

A Qualitative Research on Entrepreneurial Marketing Activities of Cluster Member SMEs¹

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Abstract

The entrepreneurial marketing (EM) approach is a new phenomenon for SMEs. This study aims to reveal the orientation's consciousness and investigate the level of behavior among seven companies located in Ankara, Turkey. The selection is done through cluster representatives of the sectors including construction machinery, medical, renewable energy, rubber, defense & aviation, and communication. The companies are determined by theoretical (purposive) sampling and semi-structured face-to-face interviews are applied for data collection. Content analysis is used for the data-treatment technique. Entrepreneurial marketing activities are measured by EM dimensions as proactiveness, risk management, opportunity-driven, innovation-focused, resource utilization, customer density and value creation. Findings revealed that companies in the research sample have the approach of entrepreneurial marketing however the intensity differs according to sectors. It is aimed to increase the awareness of the approach among the SMEs to create superior customer value. Moreover, clarifying the activities built under entrepreneurial marketing will contribute to the practical side of marketing decisions and strategies as well as future studies filling the gap in the field.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Marketing, SMEs, Clusters.

Öz

Girişimsel pazarlama (EM) yaklaşımı, KOBİ'ler için oldukça yeni bir olgudur. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de yerleşik yedi işletmenin girişimsel pazarlama yönelimini ve bu konuya ilişkin bilincini ortaya çıkarmayı ve davranış düzeyini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. İşletmeler, inşaat makineleri, medikal, yenilenebilir enerji, kauçuk, savunma ve havacılık ve iletişim sektörleri olmak üzere sektörel kümelerde faaliyet gösteren işletmeler arasından seçilmiştir. İşletmeler teorik (amaçlı) örnekleme ile belirlenmiş ve veri toplama sürecinde yarı yapılandırılmış yüz yüze görüşmeler uygulanmıştır. Toplanan veriler, içerik analizi ile incelenmiştir. Girişimsel pazarlama faaliyetleri, proaktiflik, risk yönetimi, fırsat odaklılık, yenilikçilik, kaynak kullanımı, müşteri yönelimi ve değer yaratma olarak girişimsel pazarlama boyutları kullanılarak ölçülmüştür. Bulgular, araştırma örneklemindeki işletmelerin girişimsel pazarlama yaklaşımına sahip olduğunu ancak yoğunluğun sektörlere göre farklılık gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu kapsamda, bu çalışma ile KOBİ'lerde üstün müşteri değeri yaratma yaklaşımının farkındalığının artırılması hedeflenmektedir. Ayrıca girişimsel pazarlama kapsamında oluşturulan faaliyetlerin netleştirilmesi, bu alandaki boşluğu dolduracak gelecekteki çalışmaların yanı sıra pazarlama kararlarının ve stratejilerinin pratik yönüne de katkı sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Girişimsel Pazarlama, KOBİler, Kümeler

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Introduction

Marketing and entrepreneurship phenomenon are focused by researchers nearly after 1980's especially to build a bridge within the concepts (Hills & LaForge, 1992; Collinson & Shaw, 2001; Becherer et al., 2008, Hisrich & Ramadani, 2017). Gardner (1990) explained the relationship between entrepreneurship and marketing with the definition as it is the place where innovation is brought to market. In addition, studies on entrepreneurship and marketing have shown that entrepreneurship includes many activities in marketing theory that are quite similar and feed each other (Hills & LaForge, 1992; Collinson & Shaw, 2001; Hisrich & Ramadani, 2017; Toghraee et al., 2017).

There are studies showing that traditional marketing methods and the traditional marketing mix are no longer sufficient globally (Hultman & Shaw, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Constantinides, 2006; Hisrich & Ramadani, 2018). Becherer et al. (2008) questioned whether traditional marketing methods are convenient for entrepreneurs in every circumstance as the marketing dynamics and inner resources can force entrepreneurs to develop marketing tactics with insufficient budgets.

Day and Montgomery (1999) explain that the marketing field should turn to have a more led approach and should use new methods, due to these five important changes: (1) connected knowledge economy, (2) adaptive organizations, (3) globalization and convergence, (4) fragmenting and frictionless markets and (5) demanding customers and their behaviors. In addition, business and business environments are changing rapidly in today's global economy and the marketing environment is more competitive to survive for small and medium-sized companies. Globalization has led to some transformations in traditional marketing paradigms and the development of newer methods. In this way, entrepreneurial marketing has emerged as one of the new marketing approaches.

