

The role of effectual networking in small business marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to address the recent calls for an in-depth investigation of the entrepreneurial marketing (EM) practices of small businesses and a further conceptual development of EM under market uncertainty. Drawing on the EM mix (i.e. person, purpose, practices and process), the authors aim to conceptualise EM under market uncertainty through principles of effectual networking.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted an in-depth case study of an owner-manager who networks with many different stakeholders to create new markets for wool in the Norwegian wool industry.

Findings – Situated within the creative and craft-based industries, the study demonstrates that market uncertainty can be reduced through effectual networking to produce highly beneficial outcomes for small businesses. The findings give rise to a new model of the EM mix under uncertainty, emphasising the role of the owner-manager (i.e. person) and the purpose as the outset and driving force of the EM process. These two elements constitute the initial means in the means-driven EM process and the foundation for subsequent EM practices. The person, purpose and practices interact iteratively, and focal effectual networking principles guide EM practices.

Originality/value – This paper expands and contextualises existing theories on EM under market uncertainty by introducing the effectual networking perspective. This represents a hitherto under-investigated area of research in small business marketing.

Keywords Entrepreneurial marketing, Entrepreneurial marketing mix, Effectual networking, Small business marketing

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Small business owner-managers face many challenges. Among these challenges, marketing is one of the most important for survival, renewal and growth (Jones and Rowley, 2011). The prevailing view in marketing research is that one should start with an identified market need, conduct market research and orchestrate resources to reach a measurable marketing goal (Sarasvathy, 2001). However, this is not necessarily the case for small business owner-managers entering new market territories, where they do not possess prior market-relevant experience or the right configuration of resources. Because they are often acting under limited knowledge about market needs and conditions, small business owner-managers can instead effectually create the market themselves by employing the set of means already available to them at a given point in time (Read *et al.*, 2009; Sarasvathy, 2001; Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005).

Marketing in small businesses often involves leveraging a scarce resource base through partnerships with other stakeholders (Morris *et al.*, 2002). Unlike with larger firms, the success of a small business rests largely on the marketing skills and management practices of the owner-manager (Franco *et al.*, 2014; Hills and Hultman, 2013). Owner-managers of small firms usually employ unconventional marketing practices with great success (Martin, 2009; Morrish, 2011; Resnick *et al.*, 2016). They are often close to their market and their staff, which enables them to have an informal relationship with their customers, creating a unique

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position to gain easy access to market information and thus to make informed decisions (Zontanos and Anderson, 2004).

Considering these insights, entrepreneurial marketing (EM) has emerged as a field and term at the interface between marketing and entrepreneurship (Martin, 2009; Morris *et al.*, 2002; Morrish, 2011), distinguishing between conventional marketing practices in established and large corporations and more agile practices in smaller and emerging organisations. EM as a term is not considered as a predefined management decision set (Hills *et al.*, 2008) but rather conceptualised as a process of entrepreneurial enactment addressing many issues simultaneously: opportunity, innovation, uncertainty and resource constraints (Beverland and Lockshin, 2004; Morris *et al.*, 2002).

Knowledge of how EM operationalises in the small business context is rather weak in the EM literature (see Lam and Harker, 2015; Lehman *et al.*, 2014; Martin, 2009; Thomas *et al.*, 2013 for notable exceptions). Characteristic of EM practices is that instead of relying on planning frameworks, such as the traditional marketing mix of the 4Ps (i.e. product, price, place and promotion) (see Jobber, 2009; Kotler *et al.*, 2008), small and entrepreneurial businesses often and unintentionally develop their own, informal, entrepreneurial mix (Martin, 2009; Zontanos and Anderson, 2004) that focuses on relational-based practices to reach markets (Carson *et al.*, 1995; Franco *et al.*, 2014; Stokes, 2000; Zontanos and Anderson, 2004). More specifically, Zontanos and Anderson (2004) argued that the differentiating factor of traditional marketing in larger corporations compared to marketing in small businesses can be found in the owner-manager's ability to network, which is inarguably an important contributor to small businesses' marketing (O'Donnell, 2014). However, how these network practices are developed under uncertain market conditions is largely missing from the EM literature.

Recently "effectual networking" has been introduced as a term relevant to such conditions, where the entrepreneur's goals are ambiguous (Engel *et al.*, 2017), the decision-making context is uncertain and the market must therefore be created rather than found (Alvarez and Barney, 2007; Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). In this paper, we consequently addressed the recent calls for an in-depth investigation of the EM practices of small businesses (Bocconcelli *et al.*, 2018; Morrish, 2011) and a further conceptual development of EM (see Hills *et al.*, 2008) under market uncertainty. To accommodate such a call, we expanded recent effectual accounts to EM (Crick *et al.*, 2018; Morrish, 2011; Yang and Gabriellson, 2017) by introducing core principles of effectual networking (Engel *et al.*, 2017). Drawing on Zontanos and Anderson's (2004) 4Ps (i.e. person, purpose, practices and process), later conceptualised as the EM mix by Martin (2009), we aimed to conceptualise EM under market uncertainty through effectual networking.

