# Biographical research as a methodology for understanding entrepreneurial marketing

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## Structured Abstract:

**Purpose:** This paper responds to the Special Issue call by developing the case for enhancing understanding of entrepreneurial marketing by utilising biographical research. This builds on the limited existing research in entrepreneurial marketing using this approach.

**Methodology:** Five entrepreneurial marketers are assessed using biographical research.

**Findings:** Understanding of entrepreneurial marketing is enhanced by the adoption of biographical research. The individuals assessed clearly show the connection between the telling of a life story and how a business is run using an entrepreneurial marketing approach. Biographical techniques succeed in addressing the need for situation specific understanding. Creativity and other entrepreneurial marketing core competencies contribute to shaping competitive advantage through their ability to influence entrepreneurial marketing behaviour, market creation and growth activities.

**Research implications:** Biographical research can provide the additional theoretical and practical insight which entrepreneurial marketing requires to enable triangulation with existing research findings, helped by its longitudinal perspective and embeddedness in the social and business worlds.

**Practical implications:** Entrepreneurial marketers can make use of biographical research findings due to their readability and association with their own practices to help shape future strategies.

**Originality/value:** Although increasingly popular in entrepreneurship and small business research, the biographical approach has been underutilised in entrepreneurial marketing research. These research results enhance existing understanding of the foundations of entrepreneurial marketing.

**Keywords:** biography, entrepreneurship, marketing, methodology, competencies, market creation

**Research Paper**

**Word count:** 9401

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## Introduction:

In response to the call for papers this research develops the case for utilising biographical research to improve understanding of entrepreneurial marketing as part of the wider entrepreneurship and small firm research domain. In particular it provides longitudinal insight into competency development, opportunity recognition, market creation and growth activities. It also contributes to the rethinking of entrepreneurial marketing epistemology. Its interpretive approach embraces the complexities of subjective worlds and the lived experience. This methodological approach has been greatly under-represented from an entrepreneurial marketing perspective. The central research question is: How can biographical research add to our understanding of entrepreneurial marketing? It is expected that the uncovering of data not accessible by other means such as the survey approach can complement our existing knowledge by revealing the longitudinal influences which shape entrepreneurial marketing competency development, decision making and subsequent actions.

The paper is structured as follows: An appraisal of biography as a research method is carried out before discussion of its application to entrepreneurial marketing. Researcher judgement and cross-sectional sampling are used to identify relevant individuals for analysis. Although limited in number, this approach has been used successfully in several other studies of entrepreneurial marketing (e.g. Fillis and Herman 2005; Fillis 2006a; 2006b; 2007). These papers considered how insight can result from the triangulation of biographical data with other sources. The paper then discusses the findings from theoretical and practical perspectives and reflects on the

suitability of biographical research in enhancing understanding of entrepreneurial marketing. Finally, a conceptual model is developed which visualises the paper's contributions to the Special Issue call.

**Entrepreneurship and small business research and the growth of the enterprise discourse:**

The rethinking of entrepreneurship (Steyaert and Hjorth 2003; Johannson 2004; Gartner 2010) has been accompanied by the emergence of an enterprise discourse or narrative (Du Gay 2004). Gartner and Birley 2002:387-388) believe that

> …many substantive issues in entrepreneurship research are rarely addressed, and that many of the important questions…can only be asked through qualitative methods and approaches…Our inkling about quantitative research is more of "There is something missing here". Some questions simply do not get asked, or cannot be asked, when undertaking quantitative studies.

What is required are more situation specific understandings stemming from individually, rather than uniformly, shaped behaviours. Endres and Woods (2007), for example, call for subjectivist research into entrepreneurial opportunity creation where internal mental processes and subjective meanings are deemed crucial in understanding behaviour. The challenge is to develop theory from a variety of perspectives, including the social context and longitudinal time frame (Low and McMillan 1988). Entrepreneurship should develop its own distinct methods and theories which can accommodate the variable nature of entrepreneurial behaviour:

> Entrepreneurship begins with a disjointed, discontinuous, non-linear (and usually unique) event that cannot be studied successfully with methods developed for examining smooth, continuous, linear (and often repeatable) processes…we should be studying central questions with appropriate tools, whether they are simple or complex (Bygrave 1989:8).

