

What is marketing for SME entrepreneurs? The need to market the marketing approach

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The adoption of the marketing approach in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is conditioned by their entrepreneurs' conception of marketing, which may be different from that proposed by academics using different paradigms (i.e., the *transactional, relationship, or inductional marketing*). This implies that the potential benefits for SMEs, coming from its adoption, rely upon what their entrepreneurs really do when they *think* they are implementing a marketing programme. The purpose of the present article is twofold: to shed light on SME entrepreneurs' conception of marketing, in order to verify whether their interpretation differs from that proposed by marketing researchers; and to assess the psychological determinants of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a "marketing approach" (i.e., what they mean by that), by applying a well-known explanatory model of both human and organizational behaviors (i.e., Ajzen's [1991] *Theory of Planned Behavior*, TPB). Results showed that Italian SME entrepreneurs possess a misconception of the marketing concept in comparison with the conceptualization proposed by academic researchers, and *subjective norm*, which in organization contexts can be interpreted as an indicator of corporate culture, seems to be the main determinant of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt the marketing approach.

Keywords: Corporate culture; Marketing approach; Small and Medium Enterprise, Theory of planned behavior

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1. Introduction

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are the most widespread type of business organization in Europe and particularly in Italy. They have based their competitiveness on a tendency to concentrate in industrial districts, and on a high degree of specialization and flexibility. Yet, in the last few years, due to some drivers of market change (e.g., the global competition, the diffusion of ICT), their traditional factors of success have lost their strategic relevance in favor of other key factors, such as innovation and marketing orientation. The adoption of the marketing approach is becoming crucial for enabling these firms to reach a sustainable competitive advantage. Recent research (e.g., Verhees and Meulenbergh 2004) has shown that, compared with larger firms, SMEs are more reluctant to adopt a marketing approach mainly because of a lack of resources and skills. Since SMEs usually lack marketing specialists and their owners/managers are the sole decision makers, the choice to adopt a marketing approach relies on what they *think* marketing is and their expectancies about the consequences of the adoption of such an approach in their organizations. This means that its use is evaluated subjectively, according to the entrepreneurs' perceptions, contexts, and mental schemes about marketing (cf. Guido 2001b). This is in line with the recent research in this field (Becherer, Halstead and Haynes 2003; Carson and Gilmore 2000), which has stressed the importance of the inherent characteristics of SME entrepreneurs in the choice to adopt such an approach. Due to the peculiar characteristics of small firms (such as organizational flexibility, specialization, but also the lack of resources, marketing knowledge and skills), SME entrepreneurs who choose to adopt the marketing approach are likely to implement something that is substantially different from the marketing in larger firms. Whilst marketing decision-making processes in the latter kind of organizations tend to be formal and highly structured, in small firms such processes are simple, informal, instinctive, and, thus, also different from the theoretical paradigms developed in the managerial literature (Carson 2000). Some authors (e.g., Chaston 1997; Hill and Wright 2000) 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 a pre-planning activity.

In order to provide insights on how the adoption of a marketing approach in Italian SMEs can be encouraged, it is important to understand: whether the entrepreneurs' conception of marketing differs from that developed by researchers and which are the psychological factors capable of influencing the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach. Therefore, the present article addresses two research objectives: to shed light on the po-

tential discrepancy between the conception of marketing possessed by Italian SME entrepreneurs and that developed by academic researchers; and to investigate the psychological determinants of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach. The next section will review different marketing approaches proposed in literature; Section 3 will present research objectives and methodology; Section 4 will illustrate results obtained from statistical analyses; and, finally, Section 5 will discuss theoretical and managerial implications.

