



# An exploratory study of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs

Entrepreneurial  
marketing in  
SMEs

## The role of the founder-entrepreneur

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Marketing has been seen as one of the greatest problems faced by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), but simultaneously one of the most important activities for their growth and survival. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to determine the importance and role of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs.

**Design/methodology/approach** – To reach this goal, a qualitative approach was adopted, with two case studies (SMEs) selected. As data-collecting instruments, interviews and documentary analysis were used, and the data-treatment technique was content analysis.

**Findings** – The empirical evidence obtained shows that the importance of entrepreneurial marketing is recognized, but that it differs considerably according to firm size. In the SMEs studied, marketing is informal and reactive to market opportunities and the founder-entrepreneur has an influence on the decision-making process.

**Practical implications** – The study contributes to the existing research about the role the founder-entrepreneur can have in the firm's ability to develop entrepreneurial marketing activities. From a practical viewpoint, the study has found that entrepreneurial marketing is based on networking to build and support marketing activity and it is associated with the use and development of the marketing management competencies of their entrepreneurs.

**Originality/value** – The study is innovative because the authors are able to outline empirically new issues for future investigation in this area of scarce research. Second, an integrative and holistic model is proposed for entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs and this represents the primary contribution of the study.

**Keywords** Communication, SMEs, Entrepreneurial marketing, Portugal, Founder-entrepreneur, Networking

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

Due to global competition, technological progress and the new needs of consumers, competitive paradigms are in constant change. Those changes are leading firms to compete simultaneously in different dimensions such as design and product development, production, distribution, communication and marketing (Singh *et al.*, 2008).

Indeed, marketing has grown in importance over the years (Moorman and Rust, 1999; Walsh and Lipinski, 2009). According to Churchill and Iacobucci (2005), anyone

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involved in the world of business must have knowledge about the capacities of marketing, since in a competitive environment, no business manages to gain an advantage and retain customers without it. For Vega (2009), marketing forms one of the fundamental pillars for fulfillment of objectives and organizational success. In this connection, Reijonen (2010) states that marketing can be understood as strategy, culture/philosophy, tactic/method or market intelligence.

Although marketing plays an important role in the success of large firms, its role is even more critical for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), since the loss or gain of a single customer can often determine their survival (Becherer *et al.*, 2008). According to Reijonen and Laukkanen (2010), marketing has been seen as one of the greatest problems faced by small businesses in their operations, but at the same time, one of the most important and essential business activities for SME growth and survival. Stokes (2000) states also that entrepreneurs and owner-managers of small firms tend to see marketing as a tactic to attract new business, and do not apply the philosophical and strategic concept of the term to the same extent.

SMEs have characteristics that distinguish them from large organizations (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003) and these differences are not limited to size, but also involve objectives, management style and marketing itself (Carson, 1990). For this reason, Reijonen (2010) claims it has been demonstrated that traditional marketing theories are not able to give a satisfactory explanation of marketing in SMEs. Therefore, the role of marketing in SMEs has aroused the interest of many investigators (e.g. Becherer *et al.*, 2008; Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Reijonen, 2010; Stokes, 2000). Gilmore *et al.* (2012) even say that marketing management and decision making in SMEs has been a subject of investigation for at least 30 years.

In this context, Stokes (2000, p. 2) describes entrepreneurial marketing as the “marketing carried out by entrepreneurs of entrepreneurial ventures” using tactics to attract new business that are quite different from traditional textbook-type marketing (Carson and Gilmore, 2000) otherwise known as administrative marketing. Here, we define entrepreneurial marketing as a process with an entrepreneurial spirit (marketing by founder-entrepreneur) (Hacioglu *et al.*, 2012). In addition, in this study, a founder-entrepreneur is defined as a person who creates a business, an owner and self-employed, whereas a manager is a paid employee who works under the entrepreneur.

In Portugal, entrepreneurial marketing has not been given due importance. However, the predominance of SMEs in the Portuguese business world is evident. In 2008, SMEs accounted for 99.7 percent of non-financial companies. The turnover generated by these firms was around 58 percent of total business. Portuguese SMEs are responsible for 72.5 percent of employment. The greatest number of SMEs is found in the sales sector, generating the largest share of turnover, equivalent to 41.6 percent of all business carried out (INE, 2010).

In this connection, given the importance of SMEs in the Portuguese economy, the constant competitive pressure they are under, and the lack of investigation into the marketing activities in this business sector, it was considered relevant to study the role and importance of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs in the Portuguese context. As SMEs face some limitations, such as having few major clients and limited resources for business and marketing (Jones and Rowley, 2011; Kolabi *et al.*, 2011), entrepreneurial marketing becomes more appropriate in this type of firm (Hill, 2001). Therefore, this study aims to determine the importance and role of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs.

In addition, SMEs usually lack marketing specialists and their entrepreneurs are the main decision makers. Recent research in the field (e.g. Becherer *et al.*, 2003; Phua and Jones, 2010; Guido *et al.*, 2011) has stressed the importance of the inherent characteristics of individual entrepreneurs in choosing to adopt a marketing approach in their SMEs. Therefore, our central research question is:

*RQ1.* Is there an influence of the founder-entrepreneur on the entrepreneurial marketing process?

