

**Qualitative research at the marketing/entrepreneurship interface**

This special issue addresses differing “entrepreneurial marketing” topics, namely, part of the broader marketing literature also referred to as the “marketing/entrepreneurship interface”. A body of literature exists at this interface (Hills and LaForge, 1992; Crick, 2004; Hills *et al.*, 2008; Morrish *et al.*, 2010; Whalen *et al.*, 2016), although perhaps inevitably, particular academics will have their own opinion about what topics lie at the interface. However, some studies view entrepreneurial marketing in a behavioural sense as a “process”, whereas in other studies, the entrepreneur and/or their management team together with their firm are respective units of analysis.

Although entrepreneurial marketing activities can occur in larger firms (Miles and Darroch, 2006), the focus of the analysis has tended to be in smaller-sized firms. In fact, some academics classify particular studies involving larger firms under the domain of “corporate entrepreneurship”. An interest in smaller-sized firms is relevant given that for some time it has been noted that first, various countries contain many of these types of businesses across various sectors; second, owner-managers’ objectives and strategies may be constrained by their relative lack of resources (Carson *et al.*, 1995).

Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this Guest Editorial to debate the merits of particular viewpoints on the domain of entrepreneurial marketing, but rather to consider the findings from papers in respect of facets of behaviour. Morris *et al.* (2002) consider various facets, namely, proactive orientation, opportunity-driven behaviours, customer intensity, innovation-focused behaviours, risk management, resource leveraging behaviours and value creation. Entrepreneurs may be proactive and engage in risk-seeking behaviour when starting a business. However, they may vary in the extent to which they undertake other aspects of entrepreneurial marketing behaviour, such as in the way they seek opportunities, focus on customers’ needs, add value to them, leverage resources and innovate. Studies that explain variance in entrepreneurial marketing behaviour and offer counter-intuitive findings contribute to the existing knowledge base.

The move to self-employment can carry risk/reward considerations in line with the work of Sarasvathy (2001). Nevertheless, in balancing risk/rewards, readers of this special issue might ponder on a fundamental question related to start-up firms. What is the typical key difference between a new start-up firm and an existing organisation, where the latter tends to feature in much of the marketing literature? The answer is that a new start-up firm is more likely to have no customers! Some of the marketing literature is therefore less applicable to these start-up firms; indeed, engaging in particular mainstream marketing practices may be too expensive and time consuming. Such a consideration is important in respect of how business schools address the needs of members of start-up firms and students considering this entrepreneurial route after or even prior to graduation. Therefore, particular studies involving entrepreneurial marketing have drawn on practitioner-based literature such as customer development, lean start-up and business modelling (Ries, 2011; Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010; Blank, 2013; Gassmann *et al.*, 2014).

This brings me to the focus of this special issue that addresses aspects of entrepreneurial marketing behaviour in different contexts; that is, small and larger firms plus new and existing firms. However, all the six papers take a qualitative methodological perspective in line with the aim of the journal. The first paper in this special issue by Crick *et al.* [1] outlines two issues. First, the importance of an evolving business model by owner-managers to



overcome changing environmental circumstances (competition, social changes, etc.). Second, even with perseverance and an evolving business model to build resilience, if partners cannot work together for whatever reason a firm is still likely to fail. This is important given the numbers of family-owned and operated businesses across many countries, some using “lifestyle” as opposed to “growth-oriented” objectives. Although the paper by Crick *et al.* is in the context of partners in a same sex relationship in the UK tourism sector, maintaining an agreed work/life balance arguably has relevance in various sector and country contexts. The paper is also in context to partnerships in a generic sense, where the owner-managers are in a business and personal relationship.

A small owner-managed business theme follows in the second paper by Turnbull *et al.*, in which attention turns to the issue of gender in entrepreneurial marketing practices. Many studies exist on topics relating to gender that range on the negative side from women being disadvantaged in various ways such as pay differentials in salaried roles, through to difficulties in raising finances after a move to self-employment. In contrast, literature exists about the role of what is termed by some as “feminine capital” and the positive issues that women can leverage to help their firm’s performance. Specifically, Turnbull *et al.* consider female owner-managers of small firms; in effect, to demonstrate that in certain organisations the owner and the business are the same, and so, individuals need to build a personal brand. One can easily consider successful celebrity examples via reality television appearances through to those finding fame on internet blogs, YouTube and so on. In contrast, Turnbull *et al.* use an impression management lens within a UK study of smaller-scale female entrepreneurs, finding that they engage in various entrepreneurial marketing behaviours and not least supplication in self-promotion.

The issue of gender also features in the third paper by Foster and Brindley. Their paper considers the entrepreneurial marketing activities of self-employed women that operate in the marketing services sector, with a focus on their networking practices. Networking is a topic that features heavily in existing literature; for example, the importance of strong and weak ties in social capital, trust versus opportunism among partners and various other related issues. Their study attempts to take a holistic perspective in summarising how they build, use and value networks, i.e. over the course of their respective business life cycle to date. The paper also specifically reminds us that women are not a homogenous group, and draws attention to the need to avoid making comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs, and rather focusing on different intra-group experiences.

