SMALL FIRM MARKETING THEORY AND PRACTICE: INSIGHTS FROM THE OUTSIDE

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Abstract: Previous work by the author has focused on examining the limitations of the marketing concept and its associated frameworks, processes and prescriptions focusing on a planned, strategic, linear, lower risk future for the firm. Emerging research has shown that such frameworks are now dated, despite being continually taught at business schools. Recent research at the interface between Marketing and Entrepreneurship has shown that, as a result of the inadequacies identified, there is hope for the entrepreneurial marketer (practitioner and academician alike) through the generation of alternative perspectives, and ultimately the formation of competing paradigms of marketing enquiry. Small firm marketing research shows that theories of networking, creativity, opportunity recognition and word of mouth marketing are much more valid in terms of their explanation and understanding of how such a firm behaves, rather than to endeavour to fit the square pegs of traditional marketing theory into the dynamic holes of the smaller firm operating environment. Drawing on alternative methodologies from outside the realms of marketing, this paper presents some thoughts on the merits of embracing the philosophy of researchers and practitioners in the arts and other creative fields in order to reach a more valid understanding of smaller firm behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation effects, shorter and shorter industry, product and technology life cycles, increased opportunity for new business ventures, and the impact of the emerging knowledge economy mean than in today’s marketplace, there are now businesses operating successfully that were never previously expected to do so. Barriers to small firm growth traditionally relate to severe resource limitations, ranging from the financial to the human resource and managerial competency dimensions. Research by the author and others investigating the interface between Marketing and Entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe, North America, Australia and beyond has identified that the type of marketing ultimately practiced by the typical small firm owner/manager tends to be
informal, unplanned, chaotic, non-linear and therefore at odds with general frameworks of marketing which depend heavily on linear, stepwise responses to uncertainty (Carson et al. 1995; Gilmore et al. 2001; Fillis, 2002b). The application of the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface paradigm (Carson et al., 1995) enhances understanding of the smaller firm by focusing on entrepreneurial marketing competencies which result in competitive advantage. The link between marketing competencies, organisational performance and entrepreneurial orientation is positively oriented (Smart and Conant, 1994). The Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface deals with the overlap between the disciplines, focusing on factors such as analytical skills, judgement, positive thinking, innovation and creativity. Day and Reynolds (1998) argue for the promotion and acceptance of the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface as a recognised paradigm of research, tracing its origins to Hills (1987) and the first UIC/AMA workshop. Morris and Lewis (1995) identify the three key characteristics of entrepreneurial activity which can also be regarded as integral to the successful marketing oriented firm: innovation, risk-taking and proactiveness. Following this paradigm should result in a more creative approach to investigation of smaller firm behaviour: marketing and entrepreneurship share common conceptual and practical ground and that this commonality can be made sense of in the context of a conceptual framework which emphasises the applied creative problem solving dimension of each field. Thus to the extent that creative (or innovative) behaviour is a significant feature of radical marketing success, it might also be said to lie at the heart of much successful entrepreneurial endeavour (Hackley and Mumby-Croft, 1998:505)

The following three propositions demonstrate how conventional marketing theory fails to adequately account for small firm behaviour generally, and more specifically within the remit of internationalisation and in the arts and crafts sector.

**Proposition 1: Small Firm Marketing is essentially different from its Larger Firm Counterpart.**

Researchers of the larger firm are now beginning to question the validity of accepted marketing theory. Brownlie (1998) identifies the shortcomings of stepwise formal marketing planning and strategy since such processes will always be carried out under conditions of imperfect knowledge about the future. Instead, managerial judgement and creativity are presented as more appropriate analytical planning and strategy tools (Kotler 1991; MacDonald 1999; Wensley, 1999). Brownlie and Spender (1995) call for an experimental form of marketing management, where judgement is central to
decision making. Piercy (1991) identifies ambiguity and uncertainty as uncontrollable variables in any marketing process. Uncertainty exists because of attempts to rationalise and analyse. Creativity and judgement act to minimise unsureness about decision making. Brownlie (1998) believes that any marketing practice must be socially located and, as such, multiple rationalities are possible. Piercy (1986) argues that despite widespread usage of rational methods, there is lack of evidence that such approaches produce better results than creative, judgemental approaches. If there are problems with larger firm marketing, then the situation is compounded when examining the smaller firm, where higher levels of uncertainty are expected. Brownlie (1998) views the creative, judgemental response as the result of the managerial blindness experienced from continued loyalty to the linear-rational process. Given the increasing impact of globalisation (Levitt 1983), and the accompanying increasing levels of uncertainty, there is more need than ever to consider creative responses to marketing opportunities. Since many smaller entrepreneurial firms grow successfully under these conditions of unsureness, this growth must be facilitated by creative, managerial judgement. There are strong corollaries in what Brownlie identifies as a more appropriate larger firm response to marketing decision making and what the author has found in the entrepreneurial smaller firm (Fillis, 2000a; 2000b; 2001). Interestingly, Brownlie suggests that managerial creativity can be seen as an act of theory construction.