Deacon and Harris (2011) argue that contextual studies are particularly beneficial in advancing our understanding of EM practices. Entrepreneurial thinking is now rapidly being embraced by smaller businesses in the creative and craft-based industries, which are among the fastest growing sectors in the economy (Schulte-Holthaus, 2018). Recent studies have demonstrated the importance of creative and craft-based products in regional development and in terms of enhancing competitiveness in non-rural and larger markets (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors, 2015; Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2015; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018; Rentschler *et al.*, 2018; Teixeira and Ferreira, 2019; Verhaal *et al.*, 2017). Whereas, for instance, creative and craft-based activities aim at creating something of use-value in traditional markets, entrepreneurial activities, on the other hand, aim at creating something completely new of higher value in new markets.

As the advantage of local embeddedness has to be recombined and leveraged, in order to successfully bridge between the traditional market and into new ones, we argue that this situation represents an entrepreneurial challenge loaded with uncertainty. This market-creation process (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005) entails creating new opportunities from existing means and resources through networking with new actors outside of traditional

markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Effectuation theory (Sarasvathy, 2001) neither discusses whether market uncertainty can also be related to contextual attributes, nor to what extent the entrepreneur can efficiently manoeuvre his means between market contexts. This research is grounded in the assumption that, in this situation, market creation entails more than just general entrepreneurial uncertainty – it also involves uncertainty related to the ability to efficiently exploit local resources, heritage and tradition when exploring new opportunities in other market contexts.

To investigate the topic, we conducted a single case study of a focal owner-manager in the Norwegian wool industry, someone who networks with various stakeholders to create a new market for Norwegian coarse wool from ancient breeds of sheep. The following research question guided our research:

RQ1. How does effectual networking operate through the EM practices of a small business owner-manager operating under market uncertainty?

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: first, we engaged with the literature on EM and effectual networking, situating our research and developing our theoretical underpinnings. We then outlined our methodology and findings, before discussing these in light of the literature. We concluded by outlining our contribution, suggesting implications for future research and discussing limitations of our study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 *The EM mix – reframing the original 4Ps*

Whereas still prevalent in marketing research and practice, the highly structured and disciplined alignment of the 4Ps marketing mix has come under scrutiny (Martin, 2009; Schindehutte *et al.*, 2009) due to its limitations in conceptualising marketing practices in smaller and entrepreneurial firms. In this respect, Zontanos and Anderson (2004) suggested reframing the traditional 4Ps into a new set of 4Ps to better reflect marketing in small firms. Their 4Ps (i.e. person, purpose, practices and process) integrate as a broad categorisation to explore how marketing emerges from a complex set of relationships and practices. Martin (2009) later offered an ethnographic investigation of a successful entrepreneur's marketing practices, using these 4Ps as a broad framework for interpretation, referred to as the EM mix. However, the framework is still in its infancy and warrants further conceptual development and empirical testing under different entrepreneurial settings, such as under market uncertainty. Table I presents an analysis of the literature relevant to characterise and add meaning to the various broad categories of the EM mix upon which this study was built.

The marketing of small enterprises represents an intriguing phenomenon of inquiry because the various practices are shaped by the entrepreneur's specific preferences and skillsets as much as by those of the customers in the target market (Lehman *et al.*, 2014). In this case study, we explored this dynamic in greater depth.

As the framework of the EM mix suggests, EM under uncertainty is not as much a managing activity as it is a network-based process (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2009) comprising various practices driven by the owner-manager (i.e. person) and his staff, who operationalise the entrepreneur's aspirations (i.e. purpose). Moreover, under uncertainty, this process is means driven rather than being goal driven, welcoming any willing stakeholder to self-select into the process and pre-commit only what they can afford to lose (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). However, a more nuanced understanding of the underlying principles influencing this networking process is necessary – hence, we introduced effectual networking.

2.2 *Effectual networking and the EM process*

A small firm's advantage compared to a larger firm is the ability to develop personal and trusting relationships with customers (Zontanos and Anderson, 2004). However, scholars

