi & Shepherd, 2004). This orientation can lead to market creation rather than market entry, as entrepreneurs introduce novel products or services that reshape consumer expectations. By contrast, TM typically begins with systematic analysis of customer needs and competitive landscapes. The entrepreneurial approach is therefore more proactive and speculative, reflecting a willingness to act under uncertainty and to shape markets rather than simply respond to them.

Recent methodological research highlights how action-oriented approaches, such as rapid prototyping, lean startup cycles, and design thinking components, have become crucial tools for entrepreneurs. These practices validate perceived opportunities against evolving customer needs, narrowing the gap between systematic evidence and intuitive judgment in entrepreneurial practice (Portuguez-Castro, 2023).

5.2. Resource Leveraging

Small firms compensate for limited resources by relying on creativity, partnerships, informal networks, and improvisation. Entrepreneurial ventures often achieve disproportionate outcomes through resource leveraging, drawing on strategic alliances, social capital, and flexible use of technology (Bäckbrö & Nyström, 2006). Such practices sit uneasily within conventional planning frameworks, which assume access to dedicated budgets, specialised staff, and formalised processes. Resource leveraging in EM reflects a mindset of doing more with less, where ingenuity and relational assets substitute for financial and structural capacity. This divergence underscores the contextual nature of EM, as resource constraints necessitate adaptive strategies distinct from those of larger firms.

Recent research highlights how digital skills and platforms function as multiplier resources, enhancing both sensing (customer signals) and seizing (rapid experimentation and distribution) capabilities for resource-constrained firms. Evidence from SMEs shows that digital capabilities accelerate opportunity recognition and market responsiveness, enabling firms to validate needs more efficiently and scale experimentation at lower cost (Galindo-Martín, Castaño-Martínez & Méndez-Picazo, 2024; Escoz Barragan & Becker, 2025).

5.3. The Role of the Entrepreneur

In entrepreneurial firms, the entrepreneur is central to marketing behaviour. Personal identity, lived experience, and motivation shape the venture's market positioning

and communication strategies. O'Dwyer, Gilmore, and Carson (2009) emphasise that EM is often inseparable from the entrepreneur's vision and values, with decision-making reflecting individual risk tolerance and creativity. TM, by contrast, separates managerial roles into functional units, with marketing typically delegated to specialised departments. This structural difference means that EM is more personalised and idiosyncratic, while TM is more standardised and institutionalised. The entrepreneur's influence introduces flexibility and responsiveness but also variability, as marketing strategies may evolve with the founder's personal trajectory.

5.4. Informal Processes

EM often lacks formal structures. Activities such as product development, segmentation, and strategy formation occur through iterative learning rather than stepwise progression. Stokes (2000) describes this as a process of trial and error, where entrepreneurs adapt quickly to feedback and adjust their strategies without the constraints of formal planning cycles. Informal processes allow for agility and responsiveness, but they also challenge the assumptions of TM, which relies on systematic analysis and documented plans. The informality of EM reflects both necessity and preference, as entrepreneurs often lack the resources for formal research and planning, and may value speed and flexibility over structure (Salvi, Belz & Bacq, 2023; Ayeni, 2025).

These points of divergence illustrate why entrepreneurial firms behave differently from their traditional counterparts. Opportunity orientation, resource leveraging, the central role of the entrepreneur, and informal processes all reflect the unique conditions of entrepreneurial contexts (Mathafena & Msimango-Galawe, 2023). These differences do not imply that TM is irrelevant, but they highlight the need for adaptive frameworks that capture the realities of entrepreneurial practice. Recognising these divergences enriches the conceptual relationship between the two domains and underscores the importance of contextual sensitivity in marketing theory.

At the same time, research on co-creation and open innovation demonstrates that, when adjusted to consumer readiness and the necessary degree of involvement, participatory engagement offers entrepreneurs a structured way to transform casual customer interactions into practical innovation inputs. This formalises what would otherwise remain ad hoc learning, bridging the gap between informality and structured innovation (Portuguez-Castro, 2023).

6. RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO FIELDS

The relationship between EM and TM is best understood as contextual rather than oppositional. TM remains relevant as a foundational discipline, but its models must be adapted to suit the realities of entrepreneurial contexts. EM should therefore be conceptualised as the behavioural expression of marketing under entrepreneurial conditions, where uncertainty, resource scarcity, and opportunity-driven behaviour shape practice in ways that differ from the assumptions of established frameworks.

This perspective challenges the tendency to frame EM as a competing paradigm. Instead, it positions EM as an adaptive extension of TM, one that reconfigures established principles to meet the demands of entrepreneurial environments. TM's emphasis on customer orientation, segmentation, and value creation continues to underpin entrepreneurial practice, but the methods of execution differ. Entrepreneurs often rely on informal processes, rapid experimentation, and personal networks rather than formalised planning and research (Pardede et al., 2025). The divergence lies in practice rather than principle, suggesting that EM is best understood as a contextual adaptation rather than a theoretical rupture. From a strategic management standpoint, the relationship between EM and TM may also be interpreted through the concept of organisational ambidexterity. Firms often need to balance exploratory behaviours associated with agility and innovation (EM) with exploitative behaviours grounded in structured planning and optimisation (TM). Viewing EM and TM as complementary components of ambidextrous organisations reinforces the argument that EM is not a rival model but an adaptive extension responsive to uncertainty (Li, Ming & Song, 2024; Al Jabri & Lahrech, 2025).