The paper is organized as follows. The next section gives a theoretical overview of marketing in SMEs, entrepreneurial marketing and the role of the founder-entrepreneur. Section 3, based on a qualitative approach, presents methodology and data from two cases of SMEs studied in Portugal. Section 4 presents and discusses the exploratory findings, paying special attention to entrepreneurial marketing. Finally, Section 5 concludes, puts forward suggestions for SME entrepreneurs and researchers, and presents some limitations of the study.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Marketing in SMEs

According to Singh *et al.* (2008), Walsh and Lipinski (2009) and Muhammad *et al.* (2010), SMEs play an increasingly important role in the world economy, and are considered the backbone of economic growth in many countries, contributing to the creation of job opportunities and acting as suppliers of goods and services for large organizations. Besides, Jutla *et al.* (2002) state that 80 percent of global economic growth derives from the SME sector. Internationally, various studies are related to the importance of SMEs for a country's development and economic stability (e.g. Cunningham, 2011; Dixit and Pandey, 2011). A common characteristic of European economies is the fact that SMEs form a pillar of their business structure and Portugal is no exception to the rule.

It is important to recognize that SMEs are different from large firms. Their unique characteristics do not always have a great influence on the markets, but even so, it must be recognized that their size often allows them to obtain competitive advantages. It is also clear that organizational structures in small firms are much less rigid, sophisticated and complex than in large firms (Hill, 2001). The majority of SMEs have simple systems and procedures, which permits flexibility, immediate feedback, a short decision-making chain, and better understanding of and a faster response to customer needs. But despite those characteristics, SMEs are under constant pressure to remain competitive in national and global markets (Singh *et al.*, 2008).

Another important characteristic linked to SMEs is the non-separation from entrepreneurship (Hill, 2001), since the entrepreneur has a dominant role in the decision-making process (Carson and Gilmore, 2000). In SMEs, entrepreneurs are personally and directly in charge of the firm's financial, technical, social and moral responsibilities, whatever its legal form. Entrepreneurially oriented firms do not only create new markets but also organize existing ones by launching new products or services and influencing customer behavior. Those firms offer the customer greater value and simultaneously make them buy their products or services (Zortea-Jonhston *et al.*, 2012).

In this context, the barriers to SME growth are traditionally related to severe limitation of resources and to the dimensions of management competences (Fillis, 2002).

According to Jutla *et al.* (2002), SMEs have special needs due to their limited resources in terms of staff, finance, management knowledge, marketing, selling and/or information technology. Bettiol *et al.* (2012) believe there are also limitations connected to the innovative nature of marketing.

In these circumstances, it has been demonstrated that traditional marketing theories are not sufficiently able to explain marketing in small firms (Reijonen, 2010). In SMEs, marketing is not the simplistic promotional activity it seems to be at first sight, but nor is it traditional marketing (Stokes, 2000). This author adds that in small firms, marketing is used for the needs of the moment, with little attention being paid to plans, strategies and analyses, which contrasts with marketing in large firms, where it is seen as formal, planned and well-structured.

Other researchers in this area (e.g. Hill and Wright, 2000; Morris *et al.*, 2002) have referred to this “haphazard” marketing approach often adopted in SMEs as entrepreneurial marketing, thereby stressing its intuitive and situation-specific nature, as well as its implementation without previous planning activity. SME entrepreneurs prefer simple, pragmatic and intuitive marketing planning over complexity and formality (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003) although Guido *et al.* (2011) argue that firms with formal marketing plans outperformed those without.

Summarizing, SMEs have characteristics that distinguish them from large organizations (Eggers *et al.*, 2012; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). These differences are not only of size, but also involve objectives, management style and marketing. SMEs have limited resources (such as time and marketing), a lack of specialized knowledge (entrepreneurs tend to be generalists rather than specialists) and limited market impact. These limitations influence marketing characteristics (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Thus, for Carson (1990), the distinct style of marketing in SMEs includes a set of unique characteristics (Table I).

Characteristics	Description
Inherent informality of structure, evolution and implementation	For SMEs, marketing planning is informal in structure, evolution and implementation. There is little or no adhesion to formal structure and frameworks. Marketing is carried out according to the small firm's capacities and circumstances
Restricted in sphere of activity	Due to their limited resources, marketing activity in small firms is inevitably limited in its reach and intensity. SMEs have neither the need nor the will to apply marketing strategies and costly plans
Simplistic and random/casual	The limitation of resources is shown in marketing, which is simplistic, casual and often sensitive and reactive to competitors' activity
Products	Small firms, particularly those in the initial stages of development, are inherently oriented toward products, and so it is no surprise that a great deal of their marketing is also oriented to products, compared to large competitors
Founder-entrepreneur involvement	The omnipresent founder-entrepreneur is perhaps the most important factor for the marketing style of small firms. The person in charge is involved in all aspects of the business and marketing is no exception. The entrepreneur must be committed to marketing

**Table I.**  
Characteristics of  
marketing in SMEs

## 2.2. Entrepreneurial marketing

According to Becherer *et al.* (2008), SME marketing should be designated entrepreneurial marketing, since it represents an aggressive and untraditional approach, able to provide entrepreneurs with the means to guarantee the success of their business, despite their limited resources. Jones and Rowley (2011) and Eggers *et al.* (2012) also argue that entrepreneurial marketing is particularly suited to small firms. Beverland and Lockshin (2004) and Becherer *et al.* (2006) define entrepreneurial marketing as effective action or adaptation of marketing theory to the specific needs of SMEs. Those effective actions should simultaneously solve matters such as restrictions regarding innovation, opportunities, risk and resources.