2. The Evolution of the Marketing Concept

The marketing concept has evolved through three main different frameworks – *transactional*, *relationship*, and *inductional* – which can be traced in the academic literature in a paradigmatic way. Although they still co-exist in practice and can be used by a given organization also in a complementary fashion, in relation to specific contingent factors (e.g., the strategic relevance of the customer) (Coviello *et al.* 2002; Fruchter and Sigué 2005), these three approaches are based on different assumptions and principles, thus positioning marketing at different levels – i.e., respectively, treating marketing as a function, a strategy, and a firm's orientation.

The *transactional marketing* was the first approach developed in literature. Its name, "transactional", is due to its theoretical focus on the *exchange* concept, implemented through the so-called *marketing mix* paradigm, developed by McCarthy (1960) and referred to the mixture of those elements (the 4Ps: *Product*, *Price*, *Promotion*, and *Place*) useful in pursuing a certain market response. Although the *marketing mix* paradigm still dominates both practices and theories in the field, in the last decades it has undergone criticisms, which principally stressed among its weaknesses: its theoretical flaws (Grönroos 1994); its departure from the *exchange* concept (Yudelsohn 1999); the lack of a mutual exclusivity among the four categories (i.e., the 4Ps) driving its implementation (Van Waterschoot and Van den Bulte 1992); its obsolescence, due to a production-oriented definition of marketing (Gummesson 1998); its restricted theoretical domain, because of its focus only on the 4Ps thereby neglecting many other marketing activities (Hyman 2004); its functional, rather than strategic, role (Grönroos 2002); and its focus only on the purchase phase of the consumption experience (Dobscha and Foxman 1998).

Due to these theoretical limitations, a new approach was proposed during the '80s, the so-called *relationship marketing* approach. This approach emphasized the concept of *relationship* between the organization and its counterparts (e.g., customers in the strict sense, and also suppliers, distributors, and competitors) (cf. Berry 1983; Grönroos 1994). According to this approach, marketing should be repositioned at a strategic level and all organi-

zation counterparts and members, at each level, should be considered as *customers* (in a broader sense) and, therefore, involved in the relational marketing activities of the firm. To implement this approach, Gummesson (1994) proposed thirty key relationships – the *30Rs* model – by which the *relationship marketing* could be successfully achieved. Yet the implementation of this approach, according to which marketing strategies should pervade all organization functions, continues to show some weaknesses. In fact, its application implies that *all* organization members should adopt a *relationship marketing* approach towards their external and/or internal counterparts. This means that, other than the so-called *full-time marketers*, who are employed and trained to perform marketing activities, all the other members of the organization – the so-called *part-time marketers* (Gummesson 1998) – besides performing their own tasks, should improve relationships with firm counterparts. This “dual task” of all organization members is hard to realize in many firms. A first reason is that it requires a great amount of resources in terms of time and money (Blois 1996). Furthermore, due to persisting hierarchical organizational structures in many countries, above all in Latin ones, employees tend to be reluctant to collaborate with their employers beyond their duties.

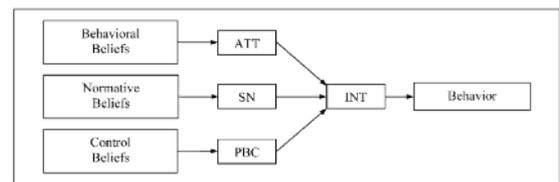
In the last decade, several phenomena (such as the globalization of competition and the diffusion of the ICTs) have caused important changes in markets, which have become structurally turbulent and network-centered (Möller and Halinen 1999). Rethinking the marketing concept has therefore emerged as a necessity to face challenges coming from the new competitive scenario. Drawing on the so-called *postmodernist* philosophy, new marketing models have been proposed, based on common assumptions (Brown 1995), such as: the increasing consumption of symbols, instead of products; the fragmentation of consumers’ needs; the necessity to both customize firms’ offers and develop new consumption experiences. All these models seem to share the *inductional* nature of such processes (Guido 2005), so that marketing is used to *induce* final consumers and all other counterparts (such as suppliers, distributors, and competitors) to collaborate profitably with the firm. Under this approach, marketers should manipulate expectancies (i.e., expectations and desires) and perceptions of both final consumers and other firm counterparts, in order to induce them to subscribe a firm’s objective and to be well predisposed towards its offers (e.g., inducing final consumers to buy its products).