Scholars have increasingly argued that entrepreneurship and marketing are mutually reinforcing domains. Kraus, Harms, and Fink (2012) highlight that EM integrates insights from both fields, creating a hybrid construct that reflects the dynamic interplay between opportunity recognition and market engagement. This integration underscores the importance of viewing EM not as a rejection of marketing theory, but as a reconfiguration that draws on entrepreneurship's behavioural orientation and marketing's strategic logic. Bridging these domains, EM contributes to a more holistic understanding of how firms create and sustain value in uncertain environments.

The entrepreneurial environment requires levels of agility, experimentation, and personal influence not captured fully by traditional frameworks. Hills, Hultman, and Miles (2008) emphasise that EM evolves continuously in response to technological change, market volatility, and shifting consumer expectations. This adaptability reflects the entrepreneurial imperative to act quickly, test ideas, and adjust strategies in real time. TM, with its reliance on structured planning and resource

sufficiency, struggles to capture this dynamism. EM therefore fills a conceptual gap by articulating how marketing operates under conditions of uncertainty and constraint.

At the same time, EM retains continuity with TM through its commitment to customer value and market responsiveness. Both domains recognise that successful marketing requires alignment between organisational capabilities and customer needs. The difference lies in the pathways to achieving this alignment. TM relies on formal research and structured processes, while EM relies on intuition, experimentation, and relational engagement (Sá et al., 2023). These differences highlight the contextual nature of marketing practice, but they do not undermine the shared foundations of the discipline.

Rethinking the relationship between the two fields has important implications for theory and practice. Conceptually, it suggests that marketing scholarship should move beyond dichotomous framings and embrace integrative models that capture diversity in practice. Practically, it highlights the need for entrepreneurs to draw selectively from TM principles while adapting them to their unique contexts. This reframing positions EM as a vital complement to TM, enriching the discipline by extending its relevance to entrepreneurial environments.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This re-examination of entrepreneurial and TM highlights the need for integrative frameworks that capture both continuity and divergence across organisational contexts. For researchers, the implication is to move beyond dichotomous framings and develop theories that account for the behavioural, structural, and contextual dimensions of marketing practice. Such work can enrich the discipline by situating EM within the broader intellectual trajectory of marketing while recognising its distinctive features. Future research should explore how EM evolves in response to technological disruption, globalisation, and shifting consumer expectations, and how these dynamics reshape the boundaries of marketing theory.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that entrepreneurs should selectively adapt TM principles to their own conditions. Customer orientation and value creation remain essential, but they must be pursued through methods that reflect entrepreneurial realities, such as agility, experimentation, and resource leveraging. Entrepreneurs can benefit from recognising the enduring relevance of TM while embracing the improvisational and opportunity-driven practices that define EM. This dual orientation enables entrepreneurial firms to remain responsive to uncertainty while still grounded in the enduring logic of marketing. There is also significant

scope for cross-sector learning. EM principles are highly applicable to humanitarian and development programme design, where implementers navigate shifting needs, donor unpredictability, and resource scarcity. Integrating EM frameworks into management education, humanitarian leadership training, and programme cycle management could strengthen organisational resilience and adaptive capacity across both profit and non-profit settings.

The implications extend to policy and education as well. Business schools and support organisations should integrate EM into curricula and training, ensuring that entrepreneurs are equipped with both foundational marketing knowledge and adaptive strategies. By bridging theory and practice, EM offers a pathway to more resilient and innovative firms, contributing to both scholarly advancement and economic vitality.

8. CONCLUSION

EM and TM share a common intellectual ancestry, yet they diverge in how they respond to organisational realities. Entrepreneurial firms operate in contexts defined by uncertainty, opportunity recognition, and resource scarcity, which shape marketing behaviour in distinctive ways. These practices differ from the formal, structured approaches associated with TM theory, but they do not undermine its foundational principles. Instead, EM adapts those principles to the lived conditions of smaller, innovative ventures.

This conceptual re-examination demonstrates that EM is neither a wholesale replacement for TM nor a simple extension of it. Rather, it represents a contextually driven reinterpretation that warrants its own scholarly attention while remaining firmly anchored in the broader field of marketing theory. By recognising both the convergences and divergences between the two domains, scholars and practitioners can develop richer frameworks that capture the diversity of marketing practice across organisational forms.

The paper also underscores the importance of moving beyond dichotomous framings. EM should not be seen as a radical departure, but as a dynamic reconfiguration that reflects the realities of entrepreneurial contexts. This reframing allows marketing theory to remain relevant across organisational scales, from large corporations to small start-ups. Situating EM within wider management literature including complexity theory, adaptive leadership, and organisational learning further demonstrates its relevance across diverse organisational types. These perspectives reinforce the argument that EM is not limited to SMEs but reflects a broader strategic approach suitable for any organisation operating in turbulent and resource-constrained environments. Ultimately, EM enriches the discipline by extending its applicability, offering insights into how firms create and

sustain value under conditions of uncertainty, and ensuring that marketing scholarship remains responsive to the evolving nature of business practice.

9. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The conception and design of the study were undertaken by M.K.A. The development of the theoretical framework was carried out by M.K.A., O.A., and K.O.O., who also contributed to the primary drafting of the manuscript. All authors collaborated in drafting, revising, and approving the final manuscript.

10. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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