Smaller firm owner/managers can derive their own form of marketing by examining successful creative practice outside the traditional boundaries of marketing. The creative metaphor (Henry, 2001) can rationalise uncertainty, resulting in creative solutions to marketing problems. Marketing decision tools such as SWOT analysis and portfolio analysis still have their role to play, but such tools should be utilised in conjunction with a more creative approach to ‘doing’ marketing. The smaller firm is more flexible, closer to customers and more capable of adaptation and implementing creative change through exploitation of core competencies, than traditional marketing frameworks recognise (Hill, 2001). Gilmore et al. (2001) believe that the SME cannot follow formal marketing conventions because of the limited resources at its disposal, and because of the different way in which the SME manager thinks. The process is haphazard, chaotic and non-linear. Networking theory is offered as an alternative and more appropriate explanation of SME marketing, with networking viewed as a central competence and mode of behaviour which must be considered when formulating marketing plans and strategies. As the SME grows in experience the nature of managerial judgement changes from acting mainly on intuition to a more considered, planned and yet still incomplete view of future strategy.
**Proposition 2: Small Firm Internationalisation is essentially different from conventional modelling of the process.**

Extending the remit of small firm marketing research to the international activities of the smaller firm, the author has identified a range of inadequacies in conventional international marketing theory in general and in internationalisation theory in particular (Fillis, 2000b). More and more smaller firms are becoming involved in international activities and are exhibiting behaviours not previously seen before (Bell, 1995; Knight and Cavusgil, 1996; McAuley, 1999; Cummins et al., 2000). This is at odds with existing frameworks of explanation (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975; Reid, 1980; Johanson and Mattsson, 1986; Anderson and Gatignon, 1986; Dunning, 1988). Internationalisation research originally focused on the activities of the multinational enterprise before shifting attention to an extent to the behaviour of the small and medium sized enterprise (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Bilkey, 1985; Coviello and Munro, 1995). One of the key issues dominating internationalisation research is the effect of firm size on internationalisation behaviour (Culpan, 1989; Moen, 1999; Wolff and Pett, 2000). A review of the literature indicates that perceptions among researchers vary as to what constitutes a small, medium or large firm. The majority of the literature is derived from studies in the United States of America, where perceptual and industry definitions of size differ from the United Kingdom and Europe (Walters and Samiee, 1990; Eroglu, 1992; Cavusgil and Zou, 1994). The transferability of findings and replicability of studies is therefore difficult to achieve, given these differences. Much of the existing theory today is still dominated by early conceptualisations, with many textbooks still promoting the use of these frameworks as an aid to understanding internationalisation of the firm some thirty five to forty years after the initial research was carried out (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 1995; Doole and Lowe, 1999).

In order to move theory forward, both testing of existing conceptualisations and forming of new frameworks based on industry specific studies is needed. Much of the theory developed so far has examined industries where larger experienced firms can progress to carrying out mass production and mass specialisation. However, the small firm can exist in tandem with the larger player through its ability to offer a flexible, customised product and service, enhanced by intuitive networking and other entrepreneurially-based competencies linked to creativity and innovation (Fillis, 2000a; 2000b; Fillis, 2000). The conceptualisations, modelling and frameworks which have been constructed in much of the literature have tended to focus on the firm passing through a number of stages or phases as it develops from the
small domestic based firm to the multinational enterprise. These stages may relate solely to firms in various states of export development alone (Bilkey and Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1984; Ortiz-Buonafina, 1991; Crick, 1995), or as part of a greater progression from domestic-based production to large scale overseas production (Aijo,1977; Morgan and Katsikeas, 1997).