3. Research Objectives and Methodology

To encourage the diffusion of the marketing knowledge among Italian SMEs, it seems important to understand whether and to what extent the marketing concept shared by local entrepreneurs differs from that proposed in the

academic literature. It is also important to understand the psychological determinants of the SME entrepreneurs’ intention to adopt a marketing approach. This research investigated the marketing concept shared by Italian SME entrepreneurs, in comparison to that developed in literature and operationalized by the three different paradigms, and analyzed the antecedents of the entrepreneurs’ intention to adopt such a marketing approach, according to the *Theory of Planned Behavior* (hereafter, TPB) (Ajzen 1991). The TPB was developed in the field of social psychology for predicting human behaviors. Recent studies (Elliott and Jobber 1995; Guido 2001a, 2003) have shown that this model is also appropriate to investigate organizational behaviors. According to the TPB, the intention to engage in a behavior, assumed to be the best predictor of such a behavior, is a function of three main determinants: the *attitude*, referred to the subjective predisposition towards that behavior; the *subjective norm*, which is the perception of social pressures to perform (or not) such the target behavior; and the *perceived behavioral control*, that is, one’s perception of how easy (or difficult) it is to perform the behavior (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Influence Patterns in the Theory of Planned Behavior



Note: ATT = Attitude; SN = Subjective Norm; PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control; INT = Intention to perform a specific behavior (i.e., the intention to adopt a marketing approach).

These determinants arise from *salient beliefs*, that is, all the mental associations between an object, or behavior, and its perceived attributes (cf. Guido 2001b), which are obtained multiplying the subjective probability of the occurrence of some consequences related to the behavior (the expectancy) by the corresponding evaluation (the value) of such a behavior (cf. Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Therefore, *attitude* results from the so-called *behavioral beliefs*, that is, the sum of products of the subjective probability that the behavior will assure specific advantages (or disadvantages) and the relative importance assigned by the perceiver to each of these consequences. *Subjective norm* results from *normative beliefs*, the sum of products of the subjective probability that the behavior will be approved (or disapproved) by relevant others and the corresponding subjective motivation to comply with them. *Perceived behavioral control* stems from *control beliefs*, the sum of products of the subjective probability of certain events that could facilitate (or hinder) the behavior and the corresponding evaluations of the importance of such events in influencing the behavioral intention. The research procedure consisted of two phases: a *pilot study*, aimed to delineate the entrepreneurs’ conception of mar-

keting and to collect their salient beliefs regarding Ajzen's (1991) determinants of the behavioral intention; and the *main study*, aimed to achieve the above-mentioned research objectives.

3.1. Pilot Study

A *pilot study* was carried out to explore the entrepreneurs' conception of marketing, in order to identify the items to be used in the main questionnaire, and to elicit the salient beliefs (i.e., *behavioral*, *normative*, and *control beliefs*) at the basis of Ajzen's (1991) determinants of the behavioral intention (i.e., *attitude*, *subjective norm*, and *perceived behavioral control*, respectively). A questionnaire was administered in an open-ended format to a sample of 41 entrepreneurs. It consisted of two parts. In the first one, six questions on the perception of marketing were asked to participants in order to explore: the subjective meaning attributed to the marketing concept; the function performed by marketing in the organization; the importance of marketing for the organization, in comparison to other functional areas; whether a marketing approach has ever been adopted; (if adopted) how long it is since this approach has been adopted; and the motives of its adoption. In the second part of the questionnaire, three questions concerning the following beliefs associated with the adoption of a marketing approach were asked to participants: expected advantages (or disadvantages) of the adoption of a marketing approach (*behavioral beliefs*); subjects, or groups of subjects, who would approve (or disapprove) the adoption of a marketing approach in the organization (*normative beliefs*); and events that could facilitate (or hinder) such a behavior (*control beliefs*).