Table I.
Organising EM
into the new 4Ps

EM element	Descriptive features	Contributing scholars
Person	A central and influential owner-manager in all firm-level activities An owner-manager with little marketing expertise but high technical or domain-specific expertise, which influences their approaches	Leitch and Volery (2017), Simsek <i>et al.</i> (2015) Martin (2009), Stokes (2000), Zontanos and Anderson (2004)
Purpose	An owner-manager's own aspirations often operationalised through their efforts to reach the market An owner-manager's motivation driving the product and promotion strategy	Martin (2009), Skarderud and Kubberød (2016) Morris <i>et al.</i> (2002)
Practices	An owner-manager using informal, personal and creative ways to enter the marketplace (e.g. flexible market orientation, shorter planning horizons and quick adaptation) An owner-manager focusing on product development first (innovation oriented) and then focusing on the customer through a bottom-up process An owner-manager relying more on their own experience and relationship feedback than on formal marketing research and uses customers as sparring partners	Gilmore <i>et al.</i> (2001), Hill and Wright (2000), Whalen and Holloway (2012), Zontanos and Anderson (2004) Stokes (2000) Bocconcelli <i>et al.</i> (2018), Hills <i>et al.</i> (2008), Skarderud and Kubberød (2016), Stokes (2000)
Process	Non-linear and means-driven co-creation process (effectual) at the expense of linear and predictive strategising (causal) An owner-manager/entrepreneur welcoming any willing stakeholders, such as early partners and customers to self-select (networking approach)	Sarasvathy (2001), Sarasvathy and Dew (2005), Wiltbank <i>et al.</i> (2006) Gaddefors and Anderson (2009), Sarasvathy and Venkataraman (2011)

did not differentiate between network-based marketing activities in different situations, such as under market uncertainty. Recent theorising on effectual networking suggests that networking under uncertainty entails a lack of information and ambiguous goals (Engel *et al.*, 2017) that make it difficult to plan and strategise. Instead, by using pre-commitments from others, the entrepreneur minimises the cost of experimentation and maintains a flexible position (Chandler *et al.*, 2011). From an EM perspective, we explored how an owner-manager actually aligns for actors to pre-commit, as we know that entrepreneurs are particularly efficient at convincing others, and they work relationally to do so (Galkina and Chetty, 2015; Zontanos and Anderson, 2004).

Intelligent altruism fuels pre-commitments in effectual networking under uncertainty. It captures a logic for relationship building that is neither extremely sacrificial nor completely selfish (Simon, 1993). Van de Ven *et al.* (2007) referred to this as the “dual drive for self- and collective interests”. At the core of the principle is the acknowledgement that helping others can inspire reciprocity and lead to future benefits for oneself (Engel *et al.*, 2017). Thus, intelligent altruism allows to both build relationships and influence the behaviours of stakeholders (Galkina and Chetty, 2015). Thus, we focused on how an owner-manager employs intelligent altruism as an influential strategy for marketing practices.

Effectual networking will, by definition, inject randomness into the market process, potentially leading to unexpected discoveries (Dew, 2009; Perry *et al.*, 2012; Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). As such, effectual networking can function as an engine to generate contingencies and harvest serendipity (Engel *et al.*, 2017). Dew (2009) argued that such serendipities or “accidents” can shape entrepreneurial success more than planning can. This points to the necessity for the entrepreneur to be able to benefit from and harvest such unexpected discoveries (Sarasvathy, 2001). Consequently, we investigated how an owner-manager generates and leverages unexpected contingencies in marketing practices.

3. Research design and methodology

For this study, we employed a single, in-depth, embedded case study design as a research strategy, investigating an owner-manager in the Norwegian wool industry and his new and existing network partners upstream and downstream in the value chain. The businesses in this value chain of wool represent our embedded units of analysis. An in-depth case study design is applicable when investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context emerging over time (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2013). As the phenomenon investigated here specifically occurs in a Norwegian context, we took into account that the findings must be interpreted as highly contextualised (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors, 2015; Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2015). Nevertheless, this contextual specificity provided us with a unique closeness to the phenomenon, making it possible to identify theoretically meaningful patterns from concrete observations and data (Eisenhardt, 1989; Flyvbjerg, 2006) grounded in real-life practices. Scholars have embraced contextualised studies within entrepreneurship (Korsgaard, Ferguson and Gaddefors, 2015; Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2015), and they have focused on what entrepreneurs actually do (Mueller *et al.*, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001; Wing Yan Man, 2006). With this research approach, we aimed to provide new and relevant insights of both theoretical and practical value.

3.1 Case description

Inspired by Taylor and Thorpe (2004), we zoomed in on an owner-manager and his business relations. In line with our theoretical framework, our analysis focused on how the owner-manager uses his relationships (i.e. means) to develop a new market for Norwegian wool products. This owner-manager is leading a manufacturing company (hereafter named “Weaver”) of apparel and interior textiles, with 32 employees situated in a rural district in Norway. Recently, the owner-manager started picking up on the trend promoting local wool production from endangered Norwegian wild sheep species, building sustainability and local sourcing into offerings and a business model (Hall *et al.*, 2010; Jolink and Niesten, 2015). This coarse wool is considered to be of little value, and there is little, if any, demand for it in the market, which poses a major marketing challenge. Nevertheless, Weaver is thriving and this market-creation process might enable the company to utilise and transform place-specific resources into valuable local assets when entering non-local and new markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). This ambition is clearly visible on the company’s website and through the owner-manager’s involvement in several ongoing development projects. From a marketing perspective, this implies that the company can leverage this new situation to build and position an image that promotes, for example, place-specific and heritage resources. Hence, the company’s unique positioning represents a marketing and entrepreneurial challenge for the owner-manager and his developer, as this is new territory for them.