The term entrepreneurial marketing is used to describe the marketing processes of firms pursuing opportunities in uncertain market circumstances (Becherer *et al.*, 2006). Morris *et al.* (2002) define identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation. Entrepreneurial marketing is characterized as an entrepreneurial orientation having seven underlying dimensions, namely, pro-activeness, focus on opportunities, calculated risk taking, innovativeness, customer intensity, resource leveraging and value creation (Morris *et al.*, 2002; Becherer *et al.*, 2008).

According to Zorzea-Jonhston *et al.* (2012), through entrepreneurial orientation, firms achieve a greater balance because marketing is promoted by stimulating markets and innovations, therefore managing to acquire competitive advantage since it is possible for the organization to mould itself to the market. Recent literature on entrepreneurial marketing has shown that small firms engage in particular marketing strategies and activities that do not necessarily reflect the coded processes observed in large organizations (Bettiol *et al.*, 2012).

Hill (2001) argues that although SMEs do much more than merely sell, they are still very focussed on sales. Hogarth-Scott *et al.* (1996) conclude that small firm business-people have various ways of communicating with customers and promoting their products and services. According to these authors, great emphasis is frequently given to word-of-mouth communication, which is well adapted to limited resources and does not bring in too many customers at the same time. SMEs have the advantage of closer contact with customers and are more flexible, responsive to change and more innovative than larger firms. They rely significantly on word-of-mouth for promotion (Stokes, 2000; Stokes and Lomax, 2002).

Gilmore *et al.* (2001) argue also that networking is a naturally inherent aspect of SMEs, due to entrepreneurs' decision making, particularly decisions related to marketing. These authors claim that SMEs carry out network marketing, through the natural activity of interacting and participating in social, business and commercial activities. Network marketing is based on activities oriented toward people and is informal, often discreet, interactive, exchangeable, integrated, habitual and can be passive or pro-active (Ramaswami and Srivastava, 2009; Coviello and Joseph, 2011). Many SME founder-entrepreneurs recognize the advantage of keeping on good terms with competitors for general well-being and also recognize the importance of including both actual and potential customers in their network (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Small firms use personal social and business networks for information gathering, idea testing and advice, and draw on experiential knowledge to intuitively develop their competencies (Carson and McCarton-Quinn, 1995; Gilmore *et al.*, 2001; Hill, 2001).

Entrepreneurial marketing is based on what entrepreneurs do (Stokes, 2000), and therefore has close links to research on SME marketing (Miles and Darroch, 2004).

Table II shows the differences between traditional marketing and entrepreneurial marketing.

*2.3 Role of the founder-entrepreneur*

Definitions of entrepreneurship have primarily created distinctions between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs based on criteria such as status as a company founder, age of firm, or orientation toward growth (Begley, 1995). However, the fundamental distinction between entrepreneurs and managers of SMEs is that entrepreneurs are interested in innovative efforts focussed on long-term growth, whereas managers of small firms, by contrast, pursue personal goals. Even this distinction, however, can run into difficulty when we try to define what is innovative or to identify who is not interested in long-term growth. Johnson (1990) attempted to deal with the question of interest in long-term growth by defining the entrepreneur as one who creates a venture and institutes practices intended to increase the firm’s size. In this definition, the intention to grow is a key differentiating feature of the entrepreneur (Begley, 1995).

Begley and Boyd (1987) offered the simplest definition of an entrepreneur, that is, a person who has founded his or her own firm. This definition can be readily applied without the need for major definitional clarification, but it does not include orientation toward growth. In this study, we start with the premise that founders of a business differ from non-founding managers in ways that justify regarding founders as entrepreneurs and non-founders as non-entrepreneurs. The founder decides to start a new venture from scratch. The non-founding manager, on the other hand, decides to take over an existing business (Begley, 1995). The entrepreneur is not controlled, but controls the overall business, including managers.

In these circumstances, the competence of SME founder-entrepreneurs is of fundamental importance, given their nature and characteristics and particularly their dominant role and influence in decision making (Carson and Gilmore, 2000). Use of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions within an SME will largely reflect the decisions of the founder-entrepreneur (Becherer *et al.*, 2008). Carson and Gilmore (2000) also show how founder-entrepreneurs strive to improve decision making, through building their competences and developing their knowledge through experience over time. Thus, entrepreneurial marketing activities can be strongly influenced by the characteristics of the founder-entrepreneur. As Krueger and Carsrud (1993, p. 318) state, “initial choices by business founders have significant repercussions that persist long after firm emergence.”