One such distinct approach is contained within entrepreneurial marketing which is now an established way of understanding entrepreneurial and small firm theory and

practice. This differs from an administrative viewpoint which tends to focus around larger organisations' ability to access greater resources, while paying much less attention to entrepreneurial small and medium sized enterprises (Hills et al. 2008). Entrepreneurial marketing is different since it does not embrace the linear, rational thinking contained in the administered perspective and instead places entrepreneurial vision, opportunity recognition and informal processes at its heart.

**Entrepreneurial marketing:**

A consensus is now emerging around the meaning and boundaries of entrepreneurial marketing. Entrepreneurial marketing recognises the need for situational awareness within a heterogeneous firm environment rather than following prescriptive, generalised advice (O'Donnell 2004). This is demonstrated through owner/manager experience, knowledge, communication and judgement abilities within a competency spectrum (Carson et al. 1995; Man et al. 2002). Entrepreneurial marketing concerns the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities in acquiring and retaining profitable customers by adopting innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation (Bjerke and Hultman 2002; Morris et al. 2002; Additional factors contributing to its practice include owner/manager self belief, innovative thinking, imagination, vision, judgement, creativity, ambition, intuition and flexibility (Hansen and Hills 2004; Thomas et al. 2013). Entrepreneurial marketers make use of both formal and informal ways of carrying out business, including networking (Gilmore et al. 2001; O'Donnell et al. 2001) to engage with customers (Jones and Rowley 2011). It also concerns the creative use of an organisation's resources (Shaw 1999). Other contributing factors include entrepreneurial effort, energy, commitment and persistence (Hill and McGowan

1997). A large proportion of entrepreneurial marketing research activity focuses on the pre start-up and start-up stages of the enterprise (Hoy 2008) but it should also concern the ongoing development of the business over time. This is where insight from biographical research can be particularly valuable. The research methodologies adopted by entrepreneurial marketing researchers transcend both quantitative and qualitative approaches. However, due to the situation specific nature of much entrepreneurial marketing behaviour, a qualitative perspective can result in greater insight and facilitate the development of a closer relationship between the researcher and the researched.

**Biography as a research method:**

Biographical analysis is a form of qualitative research concerned with the construction of stories describing human action in social and other contexts (Polkinghorne 1995; Roberts 2002). It considers the lived experience of individuals from a variety of contextualised perspectives (Muller 1999). The processes involve include thinking, talking and remembering events, constructing meaning and making sense (Josselson and Lieblich 1995; Weick 1995). In addition to any themes identified, sense can be made of the data by identifying key points made via social and cultural processes (Vipond and Hunt 1984). Understanding the role of the social world can be enhanced by interpreting stories of the self and how the individual interacts with society (Down 2006). A life story can be pictured as a series of mutually related themes within a network of interconnected cross references.

Biographical research enhances understanding of life, behaviour, motives, personality and other factors relating to the individual such as the people and conditions which

impact (Jones 1998; Jones et al. 2011). It also uncovers and interprets longitudinal, historical data, with understanding enhanced further when combined with theory (Dixon 1998). Interview data can also be viewed as a type of biography using the depth or long interview process (McCracken 1988). Like all methodological approaches the biographical method has its critics; for example, that bias can be introduced by an author writing an idealised version of the truth, or hagiography. Personal biographies on business venturing, for example, can be deemed anecdotal (Fletcher 2007). However, cross-checking of findings from a variety of primary and secondary sources can help alleviate these concerns.

Biographical research can be both descriptive and interpretive. There are several sources of biographical data (Alpers 1996). The personal biography involves demographic, family and personality characteristics of the subject. The professional biography relates to the development of the subject's career. The intellectual biography describes the subject's education and training and the environmental biography evaluates the social, political and economic conditions during the subject's lifetime. A truly objective biography is difficult to achieve, containing minimal interpretation by the biographer and large degrees of chronological, factual information (Clifford 1970). The artistic-scholarly biography contains a degree of creative imagination while the narrative biography contains fictionalised scenes and conversations. The fictional biography has minimal resemblance to the original occurrences and uses few primary resources.

Biography offers ways into the lives of individuals and their social and business worlds (Erben 1993). They tend to have a formal structure based around literary,

sociological and interpretive conventions, normally having a beginning and end, are linear, have turning points and sets of objective voices and markers (Denzin 1984). Autobiographies are self-narratives of identity through their ability to construct previous events and actions. Studying a written biography triggers an engagement with narrative discourse (Czarniawska 1997). Biography is a form of social construction (Downing 2005) where individuals build their own perceived social reality from their subjective interpretations, while also introducing historical and culturally grounded components (Fisher 1987). Biographical analysis is based on the belief that each individual has a unique personal construct system, or individual biography, which cannot be identified using other methods alone. A life history reported by an individual is a narrative of personal experience (Titon 1980), while the author of the written biography can be considered part of the contribution of the text (Derrida 1981). Denzin (1986) breaks down the life of the individual into the surface level involving everyday tasks and routines and the deep level concerning the feeling, moral, sacred inner self. The inner world of thought and experience is the phenomenological stream of consciousness and the outer layer of events and experience the interactional stream of experience.

**Using biographical research as a methodology for understanding entrepreneurial marketing:**

There is increasing use of narrative methods in researching entrepreneurship such as analysing written text, oral narratives, ethnographical material and fiction (e.g. Rae 2005; Gartner 2007; Clarke and Holt 2010; Larty and Hamilton 2011). These methods enhance conceptual, epistemological and methodological reflection (Hjorth and Steyaert 2004), with entrepreneurial events dynamically 'emplotted' in the narrative (Ricoeur 1991). They make three contributions: the story-telling interview as an aid to

constructing an entrepreneurial identity (e.g. Smith and Anderson 2004), using stories to express entrepreneurial learning and experience and narrative as an aid to conceptualising entrepreneurship (Johansson 2004). They assist in understanding what motivates individual entrepreneurs and how their businesses operate. Personal biographies are also a useful resource where entrepreneurs write primary character accounts of their lives and actions within a developing plot, enabling relational activities between individuals to be described and brought to life.

However, there is limited evidence to date of the use of biographical techniques within entrepreneurial marketing research if we move beyond the interview as narrative perspective (e.g. Herman 2004). Entrepreneurial marketing can benefit from improved theory by learning from other disciplines (Thornton 1999; Davidsson et al. 2001), enabling a critical perspective to develop through cross fertilisation of ideas, intellectual bridging and transfer (Alvesson and Deetz 2000). A biographical approach builds on existing knowledge of the owner/manager and the enterprise; for example in relation to self-employment, the socio-economic context, the psychology and personality of the owner/manager, strategy, networking and growth. Autobiographies written by entrepreneurial marketers can be used to promote their identity (Giddens 1991) and as a data source for biographical analysis (Reveley 2010). The subjectivity contained within autobiography is precisely the insight needed when assessing the impact of the entrepreneurial marketer in shaping business direction (Morrish 2011). Analysis also uncovers examples of uncertainty, opportunity recognition, vision and other impacting factors which can assist in theory construction. Improved understanding of the impact of entrepreneurial marketing competencies can be achieved by interrogating biographical texts and interview data. These competencies

are stable over time and across sectors and ultimately contribute to securing competitive advantage.

**Methodology adopted in the application of the biographical approach to researching entrepreneurial marketing:**

Researcher judgement and cross sectional sampling have been adopted in this biographical research (Spiggle 1994). A similar approach has also been used in related cross-sectional studies of creativity in entrepreneurial marketing and so is deemed appropriate (e.g. Barron and Harrington 1981; Fillis 2002; 2006a; 2006b; Fillis and Rentschler 2006; Woodman and Schoenfeldt 1990). In evaluating the appropriateness of biographical research in understanding international entrepreneurship, Fillis (2007) triangulated longitudinal findings from a range of studies on creativity, noting how the entrepreneurial competencies from not only compared favourably with the results of other research using in-depth interviews, postal surveys and literature reviews, but also enhanced understanding by identifying and discussing additional competencies which had not been noted before. In addition, authors such as Kerrigan et al. (2011) and Schroeder (2006) have interrogated visual artists from biographical perspectives to reveal additional insight into branding of the individual.

Here, the subjects have been chosen because of their information-rich status and their ability to provide substantial material from which to draw meaningful assertions (Merrill and West 2009). They range from the businessman Alan Sugar, artists Andy Warhol and Thomas Kinkade, and two small business practitioners, all with entrepreneurial marketing qualities. This approach mirrors that of Smith and Anderson (2004) but it is also balanced by interrogating the biographical insight from interviews with several less known owner/managers.

The sample size is deemed to be sufficient in narrative inquiry methodology (Chase 2005). Data has been collected using primary and secondary sources, including face to face biographical interviews, published autobiographies and biographies, websites, newspapers, journals, written diaries and gallery visits. In adopting the biographical approach as a form of archival analysis, the skilled researcher filters out irrelevant material before thematic analysis of the narratives (Boyatsis 1998). Implicit coding is used in order to ratify recurring central concepts. The findings are then compared and contrasted with previous research in the domain and with relevant theoretical and conceptual constructs. Central to interpretation is considering what the narratives tell the researcher and how they relate to other literature in the field, as well as appraising the emergence of new material in addressing the theory versus practice gap.

**Biographical research findings:**

*Alan Sugar:*

The main biographical source consulted was Sugar (2010), although various websites and other sources were also utilised. Lord Alan Sugar, probably most renowned for founding the electronics company Amstrad, now sold and a subsidiary of BSkyB, and being chairman of The Apprentice on BBC1, was born in the east end of London in 1947. He has accrued wealth of around £770m. Known for his plain speaking and ability to identify and act on business opportunities (Hansen and Hills 2004; Endres and Woods 2007), he exhibits many characteristics of the entrepreneurial marketer such as determination, vision, open to taking risks, self confidence, natural leadership, good at networking and relationship building, creativity and ambition. At a young age, Sugar was already demonstrating his flair for setting up businesses; for example, selling sacks of woollen trimmings to a scrap merchant, and printing and distributing

copies of his school magazine. He also had a paper round and worked at a greengrocer's and baker's on a Saturday, and then in a pharmacy where he developed an interest in photography, later selling prints he had developed himself. Initially working as a clerical officer in the civil service and then as a trainee cost accountant, he quickly realised that his future lay elsewhere. It was at this time that he began to take an interest in electronics. He saw an advertisement for a travelling salesman for Robuck Electrical which manufactured tape recorders and record players and began working there. After gaining more experience he then decided to work for himself, buying a van and setting up AMS (Alan Michael Sugar) Trading Company, later to be known as AMSTRAD and selling his own stock of electronic goods from his own premises.

Sugar knew there were opportunities for growth in the hi-fi stereo market and began importing cabinets from Denmark. Soon realising that he could make more money sourcing these himself, he identified local manufacturers and also modified the production process by developing an injection moulding for the hi-fi lid and surrounds. Using his natural sales technique (Hill 2001), he quickly developed business with leading companies. Sourcing amplifiers and speakers and later assembling these with printed circuit boards, this soon became a complete hi-fi system. Even though he could not necessarily compete with the larger players on quality, he manufactured cheaper systems which still appealed to the majority of potential customers. Realising that he could achieve further growth, he began working with Japanese sales agents who could source innovative products such as the latest cassette decks with Dolby sound, car radio cassettes, headphone designs and turntable stylus cartridges not yet seen in the UK marketplace. Sugar then developed interests

in Hong Kong and South Korea. Part of the reason for his success was his hands-on involvement in every part of the business (Hansemark 1998). Realising that cost savings could be made, he subcontracted some of the assembly of components which then gave him more time to concentrate on business development. By 1980 Amstrad had grown sufficiently to consider a public flotation on the stock market. By 1984, Sugar began producing colour televisions and video recorders. However, the competition was now catching up and he realised that diversification was needed and he soon began manufacturing personal computers (Qian 1997). These were initially produced with a built in cassette for uploading computer programmes and then with a floppy disk unit. Price was a key factor, with the basic green monitor model selling for £199 and colour monitor for £299. He then broke into the stand alone word processing market. Advertising and other elements of marketing were also important in Amstrad's success, with most of the strap lines being created by Sugar himself. He then entered the personal computer market, later taking over Clive Sinclair's operations and then producing IBM compatible PCs. Amstrad formed a relationship with Rupert Murdoch's satellite broadcasting company which still exists today (O'Donnell 2004). Sugar then became managing director of Tottenham Hotspur FC before his more recent status as chairman of The Apprentice.

*Andy Warhol:*

Insight into Warhol's use of entrepreneurial marketing can be gained by analysing the many books written by him and about him (e.g. Warhol 1975; Indiana 2010). There have also been several retrospective exhibitions which provide further understanding through the art works and the essays contained within the catalogues (e.g. Bastian 2001). Andy Warhol has been the subject of several previous studies in marketing and

consumption (e.g. Schroeder 1997; Fillis 2000) while Kerrigan et al. (2011) adopt a biographical approach to understand celebrity branding by analysing sources such as books, video clips, films and documentaries concerning Warhol. Originally working as a commercial artist, he utilised various media, including drawing, painting, screen printing, photography, film, and music. His art work has secured vast sums in the marketplace, for example, his 1963 canvas Eight Elvises made $100million in 2008 in a private sale. Screen prints of coke and soup cans relate to his interest in mass consumption (Lunt and Livingstone 1992). Indiana (2010) uses Warhol's exhibition 32 Soup Cans and its repeated imagery to show how the art establishment was challenged and then sent reeling by Warhol, breaking down the barriers between high and low art. He became adept at securing rich patrons for his portrait commissions e.g. the Shah of Iran, Mick Jagger and Liza Minnelli. His entrepreneurial marketing skills enabled him to develop himself and his art work as a brand using symbolic value (Holt 2003), establishing his own idiosyncratic brand culture (Schroeder and Salzer-Morling 2006) in response to mass consumerism (Schroeder 2002) and identity (Belk 1988).

Insight into Warhol's entrepreneurial marketing philosophy can be gained by reading The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (Warhol 1975) in which he discusses his feelings on love, beauty, fame, work, time, economics, success, art and other topics. He successfully differentiated his artistic message from the crowded marketplace by constructing his own form of entrepreneurial marketing (Gilmore et al. 2001) and exploiting the link between his art and fashion. His 'pop art' was strategically developed to exploit a consumer counter culture, deliberately deviating from established social practices (Desmond et al. 2011). Warhol moved away from the

notion of individually unique artwork, while also rejecting mass production and consumerism. Each of his silk screen differed slightly from the previous one. Warhol combined his artistic skills with his entrepreneurial marketing competencies gained from working in the advertising industry in order to generate large amounts of self-publicity. He successfully mixed art for art's sake and art for business sake philosophies (Whistler 1888).

He used his studio, The Factory, to enable individuals from many backgrounds, including the Velvet Underground, Jack Kerouac, Henry Fonda and the Rolling Stones, to meet, do business and interact in order to stimulate his creative thinking and practice. He was adept at networking with potential clients and other creative people in order to increase the value of his art business (Zontanos and Anderson 2004). Even though he had become a revered and respected artist among his peers, he still saw himself as a commercial artist. He launched the magazine Interview in 1969, with content from celebrities, artists, musicians and creative thinkers. His success as an artist and entrepreneurial marketer was shown in the value of his estate, estimated in 1987 to have been worth $600m.

*Thomas Kinkade:*

Thomas Kinkade, one of America's most successful artists, exhibited many entrepreneurial marketing characteristics such as being opportunity focused, innovative, created a strong and loyal customer base, had vision, took risks, was creative and a natural salesman, good at creating demand and embraced technology. Schroeder (2006) investigated Kinkade in order to understand the commodification of artistic values through extension of his lifestyle brand (Kornberger 2010) in galleries,

real estate and equities. His success was partly due to his type of art and its alignment with popular consumer demand of personal and cultural longings:

> …[his] production and marketing apparatus is a fascinating combination of technology, shrewd business sense and showmanship (Clapper 2006:77-78).

He intertwined his entrepreneurial marketing competencies with mass production techniques, branding and exploitation of his celebrity status (Schroeder 1997; 2006). His company Media Arts, Inc. promote him as The Thomas Kinkade Lifestyle Brand and he exploited the belief that the walls of the home are the new frontiers for branding. Kinkade's art became so popular that he was listed on the New York Stock exchange. His annual sales reached $131m in 2001, with Media Arts, Inc. achieving sales of $581million from 1998 to 2002.

Many art critics view Kinkade solely as a business person rather than an artist, with his art work often deemed kitsch by the art world (Greenberg 1986). Part of his success is due to his outsider status within the art market (Kjellman-Chapin 2011). One of his key skills was in creating a form of marketing which aligned to demand for American art (Orlean 2001). Although Kinkade's original paintings are never sold, it is the limited edition, signed reproductions which drive the business. Consumers can find Kinkade artwork in a range of products, including greetings cards, puzzles, mugs, bed sheets, credit cards, jewellery, calendars, ornaments and bibles. He has also been a guest on talk shows and over one hundred and forty books have been written about him or by him (e.g. Barnett and Kinkade 2003; Katz 2009). Such is the demand for his signed work that his limited signed editions often increase in value once purchased. Each one is mechanically signed using ink containing his DNA. Kinkade also made

licensing agreements with Disney, NASCAR and Major League Baseball (Boylan 2011).

Most Kinkade reproductions are sold through dedicated galleries in shopping malls, mail order, Christian stores and online, including thriving second hand sales via eBay. The setting of shopping mall galleries, or malleries, appeals to his customer base who might otherwise feel uneasy in a conventional gallery setting. These feel more like a home, with house-like store fronts, couches, carpets and fireplaces, creating an aura of genuine art (Clapper 2006). There are Thomas Kinkade galleries throughout North America, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Malaysia, Mexico and Russia. Kinkade used his mass production techniques to make printed reproductions and other licensed products under The Thomas Kinkade Company name and trademarked as Thomas Kinkade, Painter of Light, a term originally given to the artist JMW Turner. Boylan (2011) describes him as a marketing phenomenon. He certainly knew how markets operated and used his competencies to create demand for his products:

> [My art] beckons you into a world that provides an alternative to your nightly news broadcast…People are reminded that it's not all ugliness in this world (quoted in Olalquiaga 1998).

Kinkade identified and exploited the opportunities afforded to him through the commodification of art and, according to Boylan, the expectations of a customer base who have been seduced by his kitsch, sentimental art. He also targeted the Christian consumer, with many of his paintings containing biblical messages and imagery. Religiosity (Muniz and Schau 2005) is also displayed by his customers who have developed long term loyalty in their consumption practices towards Kinkade the brand. Rager (2011) describes the purchasing of a Kinkade image as having ritualistic

qualities as it acquires near communion like status, with characteristics relating to faith and family values.

Master Highlighter events are now being held where eight hour personal appearances by certified Thomas Kinkade Master Highlighters, who have previously worked on studio proofs of his work, enhance his images in front of an audience of collectors. At the time of his death in 2012, he was viewed as America's most collected living artist, with one in twenty American households having a copy of his work. Even after his death, consumers can purchase new scenes in the Kinkade style, made by Thomas Kinkade studio artists and stamped Thomas Kinkade Studios, such is his enduring appeal. His art galleries even experienced increased demand for his work.

*Alistair, owner of a small architectural practice:*

Alistair set up his sole practitioner business after being made compulsory redundant from the local Council. He then took stock of his life to see what other options were available. He had previously worked in two private practices as well as in local authority and each had their good and bad points. In the end he felt that he didn't want to work for anyone else any more. So, since he had developed a number of contacts he used them to set up on his own and acquired additional business (O'Donnell 2004). He views his main skill as being able to communicate verbally and visually with people in an understandable way and being a good judge of character. Versatility in approach is important. He has secured more than one contract from talking to people in the pub. He believes that he has to be as professional as possible at all times and demonstrate his capabilities, even in social, informal situations where networking can take place (Shaw 1999). Creativity is important to him (Shalley et al.

2004) and he conveys this with his clients through good design and structure. He feels that people today are looking for something slightly different which is innovative yet functional. He believes in making a subtle statement but also being able to demonstrate going that extra mile than the rest of the market. Alistair feels that it is the architect's responsibility to be as creative as possible since the end design will result in the tangibilising of this flair.

Due to the size of his practice, he knows he has take the small end of the market and do everything he can. Recently he designed three one-off houses where he was able to incorporate his design flair at a very early stage. His clients were very pleased and he, himself, is motivated by the 'kick' from this feedback. His innovation is embedded in his flair for flexible design (Morris et al. 2002). This sometimes means being proactive in addressing the client's requirements (Hansen and Hills 2004). Alistair relishes not being controlled by management and having the freedom of being his own boss. He continually makes use of his professional networks in order to grow the business (Birley 1985), for example projects requiring the input of a structural engineer, quantity surveyors or contractors. He has adopted a sales orientation (Hill 2001) by erecting his architect's site sign board outside his house but also makes use reputation and word of mouth (Stokes and Lomax 2002).

*Mark, owner of a small IT company:*

Mark formed his company with two of his friends from university who were studying computing. He then secured a contract through a network of one of his colleague's friends (Gilmore 2011). His basic IT skills relate to programming and database management but he sees himself more of a problem solver with a broad range of

knowledge and transferable skills. Mark reveals that the main reason for being self employed is that he becomes very bored doing the same thing time after time. He looks forward to going out on site to broken networks. He feels it highly satisfying to go into a site and fixing something he has never come across before. The trouble shooting is very rewarding and he really looks forward to it. Mark does not view himself as creative in a traditional sense but rather in relation to code writing and systems development. Every now and then he has to come up with multiple solutions that could be called creativity when standard ways aren't working (Awwad and Alli 2012). He feels that by putting himself in the user's place and adopting their perspective in working out how they might want to use the hardware or software this involves having to swap places mentally with somebody. Mark has a longer term ambition to employ a number of people. He wants other people to do the work for him. He admits to having a problem with giving up control (Hansemark 1998). He really does have to trust the person. With the current individual he has just employed he is able to mould him into someone he can trust. It does concern him slightly that when he starts thinking about getting bigger that he would lose some control.

One of the reasons Mark likes small business is its flexibility (Moran 1998). He will go out on site at weekends without charging exorbitant fees. Also, if for some reason a piece of kit will not arrive on time he will fashion something. He feels that he sees things quicker than colleagues and friends. He is always trying to find better and easier ways of doing things for his clients. He doesn't create new technology but uses existing tools to create pieces of software for specific jobs. He comes up with innovative solutions for existing problems (Cheng and Ven 1996). He sees himself as a risk taker, although they tend to be calculated. He invests a lot of capital into his

business but he also rides a motorbike and drives a fast car (Morris and Lewis 1995). He thinks that his people skills are good and that it's just a case of convincing people that what you want to do for them is something that will actually make their business better. If two companies do exactly the same thing he likes to think that his way is easier to use and so people will be likely to engage in repeat business. In a research & development department of a large organisation there may be more resources and time to be creative, as well as freedom from the payroll and finance. In a small business this can hamper creativity because of the additional time you need to spend on them. However the flexibility and the speed of response is so much better in a small business (Hackley and Mumby Croft 1998). He tends to act on gut feeling rather than longer term planning (Gilmore et al. 2001). Rather than re-inventing the wheel he makes use of other people's ideas and products and then extends and improves them by seeing where they went wrong. Mark thinks that the creativity in his business should result in clients and their customers being able to use the product in a satisfactory way, resulting in further recommendations for his business and enhancement of his reputation (Stokes and Lomax 2002).

**Discussion:**

This biographical research has both confirmed a range of entrepreneurial factors but also identified and discussed others not previously recognised, therefore strengthening the rationale for further interrogation of the methodology. These include an ability to proactively evaluate market conditions, identify and exploit opportunities for growth in order to secure competitive advantage (Morris et al. 2002; Hansen and Hills 2004). Embedded within this ethos is an ability to utilise a naturalistic approach to securing sales with a longer term focus (Hill 2001). Having the self confidence to be a self promoter and creator of demand is also important (Grinstein 2008). Market

orientation alone does not guarantee profitability in the longer term (Blankson et al. 2006), with firm innovation, competitive strength and environmental forces also being influencing factors (Augusto and Coelho 2007). If every organisation continuously followed customer orientation, no actual competitive advantage would be achieved but additional costs would be incurred, with little improved revenue (Gummesson 2008). Instead, a state of balanced centricity between customer and product orientation may be preferable. An ability to revisualise the core and augmented product is also needed, changing its attributes as the entrepreneurial marketer creates new markets and new demand using effectuation logic (Morrish 2011). This revisualisation could also involve the customer in rethinking and redesigning core concepts. Here the consumer is a co-producer whose level of involvement is raised through co-production (Lusch and Vargo 2006).

In each of the biographical cases assessed, it was evident that hands on involvement is what motivates the entrepreneurial marketer. Although they achieve success through exploitation of their competencies in selling their product, some chose to diversify from their core offering when this was deemed necessary (Qian 1997). Personal and business contact networking and relationship building are integral to securing competitive advantage (O'Donnell 2004). Strong reputation of the owner/manager and the business, personal branding and positive word of mouth communication also influence success (Shepherd 2005). Creativity is a catalyst in shaping innovative core activities and associated business ideas, resulting in an ability to differentiate the organisation in the wider marketplace (Shalley et al. 2004).

Entrepreneurial marketers establish and maintain high visibility in the marketplace through portraying their self as a brand and also spreading the brand culture of the firm and its products and services (Shepherd 2005; Schroeder and Salzer-Morling 2006). An influential, charismatic, creative owner/manager is able to create and maintain a successful aura which can be used to promote the business in the marketplace (Bjorkman 2002). Taking calculated risks is also part of the make up of the entrepreneurial marketer (Morris et al. 2002). These innovative actions are capable of driving increasing levels of consumption among existing customers, while attracting business from new customers and from those loyal to other businesses (Yim and Kannan 1999). When required, entrepreneurial marketing should be capable of disturbing the status quo so that new and profitable outcomes are achieved. Most conservative smaller businesses tend to adhere to established practices but opportunity recognition and resultant action can result in deviations from long held assumptions and potentially more profitable outcomes (Hansen and Hills 2004).