A number of authors have begun to examine the phenomenon of ‘instant’ or ‘born global’ internationalising firms in a number of sectors, from hi-tech industries (Jolly et al., 1992; Knight and Cavusgil, 1996; Madsen and Servais, 1997) to the entrepreneurial arts and craft firm (McAuley, 1999; Fillis, 2000b). Jolly et al. (1992:71) focus on the ability of entrepreneurially inclined start-up companies to pursue global strategies ‘by leapfrogging some of the traditional intermediate stages of internationalisation (to become) significant global players…in a relatively short time.’ They identify sets of entrepreneurial competencies as drivers of competitive advantage, such as having a global vision, a focused approach to doing business, the ability to recognise technological opportunities and to capitalise on them, together with the insight of the founder of the organisation. The resultant internationalisation behaviour experienced by these hi-tech firms is described as ‘a functionally specialised global network’ which needs careful management. Knight and Cavusgil (1996) see this ‘born global’ phenomenon as a challenge to accepted internationalisation theories where:

“small, technology-oriented companies…operate in international markets from the earliest days of their establishment…and tend to be managed by entrepreneurial visionaries who view the world as a single, borderless marketplace from the tie of the firm’s founding” (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996:11-12)

This can be similarly compared with findings in an industry that can not be described as high-tech (McAuley, 1999). A large number of arts and crafts firms rely heavily on manual methods of production, sometimes based on manufacturing techniques spanning several centuries. Yet some of these firms do internationalise rapidly by developing international networks, offering adapted and customised products and generally being much more flexible and faster in their approach to business than their larger competitors.

By operating in niche markets and utilising their distinct sets of competencies, the smaller firm can compete with larger organisations, despite resource limitations (Madsen and Servais, 1997). The authors examine the usefulness of the network approach and evolutionary
economics in order to provide an improved explanation of ‘born global’
behaviour. In addition, they draw on the work of Oviatt and McDougall
(1994) who identify the International New Venture as an organisation which
may initially have one or a few employees (the micro enterprise) but has a
proactive international strategy from inception of the business. Madsen and
Servais also promote the need to understand the background characteristics
of the founder of the organisation in shaping internationalisation behaviour.
Taking this further they call for an integration of the literatures on
internationalisation and entrepreneurship in order to improve understanding
of the ‘born global’ firm while also understanding the particular behaviour
of firms by size:

“Perhaps it would be a good idea to separate the analysis of internationalisation
processes of … very small firms from processes of larger firms…When analysing
small Born Globals it is necessary…to draw upon the literature on entrepreneurship
as well…there seems to be a need for integration of the research streams in the
areas of internationalisation processes and entrepreneurship” (Madsen and Servais,

This suggests that there are clear merits for examining the contribution of
the Marketing and Entrepreneurship Interface Paradigm to understanding
smaller firm internationalisation. In line with the findings of Fillis (2000b)
in his investigation of the internationalisation process of the smaller craft
firm, Boter and Holmquist (1996) recommend that industry, company and
personnel specific issues should be considered when formulating an
understanding of the internationalisation process of any company.
Comparing high and low technology firms, ‘knowledge-intensive or high
tech small firms behave very differently and that the process of
internationalisation can be instant and less organised’ (Boter and Holmquist,
1996:473; Lindqvist, 1991). This might help explain why both the craft
firm with a firmly rooted production tradition but with a high degree of
knowledge pertaining to both the product and production technology can
internationalise just as readily as a small hi-tech firm.

Proposition 3: There is little degree of fit between conventional marketing
toory and Arts Marketing practice.

There is little, if any, meaningful, critical thinking within the arts marketing
literature. The work of Hirschman on the poor degree of fit of the
marketing concept within the artistic individual and organisational
environment (Hirschman, 1983) is one of a very few pieces of works which
recognise this gap. Those writing in the field of arts marketing persist in
prescribing the implementation of the traditional marketing concept, with its
n x p framework. This lack of recognition of a key sectoral difference only
leads to inadequate theory development. Whether the art organisation is run for commercial profit or is publicly funded, it tends to suffer from similar barriers to growth as the smaller firm in general. In addition, one industry dimension not present in the majority of other businesses is the dichotomy of art for art’s sake versus art for business sake where creative ideals clash with the realities of operating in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Fillis, 2000). Despite this clash of interests, the art organisation does possess large amounts of creative resources which, if harnessed and exploited appropriately, will result in competitive advantage and growth. As formal models of marketing fail to recognise the idiosyncrasies of smaller firm behaviour in general, so these same frameworks do not account for the artistic, creative, entrepreneurial behaviour of the art marketer. One solution is to develop a more appropriate framework of art marketing through adaptation of existing marketing concepts alongside the particular needs of the sector in order to instil creative entrepreneurial marketing as the alternative, and more suitable, approach. A starting point in stimulating a creative marketing philosophy can be established by studying the creative practice of successful artists, architects, designers and other creative producers both from within and out with the arts sector (Fillis, 2000c; 2002a).