Networks is a continuing theme in the fourth paper by Andersson *et al.*, but this time we turn our attention to the fact that entrepreneurial marketing practices can also exist in larger firms and instead of the gender focus of the third paper, the “international” nature of operations is considered. International Entrepreneurship as an academic discipline has developed a body of literature. In fact, a number of papers have featured work at the Marketing/International Entrepreneurship interface. One topic that has received much attention involves firms that rapidly internationalise after inception; however, this specific paper contributes to knowledge by providing insights involving the importance of networks in Swedish firms entering the culturally diverse market of China.

Our attention then returns to the context of tourism mentioned in the first paper, but in the fifth paper by Krisjanous and Carruthers, we move to ghost tourism via a multi-country study. As the authors point out, a range of topics exists under the category of “dark tourism” and their paper is towards the lighter side of the categorisation. A ghost tour is something that many readers may have seen advertised, but not participated in within their own tourism activities. The authors discuss the results from interviews, interrogation of secondary data, plus participant observation, and find various aspects of entrepreneurial

behaviour in operators' business practices. The authors also highlight the importance of co-creating activities in a tour with customers to add value.

The final paper by Crick[2] moves to the topic of "coopetition", namely, simultaneous collaboration and competition; the study is in the context of the New Zealand wine sector. A Marketing academic colleague once discussed with me a comment in an examination whereby students needed to say what Marketing involved and one had written something like "to destroy the competition". This comment stayed in my memory and made me wonder how often students perceive that the subject of "Marketing" is a zero sum game. A body of literature exists on this topic. For example, in formal alliances through to smaller firms sharing funds and knowledge in various ways. Of course, in certain circumstances, coopetition only lasts up to a point, and after that stage, owner-managers need to concentrate on their own firms. Crick discusses the under-researched area of the drivers (or antecedents) of coopetition activities, for example, managers sharing a cooperative mind-set and having access to rivals' resources and/or capabilities. Nevertheless, if a single vineyard produces poor quality wine the reputation of a whole cluster may suffer. Therefore, sharing knowledge via wine tasting among producers can be very important, as respective owner-managers consider the broader reputational implications of other producers (competitors) in a region on their own firm's performance.

#### *Avenues for future research*

Various avenues exist for future studies at the marketing/entrepreneurship interface. Nevertheless, some time back, in respect to the broader marketing literature, Baker (2001, p. 25) refers to the value of a publication in the *Journal of Marketing Obscurity* that "is only cited by subsequent contributors to this same publication". Moreover, as Piercy (2002, p. 355) suggests, to get work published, certain academics are "obsessing with the obviously obsolete". It is important that academics are not working on "out of date" issues and phenomena that do not exist outside of a marketing textbook and in ways most appealing to journal reviewers and editors. Today, about 15 years after Piercy's (2002) commentary, in the UK and elsewhere, it appears that "impact" and "relevance" are becoming more important to balance with the academic quality of publications. For example, these issues are of interest to certain accreditation bodies and those administering research evaluation exercises. This means that it is becoming increasingly useful for academics to take notice of what entrepreneurs and management teams that confront real entrepreneurial marketing issues believe are areas of interest and address these with appropriate research studies. This may include interventions to demonstrate impact such as via action research or appreciative inquiry (Crick and Crick, 2016).

Outside of the topics in this guest edition, entrepreneurial marketing studies can address aspects of contemporary phenomena. For example, with the changing nature of technology, such as digital platform business models and other innovations, studies at the interface between the disciplines of marketing and entrepreneurship have plenty of scope to add to the existing knowledge base. In fact, certain technology is changing so fast with entrepreneurs using disruptive business models, it is important that research is undertaken that is relevant to practicing managers and students about to enter salaried positions or self-employment. One particular issue involves the "sharing economy" that is gaining interest in academic studies. Furthermore, with immigration patterns varying across countries, scope exists to understand the entrepreneurial marketing practices from members of various sub-cultures and the implications for policy makers, not least with highly skilled migrants starting knowledge intensive businesses. Another topic involves social entrepreneurship, as interest is growing in social and environmental causes with some innovative solutions.

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Whatever the exact topic, studies that are theoretically underpinned, readily accessible to practitioners, can add value, assist with an impact on business practices and address “how and why” issues via qualitative methods, may be avenues that academics pursue to move knowledge forward.

Guest editorial

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## Notes

1. For transparency purposes, management of the paper by Crick (D) *et al.* was via the Editor-in-Chief for ethical reasons given that Crick is the Guest Editor of the special issue. The Editor-in-Chief assigned referees under a double blind review process and accepted the paper after the authors addressed comments from those referees.
2. Management of the paper by Crick (JM) was via the Guest Editor and followed a double blind review process. However, since the author is a relative of the Guest Editor, for transparency purposes, consultation occurred with the Editor-in-Chief who had the final decision over this paper's acceptance.

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### About the Guest Editor

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