Results from a content analysis carried out on participants' answers to the first six questions showed that most entrepreneurs perceive marketing as a functional tool and, more rarely, as predominant over other firm functions (such as Production). According to respondents, marketing consists in a tool, or a tactics to improve consumers' knowledge of the firm and its products (27.3% of cases), to search for new markets (22.7%), to develop sales and firm size (20.5%), to meet consumers' needs (15.9%). More than 30% (31.9%) of entrepreneurs assigned no function to marketing or a marginal role (43.9%). A substantial part of entrepreneurs indicated, as the main motive of its adoption, the possibility of either favoring the firm's development (34%) or enhancing consumers' knowledge of their firm and its products in the marketplace (17%). As for the *salient beliefs* (*behavioral*, *normative*, and *control beliefs*) to be considered in the main questionnaire for measuring Ajzen's (1991) determinants of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach, results from the content analysis carried out on participants' answers to the related three questions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Salient Beliefs to Be Used in the Main Questionnaire (N = 41)

| | |
|---|--|
| Behavioral Beliefs (%) | |
| - Advantages | To develop new markets (20.4); To develop production and sales (18.6); To improve firm's image and products (14.2); To rationalize costs (i.e., fixed, financial, production) (10.6); To understand competitors better (8.0); To understand markets better (6.2) |
| - Disadvantages | To waste time and other resources (24.1); The risk of making mistakes (15.5); The need for employing highly skilled human resources (12.1); Further difficulties in fund rising (10.6) |
| Normative Beliefs (%) | |
| - Subjects or groups of subjects influencing the adoption of a marketing approach | Top management (28.9); Employees (18.4); Competitors (17.4); Customers (14.5); Financiers (6.5) |
| Control Beliefs (%) | |
| - Events facilitating the adoption of a marketing approach | A market growth (27.3); Subsidies and interventions by banks or the Government (15.6); An improvement of marketing knowledge within the organization (10.4); An increase in disposable financial resources (9.1) |
| - Events hindering the adoption of a marketing approach | Unexpected difficulties in fund rising (23.4); A markets' crisis (20.3); The necessity to modify existing strategies (13); Organizational inertia (9.4); An enhancement of tax pressure (6.3); Difficulties in employing marketing experts (6.3) |

3.2. Main Study

The *main study* was carried out to address the two research objectives concerning, respectively, the entrepreneurs' conception of marketing, in relation to that proposed in literature, and the psychological determinants of their intention to adopt a marketing approach (i.e., what they mean by that). A sample of 188 Italian SME entrepreneurs, located in the Provinces of Lecce and Rome, Southern Italy, was used. Their firms were stratified according to five different industrial sectors (Construction, Engineering, Food, TCF, and Wholesale), number of employees (1-20, 21-50, and more than 50 employees), and level of sales (0-250 thousands Euro, 250-500 thousands Euro, 500 thousands to 2.5 million Euro, 2.5-5 million Euro, 5-7.5 million Euro, and finally more than 7.5 million Euro). A questionnaire was developed from the preliminary findings of the pilot study and administered in a close-ended format to the 188 entrepreneurs. It consisted of three parts. In the first one, six questions on the perception of the marketing concept were asked to participants in order to investigate: the subjective meanings attributed by entrepreneurs to the marketing concept; the main function performed by marketing in their organizations; the importance of marketing for their organizations, in relation to other functions; whether a marketing approach has ever been adopted; (if adopted) how long it is since this approach has been adopted; and the motives of its adoption. In the second part of the questionnaire, a total of 52 questions, on a 7-point unipolar scale, were used to measure the entrepreneurs' behavioral intention and its determinants, according to the TPB (Ajzen 1991). 20 items were used to measure the entrepreneurs' attitude towards the adoption of a marketing approach: 10 of which concerned the subjective probability that this adoption behavior can provide the advantages (or disadvantages) most frequently mentioned in the pilot study; whereas the remaining 10 items concerned the subjective

evaluation of each of these advantages (or disadvantages). 10 items were used to measure subjective norm: 5 of which concerned the probability of the approval (or disapproval) of the adoption of a marketing approach by the entrepreneurs' relevant others most frequently mentioned in the pilot study; whereas the remaining 5 items concerned the relative evaluation of their motivation to comply with those referents. 20 items were used to measure perceived behavioral control: 10 of which concerned the subjective probability of the occurrence of the events that could mostly facilitate (or hinder) the entrepreneurs' adoption of a marketing approach; while the remaining 10 items concerned the subjective evaluation of the importance of such events in influencing the adoption behavior in question. Two items were used to measure the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach: one concerned the strength of this intention; and the other, the subjective probability of engaging in this adoption behavior. Finally, socio-demographics data were collected.

4. Results

4.1. *Entrepreneurs' Conception of Marketing*

The first research objective was to investigate the marketing concept shared by Italian SME entrepreneurs, in comparison to that developed in the academic literature by means of different paradigms. In line with preliminary findings, results from the main study showed that more than 75% of SME entrepreneurs share a marketing concept that is different from and narrower than that developed in literature.

Most entrepreneurs considered marketing as a tactics to develop sales and firm size (44.7% of cases), to improve consumers' knowledge of the firm and its products (18.6%), to satisfy niche customers (12.8%), or as a tool to search for new markets (8.5%). Only 15.4% of respondents, defining marketing as "A function involving all firm processes and resources", showed a broader view of this construct. Furthermore, SME entrepreneurs declared that marketing plays different alternative roles in their organizations: increasing sales (26.6% of cases); satisfying customers (16.5%); communicating (15.4%); developing brand equity (13.8%), or new products (9.6%); analysing new markets (9%); facing competition (3.7%). In comparison to other organizational functions, more than one third (35.6%) of SME entrepreneurs were found to consider marketing as important as other functional areas, while 31.9% of respondents were found to consider it as instrumental to production, and 11.9%, as marginal. Only 20.7% of entrepreneurs were found to consider marketing as the predominant function within their organizations. The vast majority of entrepreneurs (i.e., 71.8%) declared that they have already adopted a marketing approach (i.e., what they consider as a "marketing approach") in their organizations and, among these: more than one third

(i.e., 34.8%), for 2 years or less; 23%, for 3-5 years; 15.6%, for 6-9 years; and 26.6%, for nine years or more. As for the motives of the adoption of a marketing approach, entrepreneurs indicated the possibility of improving consumers' knowledge of the firm and its products in the marketplace (39.3%), favoring the firm's development (36.3%), or improving its competitiveness (20.7%).

To verify whether some differences in the entrepreneurs' conception of marketing exist across different industrial sectors, classes of employees, and/or levels of sales, the same analysis was carried out also on disaggregated data. Compared to smaller firms, medium-sized firm entrepreneurs (i.e., firms with more than 50 employees and a level of sales higher than 7.5 million Euro) possessed a conception of marketing more similar to that proposed by academic researchers. Results showed that for a relative majority of these entrepreneurs (22.2% of those with more than 50 employees and 24.4% of those with a level of sales higher than 7.5 million Euro) the main function of marketing is considered that of satisfying customers, rather than selling. According to the same kind of entrepreneurs (41.3% of those with more than 50 employees and 40% of those with a level of sales higher than 7.5 million Euro), the main motive of the adoption of a marketing approach is the possibility of the development of the whole organization. Second, entrepreneurs belonging to the TCF industry seemed to possess a concept of marketing more similar to that proposed by academic researchers. Results showed that, for most of these entrepreneurs (i.e., 45.5%), marketing is prevalent over the other organizational functions and the key motive of the adoption of a marketing approach concerns the possibility of the development of the whole organization.

4.2. *Cognitive Determinants of the Intention to Adopt a Marketing Approach*

The second research objective was to identify the cognitive determinants of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach in their organizations. Ajzen's (1991) model was implemented by a regression analysis, where the *intention to adopt a marketing approach* was treated as a dependent variable, whereas *attitude*, *subjective norm*, and *perceived behavioral control* as independent variables. Before carrying out the regression analysis, *behavioral*, *normative*, and *control beliefs* were calculated in order to obtain, through their weighted sum, *attitude*, *subjective norm*, and *perceived behavioral control*, respectively. Results from descriptive statistics showed that some perceived advantages associated with the adoption of a marketing approach, namely "The possibility of promoting both firm's and products' images" ($M = 31.99$, $SD = 13.34$) and "Improvements in firm's production and sales" ($M = 30.31$, $SD = 12.96$), more than other advantages or disadvantages impact on the entrepreneurs' attitudes. As for subjective norm, "Top

management" ($M = 32.45$, $SD = 15.01$) and "Customers" ($M = 31.35$, $SD = 15.47$) more than other social referents are capable of influencing entrepreneurs' intention. Finally, compared to events hindering the adoption of a marketing approach, those that could facilitate such a behavior, namely the occurrence of "A market growth" ($M = 26.85$, $SD = 12.62$) and "An increase in disposable financial resources" ($M = 25.83$, $SD = 12.76$), seems to exert a higher influence on the entrepreneurs' sense of control over the behavior. *Behavioral, normative and control beliefs* were added up to obtain aggregate measures of *attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control*, respectively. Results of the multiple linear regression analysis showed that the TPB is capable of explaining the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach ($R^2 = .420$; $Adj. R^2 = .410$) (Table 2, below). *Subjective norm* ($\beta = .534$, $p < .001$) was the only significant determinant of the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach, while *attitude* and *perceived behavioral control* were found to have no significant ($p > .05$) impact on this intention.

Table 2: Determinants of the Entrepreneurs' Intention to Adopt a Marketing Approach

| Variable | B | Std. Error | β | t-value | p-value |
|------------|-------|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| (Constant) | -.670 | 2.812 | - | -.238 | .812 |
| ATT | .019 | .013 | .109 | 1.489 | .138 |
| SN | .157 | .019 | .534 | 7.998 | .000 |
| PBC | .021 | .014 | .097 | 1.427 | .155 |

Note: N = 188. Dependent Variable = Intention to adopt a marketing approach. $R^2 = .648$; $R^2 = .420$; $Adj. R^2 = .410$; Standard-error of estimation = 11.202; $F(3, 187) = 44.394$, $p < .001$. ATT = Attitude; SN = Subjective Norm; PBC = Perceived Behavioral Control.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The present research investigated the marketing concept possessed by Italian SME entrepreneurs comparatively to that developed in the academic literature and proposed by the three paradigms (i.e., the *transactional, relationship, and inductive marketing*). It also analyzed the psychological factors capable of influencing the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach, according to Ajzen's (1991) model. Results showed that, although the vast majority of Italian SME entrepreneurs adopt some form of marketing, their conception is primitive and too limited with respect to the paradigms proposed by researchers. Although none of the three marketing paradigms developed in literature can be considered superior to the others in absolute terms, as their appropriateness varies across contexts (e.g., Fruchter and Sigué 2005), Italian entrepreneurs have an incomplete understanding of the marketing concept with respect to each of such paradigms, as they tend to consider it as a synonym of either selling or advertising, thus overemphasizing short-term goals (i.e., sales increases) instead of long-term profitability. Considering marketing as a mere tactics in support of selling or

advertising, rather than as a strategic planning tool or a strategic orientation, Italian SME entrepreneurs show a "myopia" in marketing planning (Levitt 1960).

Albeit a small portion (20% or less) of Italian entrepreneurs were found to be relatively marketing-oriented when facing competition, the vast majority of them seem to adopt a production- or a sales-orientation. Therefore, the adoption of a marketing approach by more than half of Italian SME entrepreneurs may be considered as an innovative organizational behavior insofar as their conception of marketing fits that proposed by academic researchers. In this regard, consistent with other research works (e.g., Becherer, Halstead and Haynes 2003), findings at a disaggregate level showed that, compared to smaller firm entrepreneurs, medium-sized ones (i.e., firms with more than 50 employees and those with a level of sales higher than 7.5 million Euro) seem to possess a more sophisticated conception of marketing, more similar to that proposed in the marketing literature. This may be explained by considering that as firm size increases, the traditional barriers to the development of a marketing orientation – such as an incomplete understanding of marketing concept itself, the inherent conflict between short-term and long-term goals, limited resources, and a lack of specialist expertise (cf. Webster 1998) – decreases. Also firms belonging to the TCF industry were found to be more marketing-oriented than others. A possible explanation resides in the fact that these SMEs, which represent a traditional and important manufacturing sector of Italian economy, more than other firms have suffered market crisis, due to the increasing competition on international markets, so they have had the necessity to reformulate their long-term strategies, in order to reach a sustainable competitive advantage of differentiation and survive the intensified competition. Most probably, in this industry, entrepreneurs have had to adopt a marketing orientation, even with the support of other skilled managers and/or external consultants.

As for the psychological factors influencing the entrepreneurs' intention to adopt a marketing approach, results confirmed the validity of the TPB (Ajzen 1991) in explaining organizational behaviors and this adoption behavior, in particular. *Attitude* and *perceived behavioral control* were shown to exert no significant influence on the entrepreneurs' intention. Rather, the adoption of a marketing approach seems to rely on internal organizational factors. *Subjective norm* in particular was found to be the sole significant determinant of the entrepreneurs' intention to engage in such a behavior. According to some authors (Elliott and Jobber 1995), within organizational contexts *subjective norm* may be interpreted as an indicator of the *corporate (or organizational) culture*, that is, the pattern of shared values and beliefs about organizational functioning that provides members with the behavioral norms in their organization (Deshpandé and Webster 1989). In terms of normative beliefs, the main

social pressures on the adoption of a marketing approach come from the "Top management", which, especially within smaller firms, consists of the entrepreneur himself/herself and, rarely, of some other manager and/or consultant. These subjects act as *culture carriers* (Leppard and McDonald 1991), that is, key organizational figures that communicate organizational values and, thus, contribute to the development of corporate culture. Hence, to encourage the adoption of a marketing approach in Italian SMEs, it seems crucial to influence values shared by these key subjects and their beliefs. This could help the organization develop an open culture capable of both broadening the conception of marketing possessed by entrepreneurs and their collaborators and encouraging a stronger marketing orientation. To this end, a crucial role may be played by marketing academics. Their task is to persuade SME entrepreneurs to deepen their marketing knowledge and increase the ability to use it in their organizations. Whenever SME entrepreneurs are reluctant to improve their knowledge in this field, marketing researchers can adopt an *inductional* approach to the diffusion of marketing knowledge and principles among local firms (i.e., what we call "the marketing of marketing"). In line with this approach, marketing researchers should try to manipulate entrepreneurs' expectancies and modify their perception of marketing. They could help entrepreneurs understand what the adoption of a marketing approach really implies in terms of advantages (e.g., a better understanding of customer needs) and disadvantages (e.g., a higher risk related to a continuing product innovation) and encourage them to attend MBA courses, marketing training programmes, which should be perceived by entrepreneurs as useful for doing business successfully. These courses or training programmes should be designed on SME peculiar characteristics (e.g., organizational flexibility, specialization, and limited resources), and marketing educators should use specific methods of teaching capable of making marketing principles more intelligible by, and more useful for, their entrepreneurial attendance.

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