Several recent studies identify the importance of achieving a balance of creative entrepreneurial and business competencies within the art museum and other cultural organisations (Rentschler and Creese, 1996; Rentschler, 1997; Rentschler, 2001). Although art organisations are influenced by market forces (DiMaggio, 1985) it is interesting to note that the more entrepreneurially minded ones are successful at creating demand for the avant garde niche artistic product, rather than following customer wishes as with the marketing concept. Creative entrepreneurial behaviour mirrors the behaviour of avant garde art movements over several centuries, where groups have successfully challenged conventional thinking, created demand for alternative artistic thinking and practice and ultimately become part of mainstream artistic production. Some interesting examples include the Impressionists, Expressionists, Cubists and Surrealists who, through their manifestos and proactive stance on moving art forward, have become accepted as key movements in art history (Harrison and Wood, 2000).

Examining the contribution to successful creative practice, artists as individuals can offer a refreshing perspective on how to operationalise meaningful and effective entrepreneurial marketing. Recent newspaper articles such as ‘King of Kitsch Turns to Oils and 40 Helpers’ (Sunday Times, 2001) and ‘French Artists Left Out of the World Picture’ (The
Times, 2001) suggests that British and American artists are now leading the art marketing world order through their adoption of particular forms of marketing. Such artists can offer an approach to marketing which can benefit both the art industry in particular and the wider economy in general. The choice for art organisations appears to be to continue following marketing practices originally intended for application in other industries which do not display strong philosophical clashes (the Establishment way) or to instead reject in part such teachings, and develop and adapt marketing within their entrepreneurial artistic environments for their own purposes (the Avant Garde way). The key issue then is how to persuade those working within the art environment to embrace wider and more appropriate creative business practices, given the conservative nature of many of the key decision makers involved.

ALTERNATIVE METHODOLOGIES FOR RESEARCHING THE SMALLER FIRM:

“The study of creativity, as no other subject, brings into a single arena the many characters of psychology, biography, literature and art. In trying to understand how man's greatest achievements come about, the initial focus is...upon the creative product...such as great works of art or science...The study of creativity need not limit itself to the eminent, the extraordinary. There are kinships between the small and the great and perhaps even between the creativity of everyday life and that of a great scientist or artist” (Gruber et al., 1962)

Existing marketing theory can only go so far in its usefulness and applicability. This paper offers some thoughts about alternative approaches to researching the smaller firm in general, while also offering some insights into particular small firm situations in the arts and within the process of internationalisation. Research at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface is offered as a refreshing alternative and more viable paradigm of small firm marketing. Within this overlapping research discipline, creativity is a potential answer to overcoming severe resource constraints and the ineffectiveness of current marketing principles to account for actual small firm behaviour. Within the context of the owner/manager and the smaller firm, incremental creativity, both in terms of developing new products and services within niche markets, and in terms of providing the necessary environment for the stimulation of new ideas and knowledge is a better alternative to existing ineffective prescriptions.

Creativity occurs as an artistic competency (Fillis, 2000c), a psychological trait (Guilford, 1950) and a managerial skill (Amabile, 1988). It has been firmly positioned by researchers at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship
interface as a key success factor in growing the smaller firm (Hackley and Mumby Croft, 1998; Fillis, 2000a; Fillis, 2000). Creativity is viewed as both a paradigmatic shift in thinking, with links to genius and discovery and incrementally, where small steps lead to change (Rampley, 1998). The Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface paradigm is promoted as a more appropriate avenue for understanding smaller firm behaviour, and is especially relevant to the art marketer since much of the research carried out relates to analytical skills, judgement, positive thinking, innovation and creativity (Carson, 1995). Examples of shared creative characteristics and behaviour found across industry sectors such as the sciences (Roe, 1963; Bohm, 1998), marketing and entrepreneurship (Bridge et al., 1998) and arts marketing (Fillis, 2000c) include risk-taking, controlling, independent thinking, unafraid of failure and self belief. Not only is creativity an important factor which transcends industry sectors, it has been identified as a central competency which results in competitive advantage for the organisation (Kao, 1989; Carson et al., 1995). The author has developed a model of creativity, focusing on its encouragement at individual, group and organisational levels (Fillis, 2000; 2002a). Unlike the majority of stepwise marketing planning and strategy procedures, this model focuses on developing creative competencies which then feed directly into future strategic thinking. The model takes into account the impact of the social environment, since each marketing action has some degree of social embeddedness, other environmental factors, cognitive skills, personality characteristics, as well as inputs from the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface. The final sections of this paper embrace a creative approach to smaller firm marketing research by drawing on methodologies found in the disciplines of art theory, sociology and other areas outside the tired convention of survey research in order to present a set of fresh and challenging viewpoints for discussion.