3.2 Data collection and sampling

The data collection was done in five steps. In Autumn 2016, we conducted an expert interview (Neergaard, 2007) to guide our strategic sampling of interesting cases to explore. The expert we consulted is regarded as the leading researcher within the Norwegian wool industry, having unique knowledge and a comprehensive overview of all relevant actors and their relationship with each other, guiding us to the focal owner-manager of this study. In March 2017, we conducted an on-site visit and a semi-structured interview with our focal owner-manager and his project developer, concerning new markets for Norwegian wool. During 2017, we also employed a series of semi-structured interviews with the focal entrepreneur’s network relationships to both explore their relationships and confirm the owner-manager’s narrative with the actors involved. We expanded our interview data through a series of unstructured observations from three meetings (Autumn 2017) involving the focal owner-manager and selected partners of his. We supplemented this with another

interview with the project developer in Autumn 2017 to follow up on project initiatives, as it was essential for the research to capture the dynamics and entrepreneurial dimensions of the activities and relationships. Taken together, this helped triangulate the findings among different sources and strengthen the validity of our research. As critical incidents are central to entrepreneurial processes, the critical incident technique, originating in Flanagan (1954), inspired our interviews. We probed for seminal relationship events in which the actors could recall having learnt something of significant importance for their business in terms of their practices within their network.

In addition, to gain a comprehensive contextual understanding for interpreting the results, we participated at eight industry-relevant events over a period of three years (2015–2018). This provided us with an advanced and comprehensive understanding which can only be achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

In total, seven informants from six business cases were included. Due to privacy considerations, we anonymised the sample by giving the actors pseudonyms. See Table II for a presentation of the sample.

3.3 Data analysis process

First, the transcripts were coded openly. Second, a thematic analysis approach (Mason, 2002) was used by building on the existing knowledge deduced from our broad framework for the EM mix to explore and categorise the main themes and patterns emerging from our raw data. These were related to the person (experience, available know-how, resources and relations), purpose (initial motivations, vision and inspiration for new markets), practices (market research, promotional activities and product/market development) and process (effectual approach vs goal-driven approach). We analysed each interview, one by one, to identify patterns and unique themes across the 4Ps that the owner-manager employs. We then analysed how the effectual networking principles came into play across the themes found. These principles were alignment of actors to pre-commit, intelligent altruism as an influential strategy and generation and leveraging of unexpected contingencies. We paid particular attention to the processual dimension in the research as we followed the owner-manager over a period, looking for seminal events in networking relationships during that period. Furthermore, using a triangulation approach that relied on the owner-manager's network (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004) allowed us to view and expand interpretations from different angles to the main patterns in the data, searching for meaningful themes.

Five central themes of practices emerged from the analysis. These themes represent the underlying patterns in the interplay between the 4Ps and effectual networking and can be described in the following way: means-driven networking in developing a purpose for promotion; a practice of altruistic “in-house” market research; leveraging purpose and person to align pre-commitments; a practice of prototyping a market through early-customer co-creation; and generating and harvesting serendipities as a practice for market orientation. In the final step of the analytical process, we returned to our entire data set, opening the coding scheme to confirm that our final themes reflected the main structures and data richness, thus expanding on the prior theoretical framework. We used our observational data to enrich and validate the final interpretations of the overall themes. In the following chapter, we illustrate these five themes through selected quotes from the narratives.

4. Findings

In this section, mirroring our empirical investigation, we present how our focal owner-manager employs the main principles of effectual networking in the process to develop a market for Norwegian wool from ancient breeds of sheep. In the following subsections, we present the five main themes of marketing practices, and we complement our findings with both suppliers' and customers' perspectives to validate the main themes revealed in the analysis.

Pseudonyms of actors	Core activity of the business cases	Number of employees, including owner	Classification	Data sources
1 Eric	Specialises in woven textiles – a provider of textiles for apparel and interior design	32	Focal owner-manager of Weaver	One on-site visit, media entries (i.e. website, media coverage), a 120-min interview and 10 h of unstructured observations
Beate			Employee at Weaver – project developer responsible for new product development in Norwegian wool	As above, plus a 75-min follow-up interview
2 Linda	Specialises in the design and production of garments – parts of the collection use Norwegian wool from endangered and ancient sheep species	8	New customer	Media entries and a 50-min interview at a fashion fair
3 Vivian	New start-up within the design and retail of apparel and interior items that use Norwegian wool from endangered and ancient sheep species	1	New customer	One on-site visit, media entries and a 148-min interview
4 Sigrid	Spinner of fibres for self and for hire, using Norwegian wool from endangered and ancient sheep species – sale of yarn, knit sets and finished garments – offers training courses for farmers and customers	3	Supplier	One on-site visit, media entries, a 116-min interview and a 33-min phone interview
5 Helene	Spinner of fibres for self and for hire, using local Mohair from endangered sheep species and other animal fibres – sale of yarn, knit sets, finished garments, knit accessories and interior textiles	9	Supplier	One on-site visit, media entries and a 59-min interview
6 Lise	Large-scale scouring and sorting of wool	51	Supplier	One on-site visit, media entries, an 81-min interview and observations of a presentation during a national wool day