In this manner, the motivation of the study is to explore (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises) SMEs marketing approach an entrepreneurial base. According to that seven companies located in

Ankara, Turkey are included in the research sample. The companies are representing a cluster belonging to sectors which are Construction Machinery, Medical, Renewable Energy, Rubber, Defense & Aviation, Communication Technologies and Rail Systems. The aim is to investigate entrepreneurial marketing activities more deeply and therefore preferred to apply qualitative research via interview techniques. It is observed that there is a gap in the literature related to entrepreneurial marketing studies, therefore, the goal of the study is to analyze the companies in a national base at first, then expand the research in an international approach with collaborative studies.

Within this respect, the research questions are listed below:

1. Do Turkish cluster member SMEs have an entrepreneurial marketing approach?
2. Can marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as entrepreneurial?
 - a. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as proactive?
 - b. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as risk management?
 - c. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as opportunity-driven?
 - d. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as innovative?
 - e. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as resource leveraged?
 - f. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as customer intensive?
 - g. Can entrepreneurial marketing activities of Turkish cluster member SMEs be defined as value created?

According to research questions, entrepreneurial marketing dimensions are included proactiveness, risk management, opportunity-driven, innovation-focused, resource

leveraging, customer intensity and value creation. In the first part, the literature review is relieved and the marketing approach of sample companies are explained. In the data collection phase, semi-structured interviews are arranged and the content analysis technique is preferred for data analysis. Findings are presented and in the discussion part, research results are evaluated for comparative future studies.

Theoretical Background

Entrepreneurial Marketing Concept

In the literature, there are many definitions of entrepreneurial marketing. Some of these definitions focus on the marketing activities of small enterprises (Bjerke & Hultman, 2002), some on who conducts the marketing activities (Stokes, 2000) and some on the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing such as innovation and value creation (Kraus et al., 2009), some on the nature of the establishment without distinction of size and age (Whalen et al., 2016).

According to Stokes (2000, p.2), entrepreneurial marketing is marketing activities carried out by entrepreneurs or people who are both owners and managers of enterprises. Hills and Hultman (2010, p.27) describe entrepreneurial marketing as "EM is a spirit, an orientation as well as a process of passionately pursuing opportunities and launching and growing ventures that create perceived customer value through relationships by employing innovativeness, creativity, selling, market immersion, networking and flexibility". Becherer et al. (2012) characterized entrepreneurial marketing as marketing processes in companies that usually have limited resources and chase opportunities in uncertain market conditions.

Whalen et al. (2016, p.7), who consider entrepreneurial marketing from a broader perspective, defined entrepreneurial marketing as "EM is a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-taking activities that create, communicate, and deliver value to and by customers, entrepreneurs, marketers, their partners, and society at large". As can be understood from the difference between the definitions in the literature, there is no consensus

on the definition of entrepreneurial marketing, where entrepreneurship and marketing intersect.

Entrepreneurial Marketing Dimensions

In the literature, entrepreneurial marketing activities of enterprises have been examined under different dimensions. These dimensions have been accepted by different researchers in different structures (Morris et al., 2002; Bjerke & Hultman, 2004; Hills & Hultman, 2006; Jones & Rowley, 2011; Whalen et al., 2016). Morris et al. (2002) developed seven dimensions in total, including proactiveness, risk management, opportunity-driven, innovation-focused, resource leveraging, customer intensity and value creation. The first four dimensions of this are entrepreneurial orientation, and the other three dimensions are marketing orientation. It is argued that these dimensions distinguish entrepreneurial marketing from traditional marketing (Hills, et al. 2008; Hisrich & Ramadani, 2017).

Bjerke & Hultman (2004) discussed entrepreneurial marketing with proactiveness, opportunity research and innovation dimensions within the scope of four basic pillars: entrepreneurship, processes, actors, and resources. Hills and Hultman (2013) suggested that there are six different dimensions of EM. These are including growth orientation, customer focus, informal market analysis, opportunity orientation, value creation through networks and closeness to market.