SEMIOTICS, ART AND SMALLER FIRM MARKETING RESEARCH:

In marketing, the use of semiotic theory has been used by researchers in consumer behaviour and advertising research (Hackley, 1999), but little has been carried out at the firm and owner/manager level. Hackley focuses on Sebeok’s definition of semiotics as the capacity for containing, replicating and extracting messages and of extracting their significance. Investigating the link between marketing communications and semiotics, marketing messages are composed of strings of signs. These sign strings then constitute messages whose promotional success depends on how meaningful they are to the targeted consumer. The degree of meaningfulness contains an element of subjective evaluation and is open to interpretation. In the
author’s work as a marketing lecturer, in order to convey meaning and metaphor from creative sources such as paintings, images are chosen to impart marketing management meaning to a particular situation. This involves extracting appropriate messages and metaphors relating to creative, entrepreneurial marketing theory and practice with respect to SME marketing. The combination of SME practices and cross disciplinary methodological approaches, such as semiotics, results in the ability to rationalise uncertainty and give shape to the dynamic and chaotic nature of the smaller firm environment. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) call for the joining together of key thinkers from across disciplines in their treatise on the creation of concepts as philosophy. This draws to the surface the issue of truth in marketing research. While many marketing researchers are intent on investigating the one single reality they are sure exists, there is similar merit in investigating the world of multiple realities, where competing, rival paradigms of marketing theory can result in a healthier, progressive working environment for the marketing researcher.

Creative media such as language, art, music and film are composed of signs, embedded within the culture from which they are derived (Adams, 1996). Each sign has a meaning beyond its literal self (Bal and Bryson, 1991). Structural semiotics attempts to identify universal mental structures found in social structures, in literature, philosophy, mathematics and in unconscious psychological patterns which motivate human behaviour (Kurzweil, 1980). It is perhaps this last element which is of prime interest when researching the motivations of the smaller firm and its owner/manager with respect to growth. There are, of course, conflicts in such thinking, with the ‘death of the author’ notion (Foucault, 1977; Barthes, 1977), placing less importance on the individual artist in giving meaning to a text or image. Saussure (1966) believed that language was a closed system whose main purpose was the communication of ideas. Language is viewed as the grammatical structure of verbal and written communication agreed jointly by a particular culture. Speech, however, is individual and variable. Translating this into the realms of art, popular art as language is determined socially, but individual, creative, avant garde art is then a form of speech, with the creative, entrepreneurial artist speaking via the picture. In semiotics, the signifier is the sounded or written element of a word, while the signified is the word’s conceptual element; so for example, with the word Surrealism, it contains both a sounded signifier element and a signified meaning. With Pierce’s semiotics (Krauss, 1977), the sign is constructed of an icon, an index and a symbol. The icon relates the sign to something we recognise, the index can relate to something from within a wider range of possibilities; for example, the social, political and economic contexts of a work of art. The symbol depends on conventional, agreed meanings. Translating
semiotics visually, the syntagm is a combination of signs on a linear plane, such as a sentence (the x axis). The y axis visualises the associated relationships, with words related to each other by a principle beyond the literal context. An example which the author uses in a semiotic sense is Van Gogh’s painting The Potato Eaters when imparting artistic, creative and marketing meaning within a variety of associated relationships (Exhibit One).

| EXHIBIT ONE: |
| SEMIOTIC RELATIONSHIPS AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS |

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<tr>
<th>associated relationships</th>
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<td>e.g. Van Gogh’s ‘Potato Eaters’: artistic meaning</td>
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<td>meaning for marketers</td>
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Jakobson (1974) identifies the subject matter of semiotics as the communication of any message whatever, or the exchange of any messages whatever and of the system of signs which underlie them. Metonymy and metaphor are identified as important semiotic ingredients. Metonymy applies to narratives set in linear time while metaphor relates to associated substitutions. In painting, metonymy is the formal arrangement of its elements, and metaphor is the content and its associative allusions to what is outside the painting itself. In the author’s own teaching and research, this is taken further than just relating metaphor to the artwork and is in addition applied in a creative, entrepreneurial marketing sense. Jakobson also applied the semiotic system to music, film, dreams and language in order to feed into the language of the artist’s paintings. He also called for the fostering of inter-disciplinary semiologies. This supports the author’s own attempts at widening the applicability of semiotics. Some artistic semioticians object to the notion of artist as genius (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Ponty felt that instead of attempting to deify the genius artist,
it was more important to realise that the artist’s life followed that of his art, with a strong linkage to his social surroundings. The author has developed a model of creativity for the smaller firm and its owner/manager, where recognition of the social environment is considered as important, if not more so at times, as other factors traditionally modelled within existing marketing conceptualisations (Fillis, 2002a; Fillis, 2000).