Table II.
Presentation of actors
and embedded cases

4.1 Means-driven networking in developing a purpose for promotion

It is rare for small business owner-managers to be integrated with a strategic network of contacts aligned to suit all their needs when working with new market opportunities (Engel *et al.*, 2017). In this respect, Eric was initially involved in a developmental project to reproduce a 1500-year-old patterned Viking wool textile found under a glacier in the mountains of Norway, and he reflected on this project's cooperation as the inspiration for his interest in wool from ancient breeds of sheep:

It was first about whether we could produce something similar to the old shirt that was found in [a glacier]. We got some pattern drawings and initiated the production process, adapted our equipment [...] It was when we got that project to copy the old shirt that we first started gaining some speed.

Eric employs those he already knew from this particular early project to spark the process of exploring new markets for ancient wool (Sarasvathy, 2001). From this project's means set, he expanded his relationships based on temporal markets and a vague idea rather than any identified market need or predefined segment, reflected in the following quote:

One and a half years ago, when we showed [Viking textiles] at a stand in [a trade fair], we arranged a meeting where we invited some people, at first all sorts of people – clothing designers, textile designers, product developers. We had a meeting where we discussed what we can do with Norwegian wool; I presented what we have done with [Viking textiles] and suddenly the ball just started rolling from there. Many came up with good ideas there; I think we should do it again. (Eric)

This example further demonstrates a means-driven approach, where Eric employed a combination of available material resources, know-how and existing relationships to leverage these available means for an informal meeting to discuss the market potential for Norwegian wool.

Interestingly, from these interactions, a purpose started to emerge:

We want to market it and say that this is Norwegian; first of all, it is Norwegian wool, it is produced at [Weaver], it has good quality, lightfastness, durability. Since we will have the wool, the spinning of yarn and the weaving in Norway, it will not be a cheap product. As a result, we cannot compete based on price, but we can do it based on quality. (Eric)

During this early stage, Eric discovered his power as a storyteller, participating at a design show where an American television team interviewed him. Eric's story about the reproduced wool fabric moved the interviewer, as reflected in Eric's account:

It was Norway's oldest textile, and if you look at [Viking textiles], you can see a diamond twill. They knew their stuff back then, too. This story gave me an "aha" moment – it was so strong that it brought out tears in a person. So, storytelling is somewhat important in this whole thing.

Later on, Eric used this particular event to tell the story from his point of view (as a textile engineer, he can speak about the uniqueness of the handicrafts in the patterns). He promotes Viking heritage on the company's website, thus materialising the purpose more clearly. Interestingly, by employing this story obtained from his networking, Eric obtained a shortcut to brand imaging on both corporate and product levels. Consistent with established marketing research, we found that the founder highly influences decisions regarding image building (Abimbola and Kocak 2007; Krake, 2005; Skarderud and Kubberød, 2016), thus highlighting the importance of the person and his purpose in the EM mix, as this can be leveraged to promote a cost-effective way to attract new stakeholders.

4.2 A practice of altruistic "in-house" market research

Eric's business started the process of experimenting with locally sourced Norwegian wool by acting upon a growing market interest from start-up designers, a growing market interest to which he largely contributed through his involvement in the Viking textile reproduction project and the promotion thereof:

There was a lot that happened in 2015-2016. We had quite a few referrals from Norwegian clothing designers about Norwegian wool – why not make a product out of Norwegian wool? I thought it was interesting, indeed – why not make something out of Norwegian wool? So, we started a project, sending an application to Innovation Norway, and they thought it was exciting. We got some money for research and to start a wool project. (Eric)

The main goal was to take in more wool from wild sheep into the production process. The idea behind it is to make something from a resource that is currently not well used. So, we have a general goal of using more Norwegian wool both in apparel textiles and in interior textiles. (Beate)

This project thus allowed Eric to further co-create the idea from the Viking textile project into new opportunities. Eric's craftsmanship and industry experience make him an important resource for his network, and he makes himself available for designer start-ups and design students through an open-door policy. By doing so, he might lose speed and capacity in his own productions because he lends out his own time, competence, staff and production equipment for others to use for free:

Eric has opened the weaving mill for small-scale start-up designers, master students [and] high schools with projects. It is a very demanding process, and it is not where the mill earns its money. (Beate)

As this account reflects, Eric constantly seeks to satisfy his network of relationships but does not expect immediate sales from these investments. By inviting in potential customers, he can do his market research at a low cost and "in-house", tapping into customers' needs and preferences:

Eric, having opened up the weaving mill [for different actors] and having been so flexible and willing, this is something that we harvest the fruits of now. And now I think we should aim for somewhat larger actors so that we have several things to rely on in addition to our existing market. (Beate)

This finding is consistent with other studies, revealing that small businesses rely more on interpersonal relationships than on formal market research (Hills *et al.*, 2008; Skarderud and Kubberød, 2016). At this point in the project, Eric cannot predict the outcome of his informal research; therefore, he effectuates with what he already possesses (i.e. his know-how), welcoming anyone interested in joining the co-creation. A designer welcomed to join in co-creation, later becoming a customer, reflected on this point:

It's very important for me that they took me in and kind of welcomed me in this early stage, it was a smart move for them, and because of that, that's the first weaver I would include, and because I'm working on some other projects I can recommend them first to everyone else. (Linda)

As these accounts reveal, cooperating more closely with stakeholders also leads to recommendations and word of mouth in the network. This resonates with the practices of relationship marketing (Berry, 1983) but deviates in terms of Eric's altruistic investments. The endorsement example revealed in the last account would probably not have taken place without Eric's altruistic investments.

4.3 Leveraging purpose and person to align pre-commitments

By analysing the process of partners committing to the process, we found that stakeholders influence the co-creation of market opportunities (Sarasvathy, 2001) because their own purpose aligns well with and is influential in developing Eric and Beate's purpose, as well. This is reflected in a supplier's commentary:

We have the necessary transparency in relation to the production process. Value creation happens from nature and the landscape to the finish product, and they [Weaver] can build upon it. That has been their [Weaver's] focus, a criterion, and it was perhaps what made them [Weaver] think our products were exciting. It was also the reason that we thought this was exciting, because we have had contact with many businesses before, who do not have this kind of understanding. (Helene)

This accords with the reasoning to have a clear purpose, as found in the study by Martin (2009), here functioning as a guiding element to drive the co-creation and commitment process in which stakeholders also have a say.

Furthermore, by having a deep knowledge about the handicraft of weaving and all sorts of yarns, Eric has developed a unique industry-specific experience. This expertise he gladly shares with his suppliers, as reflected in the following account:

The start of my cooperation with Eric and his business was that he came to visit us and looked at our machinery and actually taught the head of production some things that she did not know

before (laughter) [...] It allows us to spin wool that is otherwise very difficult to spin. It was a very rare moment because there are not many who can give us advice about spinning, but he could. It is very valuable. (Sigrid)

Evidently, through altruistic co-participation and involvement in his suppliers' value-creation processes, Eric aligns the value chain actors to commit themselves in the co-creation of new offerings suiting his own needs and purpose. This particular example of knowledge sharing is not a stand-alone example in our data; numerous examples of Eric altruistically sharing his know-how reveal he is a person investing in his stakeholders:

I want to make the production as Norwegian as possible. Onshoring is high on the agenda, as we have outsourced all of the Norwegian manufacturing. We only have actors like Weaver who bother to take on such small projects as they have been good at taking on independent designers. (Vivian)

This practice will eventually benefit the company in terms of future market explorations, as demonstrated by the following account, in which an affordable loss was directly employed to secure the self-selection of a customer:

What we do with Linda is that we give her a better price for the fabric that she can try out; we give her that opportunity because it is valuable for us to have her onboard. (Beate)

By leveraging the purpose and Eric's industry-specific know-how, the supplier side becomes motivated to commit themselves to explore new possibilities to learn more about opportunities in a new market for wool from ancient breeds of sheep:

When it comes to wild sheep, obviously I want us, as a supplier, to be a part of it, if there is a market opportunity in it. I don't want that opportunity to be lost to others; we want to be a part of this. (Lise)

4.4 A practice of prototyping a market through early-customer co-creation

Eric focuses on producing an early version or prototype of a product. This is reflected in Eric's view about having a concrete prototype for marketing purposes; it is also reflected in how the company collaborates experimentally with a textile designer they already know to accommodate this prototyping:

A designer has visited the weaving mill twice; together with him, we have created many nice fabric samples for interior design and outer clothing [...] We need something to present so that people can touch it and get an idea. I also think it's too little to just have one design; you must have several to present. (Eric)

Through altruistic market research, the company now benefits directly from these early-customer relations to develop various prototypes of woven fabrics introduced to the market for feedback. They also develop fabric prototypes in close relationships with the customers, a method which is less expensive than waterfall development, thereby reducing the risk of failing with the product:

It has been important for Linda's firm to make some fabrics for January that she can present. But her wish is that it would be a design-driven process – that we do not produce a textile in advance, of which she buys a certain amount in metres, but that she actually gets to participate in developing a pattern or textile. (Beate)

By employing experimental involvement with early customers, it is possible to explore new markets in an efficient way. This practice aids in developing products that customers already demonstrably desire; thus, a market will exist as soon as the product is introduced, rather than developing a product and then hoping the market demand will emerge via optimistic prediction. Through these interactions, Eric and his developer co-create the structure of new markets, employing the availability of those "whom I know" in the means

set (Read and Sarasvathy, 2005; Sarasvathy, 2001). Furthermore, the focal customer becomes a pilot customer, driving the goals and development of the new market by being onboard (Sarasvathy and Dew 2005).

