

## **Marketing Status in SMEs, Industrial versus Consumer Companies**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to seek differences between the status of marketing in SMEs selling consumer goods and those sell industrial goods. The research is a field study conducted with 112 Small and medium sized enterprises located in the five biggest industrial cities of Iran. The results of this research show that there are significant differences in the marketing status between consumer and industrial goods SMEs such as doing market research in the internal status of marketing (role of marketing) and market structure in the external status of marketing (relevance of marketing). This research fills a gap in the literature relating to the differences of marketing in SMEs. It has a comprehensive view in this regard.

**Keywords:** Marketing status; SMEs; Consumer marketing; industrial marketing

**JEL Classification:** M31

### **1. Introduction**

A precept of the marketing concept contends that business achieves success by determining and satisfying the needs, wants, and aspirations of target markets. Few would argue that this determination and satisfaction of target market wants and needs is critical for firm success. These concepts, traditionally thought to be part of the marketing function of the firm, have fueled scholars' interest in the role of marketing within the firm (e.g., Becherer et al., 2003; Berthon et al., 2008; Moorman & Rust, 1999; Simpson & Taylor, 2002; Webster, 1981, 1992, 2003; Webster et al., 2003).

The small and medium sized enterprises sector plays a significant role in the world economy and marketing in SMEs is a contentious issue among both academics and practitioners (Brodie et al., 1997; Gilmore et al., 2001) and has been so for more

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than 20 years (Cromie, 1990). Despite the widespread researches on the marketing in SMEs, few have been involved on the differences of marketing in SMEs. This paper sets out to describe the status of marketing in SMEs in two groups, businesses selling consumer goods and businesses selling industrial goods. We seek a precise and comprehensive comparison between these different sectors. Simpson and Taylor's (2002) Role and Relevance of Marketing model was used to relate the marketing status in the sectors. The model explains the marketing status with two dimensions, the role of marketing within the organization and the relevance or need for marketing demanded by the external business environment (Simpson & Taylor, 2000; 2002). In this research, we seek to answer the following questions:

- Do the differences between the status of marketing in SMEs selling consumer goods vs. businesses selling industrial goods mostly come from internal or external factors?
- What are different in the status of marketing in SMEs, between industries vs. consumer goods companies?

## 2. Literature Review

This literature review summarizes this literature in order to offer a contextual backdrop for this research. This involves reviewing the literature on SME marketing, and the related literature on marketing in consumer and business industries. Further, as a foundation for the research design, Simpson and Taylor's (2002) Role and Relevance of Marketing model is proposed as a framework for design and analysis in this work. Our study focuses on the marketing status. Various authors have examined the status of marketing in firms (e.g. Becherer et al., 2003; Berthon et al., 2008; Moorman & Rust, 1999; Simpson & Taylor, 2002; Webster, 1981, 1992, 2003; Webster et al., 2003) and since the 1980s, the marketing has been shown to have varying status in the firms.

There is considerable evidence which shows that small business success (Smith, 1990) and survival (Blankson & Stokes, 2002; Brooksbank et al., 1999, 2004) is dependent on the firms marketing efficiency, with many authors citing lack of marketing awareness as a key cause of company failure (Fuller, 1994; Gadenne, 1994; Hogarth-Scott et al., 1996; McLarty, 1998; Murdoch et al., 2001).

Small businesses characteristics influence the ways in which they informally implement the marketing planning process. Small businesses tend to focus on short-term goals rather than long-term objectives due to time constraints (Beaver & Harris, 1995) and prefer action rather than planning (Matthews & Scott, 1995). Various authors agree that SMEs owner/managers prefer simple, pragmatic and intuitive marketing planning over complexity and formality (Carson, 1999; McCarton-Quinn & Carson, 2003; Lancaster & Waddelow, 1998), although Walker

et al. (1992) found evidence that firms with formal marketing plans outperformed those without. Such a pragmatic and intuitive approach to marketing planning has its roots in the nature and management of small firms. Small businesses differ in their business objectives and management style from large businesses (Leppard & McDonald, 1987). They also operate under severe financial and human resource constraints, lack specialized marketing expertise and often seek controlled growth rather than sales maximization, market share and profit like larger firms (Gilmore et al., 2001). SME's have the advantage of having 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 & Lomax, 2002) and utilize personal social and business networks for information gathering, idea testing and advice and draw on experiential knowledge to intuitively develop their competencies (Carson, 1999; Carson & McCarton-Quinn, 1995; Gilmore et al., 2001; Hill, 2001a, b; Stokes, 2000). Some researchers suggest that it is difficult to disentangle such networking and relationship building from entrepreneurial action, and thereby imply that marketing orientation goes to the core of the innovativeness that is essential to SME success (Hult et al., 2003; Wilson & Stokes, 2004; Zontanos & Anderson, 2004).

As the marketing literature has evolved over recent decades, we have witnessed the emergence of a number of classic dichotomies. Such dichotomies suggest that marketing practice is "different" for firms with different types of customers (e.g. consumer vs business), different market offerings (e.g. goods vs services), different geographic scope (e.g. domestic vs international), or different size and age characteristics (e.g. small vs large, or newer vs more established firms) (Coviello & Brodie, 2001). The consumer or industrial dichotomy was established in the marketing literature by a number of persuasive theoretical works, each of which essentially argues that industrial markets are different from consumer markets along a number of dimensions (Ames, 1970; Cooke, 1986; Lilien, 1987; Webster, 1978). For example, Lilien (1987) argues that industrial markets are unique due to their derived demand, long purchase cycles, and a varying and fragmented market structure. Industrial buyers are described by Lilien as heterogeneous in terms of their number and size, and often multiple individuals are involved in the purchase decision process. He argues that systems-selling typifies industrial marketing, with products sold in a decentralized manner. From a managerial perspective, Ames (1970) also argues that marketing in the industrial world is more of a general management responsibility than in consumer firms, and both he and Webster (1978) note that industrial markets are characterized by functional interdependence and buyer-seller interdependence.

Compared with the literature stream surrounding the status of marketing, inquiry on this topic has been more limited for two different sectors in small and medium sized enterprises, consumer and industrial sectors. Many studies have attempted to

define marketing and outcomes of marketing for Small businesses in general or to examine the status of marketing in one sector of industries. Carson (2001) and Sui and Kirby (1998) traced the evolution of marketing and the various approaches to SME marketing. Other authors have attempted to develop hypothetical and empirical models of marketing for Small businesses. Sui et al. (2004), Julien and Ramangalahy (2003) and Berthon et al. (2008) showed how strategic marketing practices such as knowledge of current market conditions and consumer tastes were positively related to SME performance. Becherer et al. (2003) examined internal environmental factors such as the background and decision processes of CEOs. One aspect of marketing, promotional efforts was found to be a key influence in performance of Small businesses (Wood, 2006). Market orientation as a driver of SME business performance has also generated scholar interest (Blankson & Stokes, 2002; Fillis, 2002; Pacitto et al., 2007). Finally, authors have studied underlying reasons for the characteristics of SME marketing practices. Simpson et al. (2006) examined drivers of marketing effort such as the presence of a marketing department and marketing representation at the board level. There are a number of approaches to measuring marketing status, performance and effectiveness. The literature of market orientation has, for example, spawned a number of “scales” or “instruments” for measuring the status of marketing exhibited by firms (Blankson & Omar, 2002; Deng & Dart, 1994; Deshpande et al., 1993; Gray et al., 1998; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Narver & Slater, 1990). Amongst the models and instruments for considering marketing status, Simpson and Taylor’s (2002) Role and Relevance of Marketing model is a particularly useful basis to do this research. It is grounded in the SME sector, especially it clearly describes internal and external marketing environment in SMEs. The model is somewhat descriptive in nature. It was shaped based on the internal organization for marketing activities (i.e. the role of marketing) and the demands of the external competitive business environment (i.e. the relevance of marketing) (Simpson et al, 2006).

### **3. Hypotheses**

We first consider whether the type of customer affects the status of marketing within a small or medium size company. Firms serving industrial markets have fewer customers (as compared with consumer markets) and have closer partnerships with their customers (Heide & John, 1992). These partnerships involve more aspects of the firm and, consequently, the marketing department no longer serves as the primary link between the firm and its customers (Homburg et al., 1999). In firms serving consumer markets, the marketing function serves as the primary link between the firm and its market. Thus, it stands to reason that the marketing status is better in these firms.

H1: There is a significant difference in the status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods.