Jones and Rowley (2011) developed the EMICO model, which includes fifteen EM dimensions based on entrepreneurial orientation, innovation orientation, customer orientation, and marketing orientation. Stokes and Wilson (2010) examined the EM process with innovation, identification, interaction, and information within the scope of the 4I model. Whalen et al. (2016), on the other hand, developed another model emphasizing opportunity recognition, operant resources (knowledge, skills, and factors of production), entrepreneurial organization, environmental turbulence (market, competitive, technological), entrepreneurial marketing, and competitive advantage.

Due to these different approaches, there is no consensus on EM dimensions in the EM literature. However, focus on innovation, risk management, adaptation to markets and opportunity-driven recognition are common EM dimensions mentioned in many studies (Shaw, 2004; Morris, 2011; Hills & Hultman, 2011; Whalen et al., 2016). Many researchers have conducted their studies using the seven EM dimensions developed by Morris et al. (2002) (Hacioglu et al. 2012; Becherer et al., 2012; Gorica & Buhajoti, 2016). In this study, seven dimensions defined for EM by Morris et al. (2002) were included in the research:

1. *Proactiveness* is considered an opportunity-seeking and forward-looking perspective of businesses in anticipation of future demand (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009). Proactiveness reflects how a business responds to market demands or creates new demands (Lumpkin ve Dess, 1996).

2. *Risk management* is the ability of businesses to use the actions they develop to seize opportunities in the market and to reduce or share risks (Morris et al., 2002).

3. *Opportunity-driven* refers to the orientation toward markets with undetected profit potential (Hills, et al. 2010). This dimension is especially vital for the success of SMEs (Gilmore, 2011).

4. *Innovation focused* is the tendency to introduce new products and/or services and to experience technological leadership ahead of competitors through research and development in new processes (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). Focusing on innovation can help capitalize on existing or new opportunities (Morris et al., 2002).

5. *Resource leveraging* is the ability of businesses to develop creative resources to do better with less (Morris et al., 2002). Resource leveraging is not only effectively spending limited resources, but also discovering a resource invisible to others (Becherer et al., 2012).

6. *Customer intensity*, refers to the core values of the business and its concern for the customer (Saduki-Dushi et al., 2019). This dimension is based on the belief that a customer-oriented approach should be at the center of the company's marketing activities (Becherer et al., 2012).

7. *Value creation* is defined as finding the unused source of customer value and creating custom resource combinations to generate value (Morris et al., 2002).

SMEs and Entrepreneurial Marketing

There are many quantitative studies in the literature that reveal the effects of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions on the performance of businesses in various fields. Hacioglu et al. (2012) revealed important findings between the innovation performance of SMEs operating in Turkey and EM. According to this study, proactiveness, innovation-focused, customer intensity, and resource leverage have a positive effect on the innovation performance of SMEs. The study of Hamali (2015) on enterprises in Indonesia showed that the EM dimensions of proactiveness, resource leverage, value creation, and customer intensity positively affect the business performance of enterprises. In another study by Sadiku-Dushi et al. (2019) in Kosovo, the effect of EM dimensions on the overall performance of businesses was examined. According to the results of the research, while proactiveness and risk management affect the overall performance negatively, other dimensions affect the overall firm performance positively. Fatoki et al (2018) measured the impact of EM on the financial performance of businesses and the individual performance of the business owner on South African SMEs and found that customer intensity, resource leverage, opportunity-driven, and value creation have a positive effect on financial performance and customer intensity, resource leverage, and value creation have positive effects on individual performance. Hoque et al. (2019) showed that there is a positive relationship between EM and SME performance in their study applied in Bangladesh.

The results obtained from EM studies conducted in developed countries are also not different. Becherer et al. (2012) in their mixed methods research on the United States, revealed that EM dimensions, especially value creation, significantly affect the success of SMEs. Rashad (2018) conducted a study showing that

opportunity-driven, risk management and value creation dimensions of EM positively affect the performance of Saudi SMEs. Finally, Eggers' (2020) study showed that EM positively affects the performance of SMEs in Austria.

Although there are many quantitative studies on EM, the number of qualitative studies is very few. Qualitative research in the literature generally reveals how businesses use and adopt EM dimensions. Kurgun et al. (2011) showed how entrepreneurial marketing is implemented by boutique hotels with content analysis. Gorica and Buhajloti (2016), in their qualitative research, examined how SMEs operating in Albania use the seven dimensions of EM to increase the efficiency of the business. Another qualitative study by Kocak et al. (2009) showed that EM dimensions such as organizational structure, innovation, marketing and learning orientation have important effect on born global companies for internationalization in their early stage businesses.

Methodology

Research Design

The aim of this study is to determine in depth how entrepreneurial marketing dimensions are applied in marketing activities by the member businesses of the industrial clusters in seven different sectors. As mentioned in the previous section, many studies in the literature examined the entrepreneurial marketing activities of SMEs using quantitative methods. In addition, entrepreneurial marketing dimensions can be applied consciously or unconsciously in the marketing activities of SMEs, and such activities can be revealed more clearly with in-depth analysis methods. In order to reach the aim adopted in the research, the phenomenology approach was used to explain the stance of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions among the marketing activities of SMEs and to reveal the perceptions of the firms towards entrepreneurial marketing activities. The phenomenology research design aims to make exploratory explanations about the issues that we are aware of but do not have in-depth or detailed knowledge of. It was thought that this design would be more appropriate in terms of evaluating

the views of enterprises on entrepreneurial marketing processes and practices.

For data collection method, the semi-structured interview technique was conducted and interview questions were derived from the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing put forward by Morris et al (2002). Totally 28 open-ended questions were used in interview forms. For the validity and reliability tests, experts from the field made their contributions.

Sample & Data Collection

Within the scope of the research, interviews were applied to seven small and medium-sized companies which are members of seven different sector clusters. Criterion sampling that is one of the purposive sampling methods is preferred. Purposive sampling is based on the selection of the subject groups and individuals who can best take us to the intended subject, rather than the number (Sigri, 2021). The sectors selected for the research consist of construction machinery, medical, renewable energy, rubber, defense and aviation, communication technologies, and rail systems sectors to observe the differences between the sectors. The sectors are also associated with seven different clusters operating in Ankara. Due to time and resource constraints, the research was limited to seven clusters operating in Ankara, Turkey.

In the process of selecting the businesses from the clusters, the larger SMEs were preferred when looking at the cluster as a whole. In Table 1, the general information of the businesses interviewed within the scope of the research is given.

Table 1. Case Companies Overview

Industry	Main Business	Foundation
1. Construction Machinery	Concrete batching plants, crushing screening	1987
2. Medical	Medical devices and systems	1991
3. Renewable Energy	Biogas, landfill gas	1987
4. Rubber	Automotive spare parts	1996
5. Defense & Aviation	Electromechanical systems	1975
6. Communication Technologies	Digital communication systems	2011
7. Rail Systems	Iron & steel	1937

The data collection process was carried out between 1-31 January 2022. Data were collected through online interviews with cluster member businesses with semi-structured questions. The

online interviews, which lasted about 60-90 minutes and were held separately with each business, were recorded with the knowledge of the participants and then transcribed.

Analysis

The data collected in the research were analyzed via content analysis. First of all, the recorded interviews were listened to again and transcribed. Afterward, the expressions in the articles were carefully examined in terms of current marketing approaches and dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing.

The data-triangle was considered when checking the validity and reliability of the interview records, which were loaded into the program after the cross-check readings. Interview participants consist of senior managers such as the general manager and unit manager. The companies interviewed are seven different companies from seven different clusters. Since each company is in a different cluster, it operates in different sectors.

The code-theme list was created provided by the replies of the participants and also based on the literature review. The codes related to each other were grouped on the basis of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions. Themes were determined according to past and current studies related with the research area. At the analysis stage, QDA Miner 6.0 software program was also used. The findings obtained with the code-theme list are shown in the tables in the findings section.

Findings

The concept of entrepreneurial marketing is explained in the literature section. Accordingly, companies have explained what they do in their marketing activities within the scope of the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing. Themes were adopted as the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing used in Morris et al (2002)'s study.

The codes were created from the studies in the literature on the relevant dimensions and the data obtained as a result of the interviews and were

grouped according to the themes. In total 31 codes were obtained to express entrepreneurial marketing activities under seven dimensions. Accordingly, 4 codes for the proactiveness dimension; 4 codes for the risk management dimension; 5 codes for opportunity-driven; 6 codes for innovation-focused; 3 codes for resource leveraging; 5 codes for customer intensity and 4 codes for value creation, were determined.

The findings including the frequency values and percentages of the codes are shown in Table 2. Frequency values are defined as the number of repetitions of statements used by interviewers during interviews. According to Table 2, the most frequently repeated code was value creation activities. The most frequently repeated code has been the seeking opportunities code after the value creation activities code. The least frequently repeated code was a quick evaluation of opportunities from competitors and measuring perceived value. While the most frequently mentioned code belongs to the value creation theme; Less frequently mentioned codes belong to proactiveness and value creation themes. The least frequently mentioned codes were used by only two companies. The codes mentioned by all companies have been pioneering, seeking opportunities, exploring new markets, outsourcing, value creation activities and cooperation with competitors.

Table 2. Code-Theme List and Frequencies

Themes	Codes	Count	%Codes	Cases
Proactiveness	Pioneering	13	4,3%	7
	Opportunity Creation	10	3,3%	6
	Quick Evaluation of Opportunities from Competitors	2	0,7%	2
	Following Trends	13	4,3%	6
Risk management	Engaging in Risky Projects	9	3,0%	6
	Risk Analysis	8	2,6%	6
	Risk Taking in Marketing Activities	7	2,3%	4
	Entering New Areas	12	3,9%	6
Opportunity-driven	Seeking Opportunity	17	5,6%	7
	Exploring New Markets	13	4,3%	7
	Market Expansion	9	3,0%	6
	Evaluating Opportunities	11	3,6%	6
	Identifying Opportunities	9	3,0%	5
Innovation focused	Managing Innovations	13	4,3%	6
	Responding to New Trends	9	3,0%	6
	Effort to Innovate	9	3,0%	6
	Innovation Planning	7	2,3%	5
	Product Development for Competitive Advantage	10	3,3%	5
	Driving Competition	6	2,0%	5
Resource Leveraging	High Impact with Small Investment	8	2,6%	6
	Sourcing for Opportunities	11	3,6%	6
	Outsourcing	12	4,0%	7
Customer Intensity	Focus on Customer Satisfaction	12	3,9%	6
	Customer Satisfaction Measurement	6	2,0%	5
	Meeting Customer Need	9	3,0%	5
	Identifying Customer Expectations	15	4,9%	7
	Creating a Strategic Marketing Plan	4	1,3%	4
Value Creation	Value Creation Activities	22	7,2%	7
	Cooperation with Competitors	9	3,0%	7
	Collaboration with Stakeholders	8	2,6%	5
	Measuring Perceived Value	2	0,7%	2

As expected, there are differences between companies in terms of entrepreneurial marketing activities. Although the main question is to examine the entrepreneurial marketing activities of these companies, the components of the phenomenon are also examined on a case-by-case basis. The findings are shown in Figure 1, within and between cases. Accordingly, the companies interviewed differ in terms of their entrepreneurial marketing activities. It is seen that there is a similarity in terms of entrepreneurial marketing activities carried out in companies operating in the construction, railway and defense sectors. This may be due to the fact that all three sectors are among the heavy industry sectors. Similarly, renewable energy and medical sectors seem to be similar.

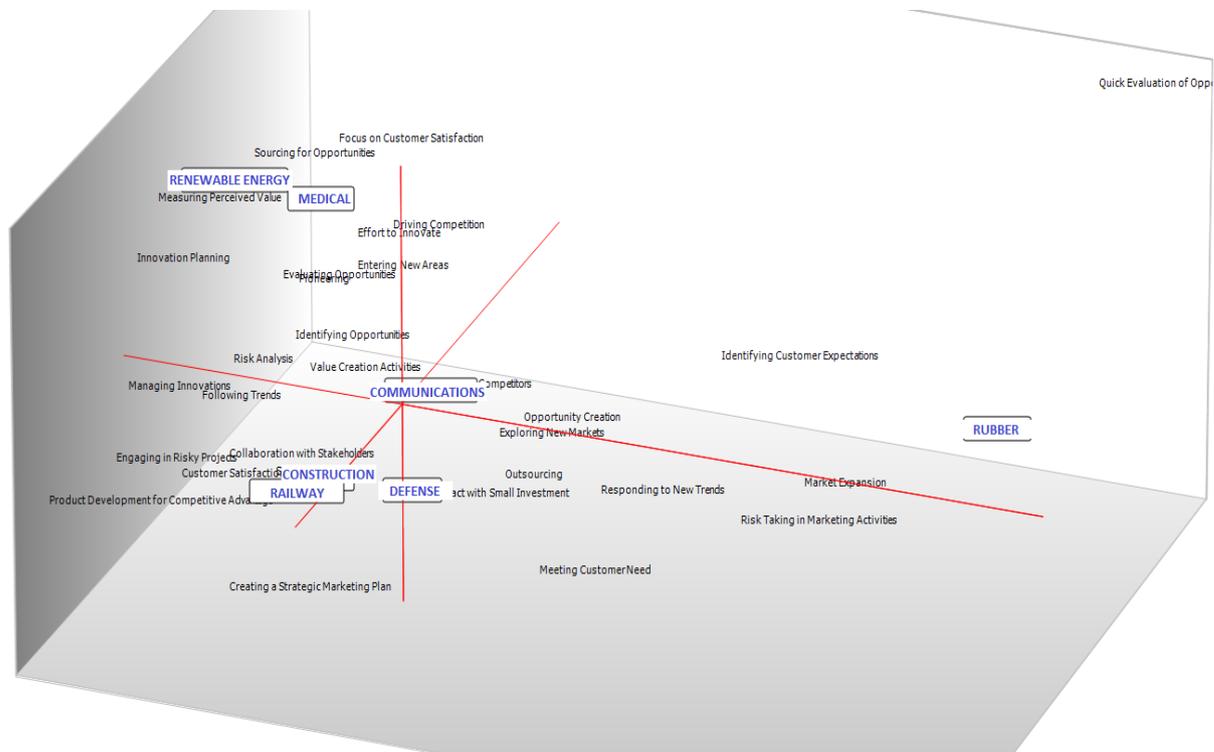


Figure 1. Correspondence Map

Figure 2 shows the entrepreneurial marketing activities on the basis of proactiveness, risk management, opportunity-driven, innovation-focused, resource utilization, customer density and value creation dimensions according to the degree of occurrence and frequency on a company basis. Accordingly, it has been observed that the company that uses entrepreneurial marketing

activities more in marketing activities is in the railway sector. The railway sector is followed respectively by the construction, communications, medical and renewable energy sectors. The sectors that mention the entrepreneurial marketing activities the least on the basis of the codes determined are the rubber and defense sectors, respectively.

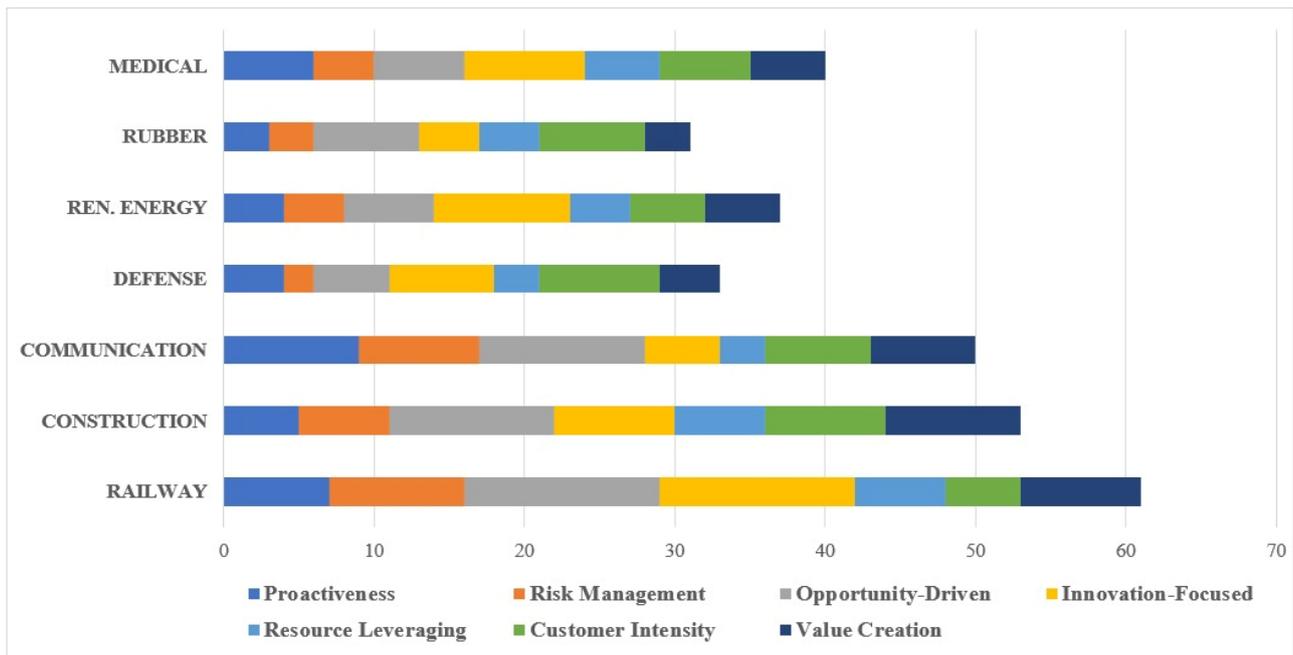


Figure 2. Entrepreneurial Marketing Activities of Case Companies

Discussion and Conclusion

The study results revealed the attribute of SMEs entrepreneurial marketing approach and it can be accepted as an edge of Turkish companies. The seven dimensions defined by Morris et al. (2002) are taken into consideration for the measurement. According to the results, it can be concluded that the sample companies have an entrepreneurial marketing approach whereas it differs from case to case. The distinct occurrence is derived from sectoral differences as well. The study also emphasizes the importance of this new marketing approach and provides a comparison of the sectoral preferences based on entrepreneurial activities.

Today's world is becoming more technology and digitalization oriented however marketing is

still the core issue for companies to survive in the market and for competitiveness. Especially for SMEs entrepreneurial marketing activities could be a good choice for marketing decisions with its many advantages. The low-cost offerings and proactive approach are the basic elements of entrepreneurial marketing efforts. While the companies behave as newly founded with an entrepreneur mindset, they can be innovative and opportunity-driven leads to the marketing dynamics. Value creation is the most important tool for companies to attract customers and have a life-long relationship with them. In our cases, railway industry companies seem to be most entrepreneurial marketing oriented. Rubber industry firms are at the bottom level according to our listing. In fact, it was expected from the communication or renewable energy sector to be at the top of this rate as these sectors are more

innovation-focused. Another interesting result is that customer intensity is observed more frequently in the defense sector.

According to these results, SMEs in the sample are more customer-oriented compared to the others while the resource leveraging is low level. For the overall results, the industries of construction, defense and rubber have similar approaches while the same behavior is observed between the medical and renewable energy sector. This can be concluded that the common missions of companies like heavy industry or the health sector have analogous approaches based on entrepreneurial marketing activities observed.

Research results are reached via the content analysis technique which means the data is provided by non-numerical variables. The findings of the entrepreneurial marketing orientation dimensions of each case firm are independent from each other therefore it should be mentioned that these findings are not directly compared of each other. As shown in the correspondence map, it reveals the agglomeration of the case firms that is presented for future studies focusing on the correlation of the dimensions.

The companies are selected and registered in the clusters which are accepted as main sectors of Turkey. This sectoral choice can be expanded for future studies as this can be a limitation of the study. Furthermore, the technique used for the explanation of research questions is based on content analysis. For further studies, quantitative techniques can be preferred to reach more participants. However, the results have a contribution to create awareness about the phenomenon both for practical and managerial sides. It is aimed to fill the gap in the literature and also increase the consciousness on entrepreneurial marketing approach.

Entrepreneurial marketing has a crucial concept both for marketing and entrepreneurship field, therefore it is suggested to increase the academic studies related with the approach. Furthermore, both quantitative and qualitative future studies can make contributions to the literature and for the managerial side and practitioners.

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