4.5 *Generating and harvesting serendipities as a practice for market orientation*

Instead of identifying the most strategic stakeholder, Eric cooperates with people he meets on his way and through his open-door policy (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005). By using this low-effort strategy, he maximises his possibilities for future referrals that might lead to unexpected contingencies and hence new business prospects (in which he already has a stake by being involved with them in the past). Eric generates a network effect, stimulating word of mouth from multiple sources, leading to unexpected leads from new customers:

We have received even more interest in Norwegian wool; we had some meetings about it in Oslo with some students from the arts-and-crafts high school; there were some designers that were going to make clothes from it. They also called from the royal palace, wanting some samples of [Viking textiles]. (Eric)

In addition to maximising the possibility for contingencies to occur, Eric demonstrated his ability to harvest from unexpected contingencies based on these networking activities. When one network partner made Eric and Beate aware of the market's cosplay segment, the latter decided to leverage this opportunity by deliberately following and liking such re-enactors on social media platforms:

Sigrid told me once – you must work with unusual people [to market/sell Viking textiles], those that, for example, engage in Viking re-enactments. Suddenly, I thought – of course! So, now I “like” many Viking people on Instagram. Using Facebook or Instagram is the best possible way because otherwise they would not know that we have this fabric. (Beate)

By leveraging this input and promoting the Viking textile idea through social media platforms, an unexpected market opportunity abroad also emerged:

Some Americans will visit us on Monday. There are quite a few Norwegians that live in America, so there's a market there too. So why not make a folk costume inspired by the Viking costumes in Norway? (Eric)

In line with Engel *et al.* (2017), these accounts demonstrate Eric's ability to employ contingency in his networking practices and how he and Beate interact with user groups outside traditional market segments. Under uncertain conditions, where we do not know which market to enter or which customers to attract, staying open to user segments and seeing what happens might be fruitful for future business.

5. Discussion

Our findings shed light on how effectual networking can inform EM and the EM practices of an owner-manager operating under market uncertainty. In the beginning, when the goals are still ambiguous and the market has not yet materialised, social interaction might itself serve as inspiration for the process, pursuing and operationalising a new idea in the market (Engel *et al.*, 2017; Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005).

In this study, we demonstrated that effectual networking is an engine for the owner-manager, the person at the core, driving the process, where existing means are put into play to develop a guiding purpose which can be promoted to attract new stakeholders outside of traditional markets. This corresponds somewhat with the findings of Stokes (2000), where the owner-manager tended to focus on the product first, and on the market second. As our study reveals, in an early uncertain phase, the focus is rather on transforming initial inspirations into a purpose, promoting it convincingly through storytelling and then taking this to the market for

further co-creation. This is in accordance with Laaksonen *et al.* (2011), who highlighted that entrepreneurial aspirations create a purpose that can be leveraged. Our study also shows that purpose, together with the person's expertise and know-how, is used to align the actors in the value chain to commit themselves to the process of exploring new market opportunities.

Most interestingly, our research draws attention to intelligent altruism, a topic little explored in EM. In line with Van de Ven *et al.* (2007), Eric left behind a predefined plan for entering a new market that serves his own interest first; instead, he seeks a relational angle to explore future possibilities. By only investing what he can afford to lose (Sarasvathy, 2001), Eric wants knowledgeable partnerships amongst potential customers and in his value chain. Our findings consequently illustrate how Eric practices intelligent altruism to tap the market for new ideas, inviting potential customers and partners in for trials and experimentation. This altruistic investment leads to efficient learning about the market preferences for the owner-manager and his staff. Engaging in intelligent altruism led to many positive outcomes, including recommendations, ultimately suiting the needs of the owner-manager and his business.

EM under uncertainty is challenging when an owner-manager markets something based only on a vague idea or just a purpose, as in this case. This is the dilemma of marketing practices in early market creation. Our findings resonate with a prototyping practice (Trimi and Berbegal-Mirabent, 2012) that focuses on producing early versions or prototypes of a product. By co-creating product prototypes with interested potential customers, Eric and his team simultaneously co-create customer demand for future business. This practice resonates with a flexible and customer-centred orientation to the market, where opportunities are co-created (Whalen and Akaka, 2016; Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017), moving beyond the use of customers solely as sparring partners.

Our study reveals that the entrepreneur (i.e. person) employs a practice that exposes him to constant flow of new inputs by welcoming stakeholders into a cooperative co-creation process (Engel *et al.*, 2017). As a result, unexpected events are likely to occur during the process. In contrast to a more strategic approach of goal setting, Eric and his team employ a flexible and open orientation when confronted with new market leads (see Whalen and Holloway, 2012). Such leads can be used as practice for market orientation in an early phase, generating referrals and uncovering new and unusual customer segments and new product ideas. Our findings are visually conceptualised in Figure 1.