	Traditional marketing	Entrepreneurial marketing
Concept	Orientation toward the customer: orientation toward the market and subsequent product development	Orientation toward innovation: orientation toward the idea and intuitive assessment of market needs
Strategy	Descending segmentation, targeting and positioning	Ascending targeting of customers and other influential groups
Methods	Marketing mix	Interactive/word-of-mouth marketing methods
Market intelligence	Formalized systems of investigation and intelligence	Informal networks and gathering of information

**Source:** Adapted from Stokes (2000)

**Table II.**  
Traditional marketing vs entrepreneurial marketing



Entrepreneurial experience is one of the more obvious means by which individuals prepare themselves for the possibility of becoming business founders (Becherer *et al.*, 2008; Baron and Ensley, 2006). Prior experience as an entrepreneur should influence how the owner approaches the new venture, as well as the nature and extent of the entrepreneurial marketing employed (Becherer *et al.*, 2008). For the last-named authors, entrepreneurs with more entrepreneurial experience use opportunity-focussed marketing strategies, are more pro-active and use leveraging strategies more frequently.

Becherer *et al.* (2006) found key differences in the decision-making tactics of the entrepreneur regarding the reasons to create a business. The founder influences aspects of entrepreneurial marketing. More precisely, marketing in SMEs varies according to the motivations for starting the business, and how the business was created (Becherer *et al.*, 2008). The motivations and decisions of the founder-entrepreneur directing a firm to pursue a particular opportunity are pro-active adaptations and fundamental entrepreneurial behavior (Dess *et al.*, 1997). The emphasis on entrepreneurial marketing actions is closely linked to the founder-entrepreneur who influences the firm directly, rather than through layers of management (Becherer *et al.*, 2008).

Most management decisions are made by the entrepreneur, and as SMEs tend not to employ specialists, founder-entrepreneurs are obliged to become “generalists” undertaking a wide range of business activities. In turn, this means that SMEs are also significantly characterized by the management style and personality of their founder (Hill, 2001; Stokes, 2000). In fact, the founder-entrepreneur plays a fundamental role in orienting entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs, and this may reflect how passionate the entrepreneur is about the business.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Type of study and case selection

Recent years have shown a significant increase in qualitative research, considered essential to discover deeper processes in organizations and to understand how these processes develop over time (Dustin *et al.*, 2010). Normally associated with qualitative methodology we find the case study, which deals with studying a given case in greater depth/detail (Freeman and Cavusgil, 2007; Yin, 2009). Therefore, this study resorted to a qualitative investigative methodology (case study method), i.e., based on observation of business behaviors, aiming to analyze in depth and detail entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs. The units of analysis were consequently the entrepreneur and the firm.

Case studies can be single or multiple (Yin, 2009). Multiple case studies are preferable as there is more support for results. Cases should be carefully selected in order to produce similar or contrasting results for foreseeable reasons. The main advantage of this method consists in the depth, which allows explanation of the case studied and its relation with others (Mattar, 1994).

This study opted to analyze two cases (SMEs) intentionally (Patton, 1990), so as to guarantee obtaining the desired results. Easy access to the companies and their particular characteristics were criteria taken into consideration in their selection. The chosen firms were *Fã Clube do Queijo* (case 1) and *DAMAR* (case 2), both located in the region of Beira Interior (Portugal). Both firms are classified as SMEs, according to European Commission Recommendation (2003/361/EC).

#### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

For Yin (2009), sources of evidence should be complementary and the most common, normally used in elaborating case studies, are documentation, archives, interviews,

observation and physical artifacts. Even so, for the author, interviews are among the most commonly used strategies for gathering qualitative data.

According to Patton (1990) and Yin (2009), the interview is one of the basic instruments for collecting data, this being a personal conversation between individuals. The authors state that the interview can be structured or semi-structured. Mattar (1994) mentions that structured interviews set out from standardized questions, whereas in semi-structured interviews, despite the existence of a script with the main topics to be addressed, other questions not contained in the script but deemed pertinent can be asked (Mattar, 1994).

Therefore, in this study a semi-structured interview was elaborated and carried out with the founder-entrepreneurs, with a view to obtaining precise and detailed information about entrepreneurial marketing in their companies. The interviews were arranged by telephone. Before beginning the interviews, which took place on May 20 and 21, 2012, a short presentation was made about their relevance, the sphere of application and the objective of the investigation. The interviews, each lasting about one hour, were analyzed and interpreted textually, in written form, and content analysis was duly carried out. Throughout the text some quotations from the interviewees are inserted. Besides the interviews, use was made of the information available on the company web sites and some documentation supplied by the companies, as well as non-participatory observation.

Table III presents a synthesis of the methodological aspects adopted in our study.