Merleau-Ponty remarks that change within systems such as painting should be viewed as dynamic, rather than as an exact point in time. The language of painting occurs on several levels, with the first or empirical level concerns the actual words, creative act and gesture. The second level relates to the sign structure. So, for example the first level might relate to the painter Jackson Pollock and his paintings (Collings, 1999), while the second level could concern the drips of paint as signs of his artistic presence, with painting as a language. Bryson (1983) viewed the work of art as a visual system of signs, with art being constructed of cultural signs. When these are decoded, they unveil the level of art’s role in the wider society. This decoding offers the marketer an endless supply of data within a single painting, with messages and implications for consumer researchers and researchers of the firm. Bryson also draws on signs outside the work of art within the wider cultural environment, thereby facilitating the connection between art and other disciplines such as business and marketing.

There are criticisms of the use of semiotics. Barthes (1969) originally believed that semiology could not impact meaningfully on art since he felt that artistic creation could not be reduced ultimately to a system. He later relents somewhat (Barthes, 1981) with the example of photography, where he identifies the operator as the person who frames reality and takes the photograph, the spectator who observes the picture, and the spectrum as the subject of the picture. This can be compared similarly to the painter who paints the picture, the viewer who consumes the painting and the spectrum as the subject of the painting. Heidegger and Derrida (Adams, 1996:162) suggest that semiotics should be viewed dynamically, rather than with a closed system, giving further weight to the applicability of semiotics to other areas of enquiry. Derrida believed that meanings are not fixed but instead vary depending on the context. In ‘The Truth in Painting’ (Derrida, 1887), the title of the first chapter ‘Passe Partout’ is a metaphor for opening up the boundaries of thought, again promoting the extension of semiotics to other disciplines. Semiotic interpretation allows for a variety of representations. Picasso has said that he did not paint symbols, he only painted what he say and that it was up to others to seek meaning (Richardson, 1992; 1997). This serves as a challenge to researchers across
disciplines to use semiotics and other methodologies to elicit meaning from his paintings. The view can be taken that these comments from Picasso were deliberately provocative and that he knew absolutely what every brushstroke and pencil line meant to him as an artist, and entrepreneurial marketer. His seminal work, Les Demoiselles D’Avignon, challenged artistic convention to its very limits when it was first exhibited and is seen today by many as the first cubist painting. Picasso’s creativity does not seem to have been consciously planned. He describes how the process is instead a matter of ‘stumbling across what you are looking for’. Together with George Braque, Picasso fashioned cubism into a commercially successful artistic product with high public demand, but yet which still remained controversial and confusing to many. Jean Cocteau described how Picasso appeared ‘to be spraying genius everywhere’, a creative genius not content with relaxing within one particular style but was instead prepared to develop and experiment with a range of styles over time. Picasso even became involved in political marketing, when asked by the exiled Spanish Government to produce Guernica as a promotional, propaganda device against fascism. The entrepreneurial Picasso was eager to exploit new forms of media and was eager to perform on film, painting on glass, something that Jackson Pollock also did, but with a large degree of introvertedness and lack of showmaship. With Salvador Dali’s painting ‘The Endless Enigma’, the possible range of meanings derived from it are endless (Fillis, 2000c). Thus, semiotics allows for the parasitizing of systems which interact with each other. There is an immense opportunity to adopt alternative research methodologies in order to construct more meaningful, contextual marketing theory using semiotics and other approaches. This can result in the derivation of a rival paradigm of creative, entrepreneurial marketing suitable for the smaller firm, the individual practitioner and the creative, entrepreneurial marketing academic.