How entrepreneurial marketing is achieved in practice is the result of acquiring and implementing sets of appropriate competencies which are shaped by both intuitive and rational thinking (Ardley 2006). This can be done by being prepared to change managerial styles and systems when required through the inherent flexibility of entrepreneurial marketing. These styles are shaped both by external uncertainty and ambiguity, and core competencies such as intuition. The results of this approach can be seen in the seduction of consumers and attempts to control, manipulate and predict the market through owner/manager vision (Schroeder 2006). This is shaped by appropriate skills in communication, visualisation and judgement of character and opportunities.

Due to the up close and personal approach adopted by entrepreneurial marketers with their customers, they are able to quickly reach an understanding of consumer demand, preferences and tastes (McGowan et al. 2001). The self confidence of these managers can then result in the creation of a market for the firm's products which aligns to this particular aesthetic (Augusto and Coelho 2007). The loyalty of customers content in their long term relationship with the firm can result in displays of religiosity or devotion for its brands and products (Muniz and Schau 2005). Central to successful entrepreneurial marketing practice is an ability to express ambition within the constraints of limited resources. Owner/managers who practice entrepreneurial marketing display an effectual logic shaped by their personality and which impacts on decision making (Douglas 2005). This results in the development of a personalised management style. Although innovative SMEs cannot compete on price with their larger competitors, they can deliver on offering added value. Entrepreneurial marketers are motivated by doing, not by being told what to do by others and to have a large degree of control in business direction (Hansemark 2007). They often have an enquiring disposition and are good problem solvers when responding to challenging situations, often keen to derive non standard solutions through their flexible, imaginative approaches.

Entrepreneurial marketing is an appropriate response to market conditions characterised by fragmentation, chaos, ambiguity and complexity. Although it can also be located in larger organisations, it acknowledges the situation specific nature of how SMEs operate and how their managers shape individualistic firm behaviour. Its theory can be developed further by utilising perspectives which consider its social

context and the incorporation of longitudinal data. This multidisciplinary approach results in cross fertilisation of ideas and concepts from different domains which can aid understanding. The biographical approach to informing entrepreneurial marketing can be viewed in a critical sense (Grey and Wilmott 2005) in that it results in the challenging and rethinking of commonly held beliefs and the generation of new theory through its largely qualitative focus.

Figure 1 synthesises the research findings in a model which considers the role of the entrepreneurial marketer and the enterprise, the impact of the external environment, the range of entrepreneurial marketing competencies exhibited by the owner/manager, the role which biographical research plays in uncovering insight into entrepreneurial marketing and the anticipated results of implementing entrepreneurial marketing in the enterprise.

**Figure 1 about here**

**Conclusions:**

In response to the Special Issue call this paper set out the case for using biographical research as a way of adding to our understanding entrepreneurial marketing. The individuals assessed clearly show the connection between the telling of a life story and how a business is run, using an entrepreneurial marketing approach. Narrative foundations have provided the supporting backdrop to the biographical analysis which has uncovered a wide variety of impinging factors. These affect the personality, behaviour, motives and shape the competencies of the entrepreneurial marketing decision maker in the quest for new venture creation and business growth. Biographical techniques succeed in addressing the need for situation specific

understanding, but can also be used to compare and contrast across different scenarios so that triangulated findings can contribute to theory and knowledge construction. Longitudinal insight is delivered into human action before, during and after any engagement between the individual, the organisation and its customers.

Any bias issues have been addressed through the data triangulation process where the findings from each individual analysis have been held up against each other but also compared with the findings of previous related research. Biographical research should be viewed as a legitimate method in shaping the theory and understanding the practice of entrepreneurial marketing. The author encourages other researchers to adopt a similar approach with other entrepreneurial marketers so that further data triangulation can be carried out. Figure 1 should be viewed as a catalyst for further engagement with biography. Such an approach could also be adopted in other situations where the life of an individual is of interest.

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**Figure 1: Using biography to enhance understanding of entrepreneurial marketing**