As depicted in the proposed model of the EM mix under uncertainty, our study demonstrates that market uncertainty can be reduced through effectual networking,

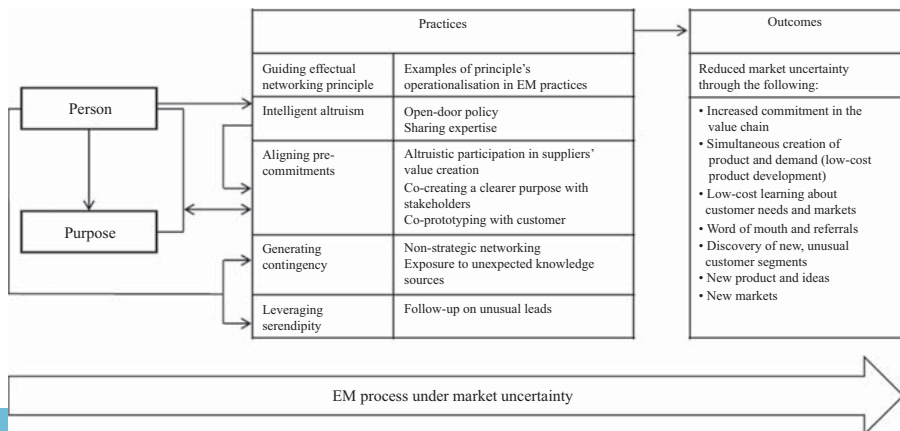


Figure 1.
Model of the EM mix under market uncertainty

producing highly beneficial outcomes for a small business: increased commitment in the value chain, simultaneous creation of product and demand, low-cost research into customer needs and markets, established word of mouth and referrals, and discovery of new and unusual customer segments, new product ideas and new markets. Our findings emphasise the role of the owner-manager (i.e. person) and the purpose as the outset and driving force of the EM process. These two elements constitute the initial means in the means-driven EM process and are the foundation for subsequent EM practices. The person, purpose and practices interact iteratively, and effectual networking principles guide the EM practices.

6. Conclusions and implications

This case study was a novel attempt to explore and conceptualise EM under uncertainty through the combination of the entrepreneurial 4Ps, the EM mix (Martin, 2009; Zontanos and Anderson, 2004) and effectual networking (Engel *et al.*, 2017), which represent a hitherto under-investigated area in the EM field. Moreover, the case study puts forward an interesting perspective on value creation as it demonstrates the potential to reinvent tradition, heritage and localness, and to position this potential within higher value products offered to new markets. Because the principles behind EM practices in small businesses are far from fully understood, we explored these in the making, distinguishing the early and uncertain phase of marketing activities for small businesses in the creative industries. Such a study contributes important insights into marketing when small businesses enter new territories where they do not possess prior market knowledge.

Our proposed model in Figure 1 particularly emphasises the role of the owner-manager (i.e. person), whose existing means and behaviours have a large influence on the purpose, setting the agenda for the business's marketing practices. The owner-manager's ability to attract, garner commitment from and work efficiently with stakeholders is at the core of our study, which is well in line with recent research by Resnick *et al.* (2016). As with Resnick *et al.* (2016), our study contradicted the wider literature, which suggests that relying on the SME owner-manager is insufficient. We argued that in early and uncertain phases of new market explorations outside of traditional markets, relying on a person with a clear purpose might be a good starting point.

Our study bears several theoretical and practical implications for future developments in the EM field, in particular, and small business marketing, in general. At the theoretical level, the conceptualisation of the person in the EM mix is evident and should be emphasised in future research, particularly in early market entry processes, where initial practices may be decisive for further development and marketing success. Factors such as partner commitment and the roles of intelligent altruism and contingencies are rarely studied in the EM field, and their roles in marketing under uncertainty should be further explored in future studies.

This paper is based on a single embedded case study in the Norwegian wool industry; thus, further empirical case studies in other similar creative and craft-based industrial contexts are warranted to verify our themes and proposed model more rigorously (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The initial purpose of this study was not to generalise but to provide insights into a relatively unexplored phenomenon. We lean on Flyvbjerg's (2006) argumentation to justify that even though one cannot formally generalise the knowledge from this case study to other sectors, it is likely that our findings will reflect the experiences of other creative small businesses in a similar situation. Considering the insights gained from this case study, we provide the following recommendations as inspiration for small business managers and entrepreneurs operating within similar industrial contexts when moving into new market territories:

- Act upon your initial inspiration to invite stakeholders to ideate and envision a future market of what might be, instead of setting up a market goal.

- Engage in altruistic market research practices, inviting potential customers to your facilities to interact with you. This can be a low-cost strategy to generate pilot customer relations in an early phase and under resource constraints.
- Assist your suppliers by sharing what you know and aid in their problem solving. This altruistic behaviour will commit the supplier to develop a clearer ambition and align them in co-creating a market for your future products.
- Use your early-customer relations to prototype yourself into the market. This serves to reduce uncertainty and to secure future market demand.
- Be open to unexpected inputs as a form of market orientation and engage with unusual user groups because this might lead to new product ideas or new market segments.

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