#### 4. Case studies

##### 4.1 Case 1: *Fã Clube do Queijo*

The business idea of the *Fã Clube do Queijo* company, located in Covilhã (Beira Interior region), emerged as a response to the closure of firms which had been occurring in traditional commerce. Paulo Longo, the founder-entrepreneur of this SME, decided to create an online shop through the Facebook social network, due essentially to the reduced cost and possibility of having a presence in various countries. The choice of products was to be the most appealing and traditional in the region, with Serra da Estrela cheese being chosen initially. Later, due to the success of the undertaking, other traditional products came to be included such as wine, rye bread, sweets and charcuterie[1].

Research procedures	Geographical area	Beira interior (Portugal)
	Investigative approach	Qualitative investigation
	Case selection	Intentional/convenience
	Sector of activity	Commerce
	Firm size	SMEs
	Units of analysis	Entrepreneur and firm
Data-collecting instruments	Case studies	2 interviews
		Founder-entrepreneur
		Arranged by telephone
		Lasting about 1 hour
		Documentation supplied by the firms;
		company site
		Non-participative observation

**Table III.**  
Methodological aspects  
of the investigation

Data analysis

Content analysis



*Fã Clube do Queijo*'s mission is to make known, promote and sell all the firm's products, at the lowest price and make them available, at home, within 24 hours, in any part of the Portuguese mainland and islands (Azores and Madeira) and the European Union[2].

According to the interviewee:

The bulk of the firm's customers are Portuguese (Lisbon, Porto and the Algarve) and to increase the number of foreign customers, the firm has been concentrating on partnerships in order to reduce transport costs.

The SME, which at present has 12 collaborators involved in the production of high-quality products, recognizes that in an increasingly demanding and competitive market, it is necessary to guarantee customer satisfaction, and to this end it has decided to certify its products. *Fã Clube do Queijo* recognizes that the option for certification represents a "major contribution to recognition of its products in the market," as the interviewee says.

Analysis of the answers from the founder-entrepreneur of this SME confirmed that the importance of marketing for the firm's growth and sustainability has been recognized, since it has contributed to strengthening its market position. Acting in increasingly demanding and competitive markets and aiming to achieve complete customer satisfaction, the entrepreneur recognizes that marketing "is a crucial selling tool, the most powerful one nowadays." Nevertheless, *Fã Clube do Queijo* does not have a marketing department. The entrepreneur considers that traditional marketing has "a complex and very expensive segmentation," which does not fit in with his firm's resources.

Besides, he believes that the experience acquired through "seminars and socializing with family and friends who manage multinational firms" has given him the necessary ability and knowledge to develop the firm's marketing activities. The founder-entrepreneur is responsible for all decisions made in the firm, taking an active part in the whole process. It should be noted that he is also responsible "for contact with customers," answering all their e-mails and trying to satisfy all their demands. The entrepreneur stresses that this attitude only "brought benefits."

This SME's marketing strategy (case 1) is consequently very dependent on its entrepreneur's competences. The firm's marketing is not planned and has "the objective of finding the most suitable solutions for customers to accept the product, aiming to respond to the needs/demands they present." According to the entrepreneur:

[...] marketing strategies should not be seen as formal or informal plans, but rather as a professional plan that contributes to the firm's success.

Communication about the company's products is essentially through "social networks and exhibitions." The firm's communication is based to a great extent on its "network of friends/acquaintances," which has "developed over the years" in carrying out the different activities. "It was they who contributed to making the firm known, because they were responsible for spreading the word" – P. Longo, founder of this SME.

Word-of-mouth strategies of social interaction and communication (network marketing) bring "countless advantages because they are more economical," which is beneficial for the firm, since like most SMEs, it has limited resources. *Fã Clube do Queijo* has around 64,000 fans who communicate company products, their experiences and opinions throughout their network of friends/acquaintances (network marketing).

According to a document supplied by the entrepreneur, concerning a study by RTP (Portuguese television channel):

84% of people trust messages passed over the social network, as against 14% who trust in traditional advertisements [...], essentially due to the relationship of proximity and trust generated by friends and their recommendations.

The entrepreneur says this networking strategy was best, regarding marketing, because “it is suited to the company’s limited resources as the cost is practically zero.” The interviewee also mentions that the firm “did not invest much in publicity,” since this occurred mostly “for free in the national television news (RTP, SIC and TVI) and internationally too,” signaling that this was the first online shop in Portugal. In addition, several national and regional newspapers highlighted the firm.

While recognizing the advantages of marketing, the interviewee says that given the “high costs of implementation and development and the staff available, it is not likely in the near future that the firm will change its position and begin to concentrate on structured planning of marketing activities.”

To sum up, the marketing of this SME is very characteristic of the situation of this type of firm, being informal and constructed as the need arises. The firm does not concentrate more on formal marketing because of the restrictions faced, particularly related to major financial investment and a change in methods, habits and mentality. It concentrates heavily on marketing through social networks.

#### 4.2 Case 2: DAMAR

Situated in the region of Beira Interior, between the mountain ranges of Estrela and Gardunha, the main activity of *DAMAR* is traditional production of regional cheese. It all began when the grandparents of Daniel and Adriana Amarelo (founder-entrepreneurs of this SME) decided to initiate the activity of production and sale of cheese (the renown yellow cheeses). The liking for homemade production of cheese was passed down to Daniel and Adriana who, in 1987, decided to create a firm to expand the business, without forgetting, however, the traditional production process, which they consider the secret of the business: “The milk is collected from farms in the region and used in its pure, natural form. Only natural coagulants are used[3].”

The entrepreneurs decided to expand the business by adopting a strategy of product differentiation and internationalization (American, French, Dutch, Canadian and Macau markets). *DAMAR*’s mission is to produce and sell traditionally produced cheese. New technology is only introduced in preparing the raw material, in treating and preserving the products and in transport to the various points of sale. The firm’s main clients are “Modis, the Auchan group and the Pingo Doce group.” At present, the firm has 28 collaborators involved in high-quality production and seven equally committed collaborators on the administrative and commercial side, making up a total of 35 collaborators.

Analysis of the answers from *DAMAR* leads to the conclusion that the importance of marketing has been recognized for business expansion and sustainability. However, despite recognizing the relevance of marketing for firms, *DAMAR* has no marketing department nor formal marketing plans. The interviewee justifies this fact as being due to the “high costs of development which are not appropriate for the insufficient resources available,” making the point that for her firm “that high investment is not yet justified.”

According to the empirical evidence obtained, it is understood that the founder-entrepreneurs are in charge of the marketing carried out by this SME. The interviewee states that:

[...] the knowledge held has been enough to structure some marketing activities according to the “needs and opportunities” appearing in the market.

The cheese produced by the company was considered the best cheese in the world, which was reflected in its increased international projection, and as a result, in increased exports. Following on from these results, this SME began to concentrate on “presenting its products internationally, with occasional actions in the presence of consumers,” the interviewee also mentions.

Communicating the firm’s products occurs essentially in “fairs, exhibitions and on the internet site.” It also happens through the “partners and collaborators, who promote/publicize the business and bring opportunities,” so contributing to company growth. “We invest in occasional promotion actions where customers are, to promote the brand and its products,” says the *DAMAR* entrepreneur.

The firm chooses to invest only what is necessary and respond to opportunities, considering it is “necessary to invest some resources in publicity, principally internationally, to strengthen entry into new markets and gain new clients.” Despite considering that the marketing followed by *DAMAR* is “very effective with the desired results,” the interviewee comments that:

[...]“according to the business’s growth, nationally and internationally, the SME may possibly begin to adopt a formal marketing strategy”, that is, more planned and structured, aiming to respond more effectively to both its actual and potential clients’ needs and expectations.

Summarizing, while recognizing the importance of marketing, the SME studied here chooses not to follow formal marketing plans, due to the limited resources at its disposal. However, the firm is considering the possibility of beginning to target new markets, and if the investment is successful, more serious consideration will be given to the possibility of strengthening marketing, perhaps taking on a specialized professional in the field.

#### 4.3 Cross-case analysis and discussion

After content analysis of the cases, this sub-section makes a comparative analysis of the position adopted by each SME concerning the main dimensions considered in entrepreneurial marketing. Table IV resumes the main aspects of the marketing activities in the two SMEs analyzed.

The empirical evidence obtained by interview shows that marketing in both SMEs studied is very dependent on their founder-entrepreneurs: “I am responsible for contact with customers. I reply to all their e-mails and try to satisfy all their needs” (case 1); “the knowledge we have has been enough to develop some marketing activities according to the needs and opportunities that arise” (case 2). As stated by Carson and Gilmore (2000), the competence of SMEs’ founder-entrepreneurs is of fundamental importance, given their nature and characteristics and particularly the dominant role they assume in decision making. This is also corroborated by Becherer *et al.* (2008) and Baron and Ensley (2006). Consequently, this means that SMEs are significantly characterized by the management style and personality of their founder-entrepreneur (Hill, 2001; Stokes, 2000).

	Case 1: <i>Fã Clube do Queijo</i>	Case 2: <i>DAMAR</i>
Marketing department	None	None
Type of marketing	Informal and reactive Very dependent on the founder-entrepreneur who believes he has all the necessary competences	Informal and reactive Very dependent on the founder-entrepreneurs because they are in charge of decision making
Marketing budget	Some money is spent	Not referred to
Communication methods	Social networks (extremely important) Word-of-mouth Exhibitions and fairs	Site Collaborator network Word-of-mouth Exhibitions and fairs
Importance of marketing	Publicizing and selling products	Publicizing products
Opinion of formal marketing	High investment Need for staff Costs greater than benefits	High investment Need for specialized staff
Position regarding marketing	Going to continue with the same type of marketing	According to firm growth, will consider formal marketing
Advantages of marketing used	Creates the need in the customer's home Good strategic segmentation Good national and international positioning Economical Powerful communication tool Service of excellence Alternative to direct advertising Contributes to regional tourism	Effective with clear results Good strategic segmentation Good national and international positioning Economical
Disadvantages of marketing used	No disadvantage mentioned	As the wish is to access new markets, investment of more resources is necessary in this area

**Table IV.**  
Entrepreneurial  
marketing: comparative  
analysis

In *Fã Clube do Queijo* (case 1), the entrepreneur even believes he has sufficient competence to carry out marketing activities able to guarantee the firm's competitiveness in the market. As for *DAMAR* (case 2), the firm is considering taking on a marketing specialist if investment in new markets brings good results. So it is the entrepreneurs who take charge of the business and make all decisions in the area of marketing, in spite of not having specialist knowledge in that area. Many founder-entrepreneurs perceive themselves to have limited marketing ability, primarily because their prior interests and background mean that they are unlikely to bring useful marketing experience and skills to a business. Thus, for Gilmore *et al.* (2001), the use and development of management competencies for carrying out marketing are important for entrepreneurs throughout the life of the firm. Marketing decisions are often inseparable from any other decisions relating to the enterprise.

Both SMEs studied (cases 1 and 2) choose not to follow formal (planned and structured) marketing plans, due to the limited resources at their disposal, particularly financial and human resources. Marketing is a crucial selling tool, the most powerful one today, but it requires high development costs that do not match the insufficient resources of SMEs, and so neither of these firms has a marketing department. This result is supported by Gilmore *et al.* (2001), when they state that SME marketing is occasional, informal, loose and unstructured. This is also in line with Beaver and Harris (1995), who found SMEs' characteristics influence the ways in which they

informally implement the marketing planning process, as well as Moriarty *et al.* (2008), who argue that small firms prefer action to planning.

Whereas traditional marketing has espoused the customer as the focal point of all marketing activities and tailored the market offering to suit the needs of the target market, entrepreneurial marketing recognizes that the entrepreneur is equally a central actor in the marketing process (Morrish *et al.*, 2010). Understanding entrepreneurial marketing is based on knowing how SMEs entrepreneurs actually do business and how they make decisions, deliver their market offering in the market place within the constraints of limited resources, expertise, impact and size (Gilmore *et al.*, 2001).

From the empirical evidence, both SMEs studied here emphasize word-of-mouth and interactive communication to develop the entrepreneurial marketing process. These means of communication are very important in the development of *DAMAR*. This SME concentrates more on direct publicity and invests in occasional promotional activities where clients are present, to promote the brand and products. Nevertheless, it was necessary to invest in some advertising resources, mainly internationally, to strengthen entry into new markets and attract new clients. Thus, the results are in accordance with our theoretical considerations (e.g. Carson and McCarton-Quinn, 1995; Hill, 2001; Stokes, 2000). According to Gilmore *et al.* (2001), many founder-entrepreneurs of SMEs recognize the advantage of keeping good relationships.

We also found that networking is important to promote/publicize the business and bring opportunities. "If in the past advertising was the main route to promote products, now with a page on Facebook, this firm can create a relationship of 'affinity' with its customers" (case 1, in *Jornal de Negócios*, 2012). Concentrating on network marketing is more evident in *Fã Clube do Queijo* (case 1) than in *DAMAR* (case 2), although the latter also uses it through its collaborators. In case 1, communication about firm products is based on the network of friends/acquaintances, which was built up over the years in different activities. It was they who contributed to making the firm well known, because they were responsible for passing on the message. In case 2, network marketing is not as significant, but it also occurs. These observations go along with the insights of Stokes (2000), and Stokes and Lomax (2002), who found that SMEs have the advantage of closer contact with customers and are more flexible, responsive to change and more innovative than larger firms.

Networks and networking are fundamental to how the entrepreneur does business and the intrinsic value of an entrepreneur's business lies in its networks (Gilmore *et al.*, 2000). Networking helps the entrepreneur gather information that is useful in supporting decisions, aids his/her assessment of any market situation and also helps in maintaining awareness of market-related issues (Rocks *et al.*, 2005).

Ramaswami and Srivastava (2009) also suggest the use of informal networks to foster customer relationships and involve customers (especially high-value ones) in new product development. Coviello and Joseph (2011) found that customers are a fundamental source of advantage serving as "sounding boards," "critics," "supporters/approvers" and "promoters" when developing new products. This involvement can be crucial in the fine tuning of products/marketing tactics before entering new markets.

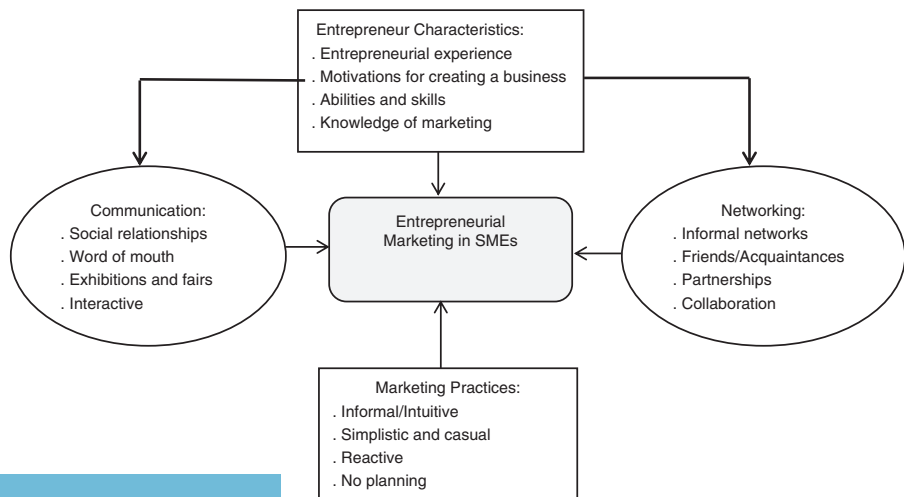
Finally, in the SMEs studied here, marketing differs from that of large firms, since it is not as formal, planned and structured, but rather informal, reactive and as a response to the needs and opportunities that arise in the market. It is consequently suited to their financial and staff limitations and depends greatly on the decisions of the founder-entrepreneur and word-of-mouth communication.

### 5. Conclusions and implications

The objective of this study was to understand the role and importance of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs and to examine the influence of the founder-entrepreneur role in this process. To attain these goals, a qualitative methodology of investigation was used (multiple case studies) through interviews and documentary analysis, with two SMEs situated in an inland region of Portugal: *Fã Clube do Queijo* (case 1) and *DAMAR* (case 2).

Based on the empirical evidence, we concluded that, despite recognizing the importance of marketing for business growth and sustainability, the two SMEs studied decided not to follow formal marketing plans, as happens in large firms, due essentially to the limited resources at their disposal, particularly financial and human resources. It is also inferred that marketing in these SMEs is informal and reactive, i.e., seeking to respond to the needs and opportunities that arise in the market, being focussed more on communicating products in a network and through activities directed to people. This strategy is more evident in case 1, although it also occurs in case 2, through its collaborators and clients. It was also possible to conclude that marketing in the SMEs is very dependent on the decisions and influence of the founder-entrepreneur, since he/she is in command and in charge of the whole business. In our study, we also confirm that entrepreneurial marketing activities present effective and visible results. Therefore, the SMEs studied are now beginning to adopt this type of marketing, to create value over time.

The results of the study are important because they confirm the results obtained through conventional deductive research, which represents the majority of the studies cited. Thus, from empirical evidence, we have proposed an integrative and holistic model (Figure 1) that shows how SMEs can adopt different levels of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions. In particular, within the core-dimensions of the model (Entrepreneur characteristics and Marketing practices), SMEs may exhibit different levels of engagement with different activities for entrepreneurial marketing. The proposed model also represents two other important constructs found in the present study; Communication and Networking. The different variables within these constructs have been discussed in the literature review and are consistent predictors of entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs. Our conceptual model represents, therefore, the primary contribution of this study.



**Figure 1.**  
Key dimensions and variables associated with entrepreneurial marketing in SMEs



From this integrative and holistic model, and based on the outcomes, several theoretical and practical implications for founder-entrepreneurs and owner-managers in SMEs are presented. In theoretical aspects, our study contributes to the existing research about the role founder-entrepreneurs can have in the firm's ability to develop entrepreneurial marketing activities. Here, the most important variables were entrepreneurial experience, motivations for creating a business, abilities/skills and knowledge of marketing. However, we invite researchers to tackle these topics, studying more SMEs in different sectors and regions/countries. The dimensions presented in the model are intended to serve as a useful basis for future empirical testing and investigation of a quantitative and/or a qualitative nature.

From a practical viewpoint, our study is of use in considering and designing entrepreneurial marketing policy. Knowing the role and importance of entrepreneurial marketing is relevant insofar as it allows SMEs to create effective mechanisms to enhance good performances and achieve competitive advantages. This paper has also found that entrepreneurial marketing is based on networking to build and support marketing activity and it is associated with the use and development of informal and interactive ways of communication.

This study is not without limitations, the main one being the fact that results are specific to the cases analyzed, which does not seem to be sufficient to draw generalized conclusions. Thus, it is recommended that further research is conducted in large-scale organizations and also in different contexts to be able to generalize findings. Second, due to the cross-sectional character of the study, it was not possible to use triangulation methods, which would allow us to obtain more complete and objective information. According to Jack and Raturi (2006), a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides depth and/or details that are not obtained when using just one method. It is therefore suggested that in future research, studies adopt the mixed investigation method.

Finally, recognizing the importance of founder-entrepreneurs in SME marketing, since it is they who take the reins of the business and the majority of decisions, it is considered pertinent to carry out more investigation on this subject in the future, particularly on the influence of entrepreneur characteristics (personal and psychological) and competences on entrepreneurial marketing, as well as investigating how to increase marketing action in micro and small firms.

#### Notes

1. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-1YgZVXXPs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-1YgZVXXPs) (accessed May 16, 2012).
2. <http://pt-pt.facebook.com/ProdutosSerradaEstrela?sk=info&filter=2> (accessed May 16, 2012).
3. [www.damar.pt](http://www.damar.pt) (accessed May 16, 2012).

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