Differences of the marketing status in SMEs, between industrial and consumer companies, could be divided into two groups, internal and external differences. Simpson and Taylor (2002) called these two groups role (internal) and relevance (external) of marketing. If, generally, there is a significant difference in the status of marketing between companies selling industrial goods and those selling consumer goods, we would seek to examine two more hypotheses related to differences in role and relevance dimensions.

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s a series of controversies took place on the issue of the specificities of industrial and consumer marketing. For some scholars (Bonoma & Johnston, 1978; Corey, 1976; Webster, 1979) industrial marketing situations show unique characteristics that must be distinguished from consumer marketing: a small number of customers for any given supplier, buyer-seller interdependence and the existence of the durable customer supplier relationship (Cova & Salle, 2007).

H2: There is a significant difference in the internal status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods.

H3: There is a significant difference in the external status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods.

Our research adds to the SME literature stream by comparing the status of marketing in SMEs (consumer industries and business industries) with a deep view of both internal and external environment.

#### **4. Research Design**

The broad aim of this research is to investigate differences in the status of marketing in Small and medium sized enterprise between businesses selling consumer goods and companies selling industrial goods from two dimensions, internal and external marketing environment. We employed a Face to Face survey of SMEs of the five biggest industrial towns in Iran, using a list came from Iranian Organization of Small Industries and Industrial Towns<sup>1</sup>. The list, totaling 3585 businesses, was screened to ensure only Small businesses were included in the statistical society. Interviewers were sent to 144 Small businesses of which 50 per cent were businesses selling consumer goods and 50 per cent were businesses selling industrial goods. Of the 144 Small businesses were visited, 112 acceptable questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 78 percent. The questionnaire was targeted at marketing managers, marketing directors or managing directors,

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whichever was appropriate and who had knowledge of marketing within the company. No inducements were included for participation in the survey. Instead, the research director of Islamic Azad University (Ahar Branch) prepared a letter asking members to participate. Several steps were taken to address nonresponse error and other external validity concerns. First, on receipt of the completed questionnaires from interviewers, respondents were contacted by telephone to verify that they personally participated in the survey and were top managers of their firms. Table 1 shows the sample profile.

**Table 1. Sample profile**

Size	Business type		Total
	consumer	industrial	
1-9	19	10	29
10-19	10	17	27
20-49	18	18	36
50-99	7	10	17
100-149	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>112</b>

The questionnaire was developed by designing questions based on the Simpson and Taylor's work (Simpson & Taylor, 2002). The role of marketing, representing the status of marketing inside SMEs, was measured using a 12-item scale (alpha 0.87) and the relevance of marketing, representing the status of marketing outside of SMEs, was measured using a 16-item scale (alpha 0.79). A five-point Likert scale, anchored by Very high and very low, was used to record responses.

## 5. Findings

### *Hypotheses testing*

Mann-Whitney test was used to test the hypotheses. We ran three examinations on all issues, Status", issues of the internal status of marketing, Role" and issues of the external status of marketing, Relevance".

H1 proposed that there is a significant difference in the status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods. We found support for this (Sig<0.05, 0.013). There is a significant difference in the status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods.

H2 stated that there is a significant difference in the internal status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods. We found support for this (Sig<0.05, 0.032), so there is a significant difference in the internal status (role of marketing) of marketing in SMEs, between consumer and industrial goods companies.

H3 stated that there is a significant difference in the external status of marketing in SMEs, between companies selling consumer and those selling industrial goods. Despite hypotheses H1 and H2, we did not find support for H3 ( $\text{sig} > 0.05$ , 0.068), therefore there is no significant difference in the external marketing status (relevance of marketing) in SMEs, between consumer and industrial goods companies.

#### *Differences in Marketing Status*

Mean responses were calculated for the 12 questionnaire items of role of marketing and for the 16 questionnaire items of relevance of marketing for both the industrial and consumer goods companies. The mean scores for the 28 items were then tested utilizing Mann-Whitney test to determine where significant differences were present between industrial and consumer product SMEs. The mean ranks and Mann-Whitney tests are presented in Table II (role of marketing) and in Table III (relevance of marketing). Mean scores above the scale midpoint of 3 were generally considered agreement answers while those scores below the midpoint were generally considered disagreement response. While the cutoff point is arbitrary, it does reflect that scores above the midpoint should indicate higher levels of agreement than scores below the midpoint. Statistically significant differences in the internal status of marketing (role of marketing) between consumer and industrial goods SMEs were seen in terms of four items: Marketing Performance Measurement, Doing Market Research, and Pricing Based on Market Research and Placing Based on Market Research ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ , dark area of the table II).

**Table I. Differences and Similarities between Status of Marketing Variables (Role of Marketing) for Consumer and Industrial Product SMEs. Mann-Whitney Tests (Non-Parametric Test)**

Independent Variables (Role of Marketing)	Mean		Sig.
	Consumer	Industrial	
Q6 Business planning	3.13	3.14	0.725
Q7 Marketing strategic planning	3.11	3.25	0.504
Q8 New product development	3.56	3.62	0.686
Q9 Promotion and ads planning	3.16	2.87	0.151
Q10 Customer data base developing	3.11	3.00	0.710
Q11 Competitors analysis	3.58	3.50	0.488
Q14 Improving plans based on marketing assessment	3.38	3.18	0.199
Q15 New product development based on market research	3.34	3.30	0.800
Q12 Marketing performance measurement	3.45	3.07	0.026
Q13 Doing market research	3.18	2.84	0.035
Q16 Pricing based on market research	3.45	2.95	0.003
Q17 Placing based on market research	3.38	2.79	0.000

**Table 3. Differences and Similarities between Status of Marketing Variables (Relevance of Marketing) for Consumer and Industrial Product SMEs. Mann-Whitney Tests (Non-Parametric Test)**

	Independent Variables (Relevance of Marketing Items)	Mean		Sig.
		Consumer	Industrial	
Q19	Have a competitive policy	3.59	3.59	0.827
Q24	Low need to marketing because of a stable and guaranteed market	2.05	2.32	0.114
Q27	People are market oriented	3.41	3.12	0.114
Q29	Want to develop their markets	4.21	3.98	0.443
Q31	Want to sale current products in current markets in future	4.29	4.07	0.215
Q33	Want to sale new products in new markets in future	4.15	4.04	0.339
Q18	Stability of markets	2.77	3.21	0.020
Q20	Intensity of competition in market	4.13	3.23	0.000
Q21	Ease of entrance into market for newcomers	3.32	2.64	0.002
Q22	Market is in hands of a few firms	1.75	2.46	0.000
Q23	Ability to influence on market by a few firms	2.07	2.77	0.000
Q25	No need to marketing to do business at present and in future	1.93	2.29	0.031
Q26	Necessity of internal coordination to get marketing aims	4.36	4.07	0.045
Q28	Marketing is critical for firms	4.13	3.52	0.001
Q30	Want to sale current products in new markets in future	4.75	4.39	0.004
Q32	Want to sale new products in current markets in future	4.27	3.93	0.034

As the tables show, differences in the internal status of marketing between consumer and industrial small and medium sized companies were less than differences in the external status of marketing including Stability of Markets, Intensity of Competition, Ease of Entrance into Market, A few Firms control Markets, Ability to Influence on Market, No Need to Marketing, Necessity of internal coordination, Marketing is critical, Willing to sale current products in new markets and Willing to sale new products in current markets. There were not significant differences in six items of the external status of marketing (relevance of marketing) ( $\text{sig} \geq 0.05$ , light area of the table III).



## 6. Conclusions

The result of this study found some interesting differences between consumer and industrial goods SMEs.

The mean analysis shows four differences in four items of the dimension of the internal marketing status. Industrial sector answered almost all questions related to “Doing Market Research” (q13, q16, q17) and also item “Promotion and Advertising Planning” (q9) below 3. Since firms serving industrial markets have fewer and have closer partnerships with their customers (Heide & John, 1992), they do little market research and have fewer tendencies to plan for advertising and promotion. It means that the main differences in the internal marketing status between consumer and industrial goods SMEs relates to customer type. Indeed, Contrary to consumer goods SMEs, industrial goods SMEs prefer to have direct and individual relationships with their customers.

Although the test of hypothesis H3 did not prove that there are significant differences in the external marketing status, we found three main differences in this dimension including: “Market Structure” (q18, q20, q21, q22, and q23), Need to Marketing” (q25, q26 and q28) and relatively “Marketing Strategies” (q30, q32).

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