BIOGRAPHY, ART AND SMALLER FIRM MARKETING RESEARCH:

A more appropriate framework of sector specific marketing can be elicited by drawing on the successful creative behaviour of the artist. Through the examination of published biographies, observation and other sources, the author has identified a particular type of artist who can be described as an entrepreneurial marketer (Fillis, 2000a; 2000c; 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). A series of conceptualisations of how the smaller firm researcher and practitioner can learn from researchers at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface (Day and Reynolds, 1998; Collinson, 2002) and, more specifically, how the arts organisation can embrace a more appropriate form of creative, entrepreneurial marketing which fits more comfortably
with a sector with a clash of ‘art for art’s sake versus ‘art for business’ philosophies (Fillis, 2002b; 2002c).

This paper demonstrates that reading from a much wider range of sources than is traditionally the case within marketing produces innovative perspectives and potential solutions to firm level marketing problems. In researching the activities of the smaller firm, increased insight can be gained by drawing on both traditional sources of research from within marketing, business and social science literatures, but also from sources in creative disciplines such as art. Researching aesthetics and art, for example, uncovers relationships between the artist, the work of art and the audience, with direct parallels easily made between the marketer, the product or service and the customer (Edwards, 1999; Harrison, et al. 1998). Investigating the potential for informing marketing theory from the methodologies found within art, the artistic biography and autobiography are valuable sources of data (Dali, 1993; Roskill, 2000). The works of art produced by the artist are inextricably linked to the artist’s personality and everyday life. Translating this into the wider remit of marketing, a product or service is ultimately derived from the social and economic environment. The biographical method relies on the availability of texts on the artists’ lives. The philosophy of some historical artists will never be understood completely due to the dearth of material concerning their lives and work, but others such as Van Gogh have a much more complete documentation. The author has adopted this approach in order to develop a framework, or manifesto, of marketing artistry for marketing theorists and practitioners alike (Fillis, 2000c).

The earliest artistic biographies related to artists as gods, as almost mythical characters. The reason behind this elevated thinking was that art was thought to be divinely inspired. In ancient Greece, when artists respected the gods and acknowledged them as sources of artistic inspiration, they were allowed to pursue their creativity. Early accounts of artists and their patrons appeared in Ovid’s “Metamorphoses” and Pliny’s “Natural History” where the artist Zeuxis adopted an early form of advertising, helping to promote his value as an artist (Barolfsky, 1995). Nothing much of value appeared from then until the 14th Century, with the focus of writing on hagiography (the lives and miracles of the Saints). However, in 1550 one of the central works of artistic biography appeared, alongside the development of the Renaissance. Giorgio Vasari’s ‘Lives of the Artists’ was commissioned by Bishop Paolo Giovio in an attempt to document a ‘Who’s Who’ in the arts (Vasari, 1998), including artists such as Brunellesco, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Da Vinci, Titian, Michaelangelo and Giotto, the
pioneer of three dimensional picture space and the constructor of the perfect

circle. Vasari, although generally famous for this biographical work, was
also a son of a minor painter and showed his wider creative strength through
his designing of the Uffizi in Florence. Vasari’s biographical work was
written without the aid of any real written reference materials, relying
mainly on oral accounts and whatever documentation existed. Therefore
some mistakes were inevitable but as a major biographical work, it is not
disputed. Since the Renaissance, the artistic biography has grown to include
a number of related genres, from short anecdotal commentaries,
autobiographies, notebooks, poetry, memoirs, journals, letters, fictional
biographies to multimedia output such as videos of artists at work, taped
interviews, film biographies and use of the Internet to disseminate pertinent
information.

The author draws from a number of these sources, including the letters of
Van Gogh (Roskill 2000), the writings by and about Salvador Dali (Gibson,
1997; Dali, 1998), Pablo Picasso (Ashton, 1972), as well as more general
books and television material on artistic movements (Collings, 1999). The
imagery of the artistic work can also be construed as a form of
autobiographical text. Van Gogh’s ‘Potato Eaters’, for example, is a
painting about suffering and the frugality of living in a peasant setting
(Exhibit Two). This imagery can be extended in a semiotic sense to convey
an alternative meaning to marketers. The dark tones of the paints used in
the construction of the work, together with the fact that the various
characters are sitting around a table with a dimly lit light hanging above it,
serve to act as a metaphor for the uncreative state. The darkness conveyed
in the painting is used to mean that we, as marketing practitioners and
theorists, will be destined to a failure to stretch our knowledge, construct
new conceptualisations of marketing and generally remain in the dark about
new opportunities, unless we move forward, search for more appropriate
frameworks of understanding and willingly promote the merits of creative,
entrepreneurial marketing.

Schopenhauer (Harrison et al., 1998:15) believed that art is a form of
knowledge which is distinct from science. Through the investigation of art,
interested parties are able to rise above knowledge of specific issues to a
more holistic plane of ideas through the relinquishing of ordinary ways of
considering things:

“(Artistic) genius is seen as the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own
interest (subjectivity)...and to consequently discard our personality for a time in
order to remain a pure knowing subject, the clear eye of the world (objectivity)” (Harrison et al., 1998:18).

Imagination, although an important element of genius, is not identical to it. Only a few individuals can ever hope to reach a state of genus but we can all use our imagination and increments of creativity in order to question the status quo and test the boundaries of marketing knowledge. Theodore Gericault (Harrison et al., 1998:23) believed in the creative power of the individual genius although he identified that this may be linked to the economic wellbeing of the surrounding environment. Gericault identifies the success of David (Harrison et al., 1998:24) as attributable to his own abilities rather than because of the artistic establishment of his time. Jacques-Louis David was central to the Neo-classical movement, reacting against the Rococo period. He became the leading painter of the French Revolution. David studied the old masters and absorbed their creative methodologies, but in addition travelled to Italy where he drew inspiration from his surroundings and he subsequently became a role model and leader of a new artistic school. This exposure to other cultures, systems and processes can be compared similarly to the entrepreneurial marketing
researcher who is willing to experiment with alternative methodologies in order to construct more meaningful theories. There is also some useful discussion from the Journal of Eugene Delacroix (Harrison et al., 1998:29) in terms of the merits of revisiting past processes of creative elimination in order to inform the present and the future:

“...it must not be thought that just because I rejected a thing once, I must ignore it when it shows itself today...I think that it is imagination alone...that makes one see what others do not see, and which makes one see in a different way.”

This demonstrates the benefits of the willingness to embrace a previously unattractive concept or idea as circumstances change. The author embraces a creative philosophy in teaching marketing, where students are encouraged to think creatively about how entrepreneurial artistic practice by historical and contemporary artists, designers, architects and engineers can inform the process of new product development. Instead of adopting a narrow, textbook, view of how creativity impacts upon the process (usually only conceptualised at the idea generation stage), students are encouraged to think instead in terms of generating a wider creative, entrepreneurial marketing philosophy to their work. Use of the metaphor, interpretation of imagery, the sign and other semiotic devices are used to stimulate creative thinking and inform smaller firm marketing research.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

This paper has identified a number of shortcomings in the ability of conventional marketing frameworks, conceptualisations and theories to understand and explain smaller firm behaviour. A review of the literature has shown that, in reality, the non--linear, sometimes chaotic nature of SME behaviour does not mirror the stepwise, linear, formal prescribed approaches as found in the majority of marketing management texts. However, research has shown that many of these firms can grow successfully in domestic and international markets by exploiting sets of creative entrepreneurial marketing competencies. In order to gain an improved appreciation of the central processes involved, the smaller firm marketing researcher is encouraged to embrace the philosophy, and practice, of researchers at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship interface where understanding of knowledge, creativity, opportunity recognition, networking and word of mouth communication are viewed as central to rationalising the uncertainty found in the SME environment. Examples of contemporary research into internationalisation and arts marketing has also identified a void in understanding smaller firm behaviour.
Given this knowledge gap, it seems appropriate to suggest that an alternative paradigm of smaller firm marketing research be created using non-conventional marketing research methodologies. One of the key central constructs is that the smaller firm entrepreneurial marketer uses creativity in order to establish competitive advantage and to overcome severe resource constraints. In addition, the entrepreneurial marketing researcher can be creative in the use of alternative research methodologies in order to generate improved understanding. The paper has demonstrated that there are merits in carrying out investigations of successful, and unsuccessful, creative practice and in endeavouring to understand how creative philosophies are formed. Investigation of art history methodologies in combination with contemporary arts marketing research provides a creative research arena for small firm marketing research. Future research need not be limited to the SME; several marketing researchers of the larger firm have identified weaknesses in conventional marketing techniques. Creative approaches to understanding are equally relevant there.

The study of creativity provides a natural linkage between marketing, art, science, psychology, biography and other areas of enquiry. This paper has focused on particular approaches such as biography, semiotics and metaphor in order to understand creative behaviour, rationalise uncertainty and to convey an entrepreneurial marketing message to those researchers of the firm interested in testing the boundaries of conventional thought. Future research will examine additional art history methodologies and continue to embrace a cross-disciplinary approach. By combining this with contemporary research at the Marketing and Entrepreneurship, an improved understanding of the creative process will be reached and a heightened appreciation of entrepreneurial smaller firm marketing obtained.

REFERENCES:


