Original Article

External Marketing Challenges to New Ventures: A Study on MSEs in Dawro Zone, South Ethiopia

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Abstract - Marketing as a problem is always on the list as the major impediment to the MSEs success. However, it was not studied among other detrimental factors in relation to venture performance. Therefore, this study pointed towards unleashing the external marketing challenges affecting marketing activities and their bearings on venture performance among MSEs in the Dawro Zone of South Ethiopia. The central aim of the study is to assess the marketing challenges of MSEs with a specific focus on the external marketing environment. i.e., to see marketing context and evaluate the adequacy of institutional marketing supports. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey and used survey tools to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information to assess the marketing challenges of the ventures. Data were obtained from 222 venture operators in 3 districts. Depending on the stratum size of the sector in which the incident engaged, an individual firm was selected based on the lottery method. The respondents were given a questionnaire, pilot-tested for reliability and found to be 0.812 for Cronbach's α. Information that augments data obtained from sector participants has also been collected by semi-structured interviews. The data from the questionnaire were analysed using Spss V.20. Descriptive statistics were employed to evaluate the status of the marketing context, support and performance of the venture.

Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to see the relationship of marketing factors with venture performance. The mean score for business environment favourableness µ= 1.638 - 1.835 at 95% confidence level where t-value is 34.63 at 200 degrees of freedom. Moreover, µ for the marketing support given by relevant institutions is 1.4745 - 1.6499 at 95% confidence level since the calculated t-value =35.14 at 200 degrees of freedom was more significant than the critical value. This showed that the enterprises were doing their business activities in challenging marketing contexts, and the supports were not considered satisfactory to alleviate contextual problems. Hence, the average performance as indicated by the mean performance score rated on the Likert scale from 1 to 5 for the sample is 1.70 with a standard deviation of 0.72, far below the normal average. The relationship of business performance and each of the marketing factors were also positive, and its coefficient of correlation (r) was 0.67 with environmental marketing factors and 0.58 with institutional marketing supports. The relationships were statistically significant at a 99% level of confidence level. This again showed that there is a higher positive relationship between venture performance and the marketing challenges and institutional support. Therefore it is better to bring the enabling environment for the enterprises by making the business environment conducive and providing necessary institutional marketing support.

Keywords - Marketing Challenges, MSEs, Venture Performance, Institutional Supports

I. INTRODUCTION

As was advocated by many scholars, SMEs occupy a prominent position in the development plan of many countries [1]. Accordingly, phrases like 'lifeblood of the economy, 'serving vehicles for employment opportunity', and 'backbone of the economy, were frequently used by economists, politicians and others to highlight the sector's benefits [2]. Upon this premise, the Ethiopian government tried to promote the industry since 1997 Ethiopian government fiscal year [3]. Despite the support given by the government and other stakeholders, the performance, growth and sustainability were jeopardized by many contextual factors.

From the repeatedly raised MSEs performance and growth determinants, marketing challenges are always in the list as the major impediment to the MSEs [5]. This is because most entrepreneurs ignore marketing at the early stages of planning the new venture meaning 'Concentrating on the cart and neglecting the Horse' according to the adage [6]. Dandayan (2012) identified such marketing problems as; inability to find a new market for their products, not using marketing techniques to sell their products and services adequately, no marketing work has been done either to satisfy or follow-up the

customers no focus on distribution channels and outlets in their supply chain as a significant challenge for their performance [7]. But according to MUDC (2013), MSEs face ruthless competition from large inland and international firms that produce similar goods armed with improved technologies, managerial ability and best marketing and sales force while delivering premium quality products [8].

Therefore, this study pointed towards unleashing the external marketing challenges that affect the marketing activities and their bearings on venture performance among MSEs in Dawro Zone of South Ethiopia, where no similar research work has not been conducted yet. It also deemed to identify critical success factors in the marketplace that ought to be recognized by venture owners and stakeholders in their endeavour for creating, owning and supporting to make MSEs successful through the analysis of marketing practices of best performing and failing enterprises. By doing so, the study has made efforts to find answers to the following research questions.

- What are the primary marketing challenges newly established MSEs face in their marketplace?
- Could institutional marketing supports be enable MSEs to perform well in the market?
- What was the impact of marketing challenges on the performance of the ventures?

II. OBJECTIVES

The central aim of the study is to assess the marketing challenges of MSEs with a specific focus on the external marketing environment. i.e.,

- To see marketing challenges of new ventures among MSEs,
- To evaluate the adequacy of institutional marketing supports, and
- To see the effect of external marketing factors on venture performance.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

As indicated above, micro and small enterprises are the principal sources of economic growth and employment creation. They are at the heart of economic activity and development in nearly all countries. Moreover, all of them tried to support running their benefits freely through different policy frameworks and interventions to solve their problems [9].

Among the problems in MSEs business operations, marketing problems have the gravest impact on the performance and sustainability of the enterprises and took the attention of government policymakers, scholars and other stakeholders. There is evidence that small business failure could have resulted from marketing problems. Small businesses

are unable to perform competitive marketing practices and more vulnerable to threats from competition [10].

According to Gruber (2004), newness, the smallness of size at startup and uncertainty and turbulence in the marketing environment are the new venture characteristics creating marketing challenges of a new venture. In his position, tension and turbulence in the marketing environment pour their manifold bearings on the market position that ultimately results in an increase of vulnerability of the firms to external shocks [11].

That means the marketing environment of emerging markets contributes to the challenges. Characteristics such as market heterogeneity, unbranded competition, socio-political governance, and a chronic shortage of resources and infrastructures are among the factors mentioned in some empirical studies [12]. Likewise, shortcomings in developing economies markets such as low marketing education, preference for foreign goods, high cost of production, inadequate infrastructure base, few competitive opportunities, excessive government regulations, interferences, political instability, and low patronage for non-essential goods were identified as problems of marketing [13].

When we look at Ethiopian context [7] and [14] similar studies conducted in Addis Ababa and Dessie towns respectively and come up with similar results that marketing problems stood first among other issues and outlined such problems as the existence of competitors with identical products, change in demand, absence of market linkage, poor business location as significant determinants of MSEs sustainability.

Due to these factors, ILO [15] emphasized the need for institutional marketing support to create enabling environment for sustainable enterprises. However, the searching market for their product is the primary role of MSEs' themselves. There is an Indian experience to support MSMEs in marketing through an independent institution, i.e., National Small Industries Corporation (NISC), to enhance their marketing capabilities, competencies and competitiveness [16]. In line with the ILO commandments to create the enabling environment for start-ups, the Ethiopian government support scheme involves market development and market system support based on the product life cycle model [3]. The market development and marketing system support, in turn, involves 5 sub support schemes in the FDRE strategy document, viz., marketing system supports (sub-contracting, outsourcing, franchising, and out-grower systems with larger enterprises and public organizations); raw materials/inputs support; MSEs exhibitions and bazaars; construction of market centres; and formulating MSE website and directory. However, according to OECD [17], the local government role in implementing such policy

directions is an essential dimension in improving and facilitating the business environment.

This study was designed to isolate marketing challenges hampering the performance of MSEs. The research is also inclined to see the effect of institutional marketing supports provided to the ventures on performance and their adequacy in light of the external marketing factors. Hence, the theoretical study framework considers these factors in the business environment. Secondly, marketing supports offered to enterprises are activities carried out by the mobilization partners to overcome entrepreneurs marketing deficit and engage in effective marketing. As shown in the following diagram constructed from the literature, these all factors have their bearings on the performance of the venture that could be defined as the extent to which the proposed business objectives in sales volume, sales revenue, profitability, customer base, etc., achieved in the face of all working factors in the market [18].

revised Ministry of Trade and Industry (MOTI) definition [3] was utilized to distinguish the economic units. There were about 526 officially registered enterprises in the study area which made up the sampling frame.

According to Adams et al. (2007), the sample size required to see inferences about population mean could be expressed as:

$n_0 = z_{(\alpha/2)}^2 \ (p(1-p))/d^2$, where n0 is the sample size, z is the expected average value at specified confidence value, α is level of significance, p is estimated rate of proportion variability and d is the required precision range [19].
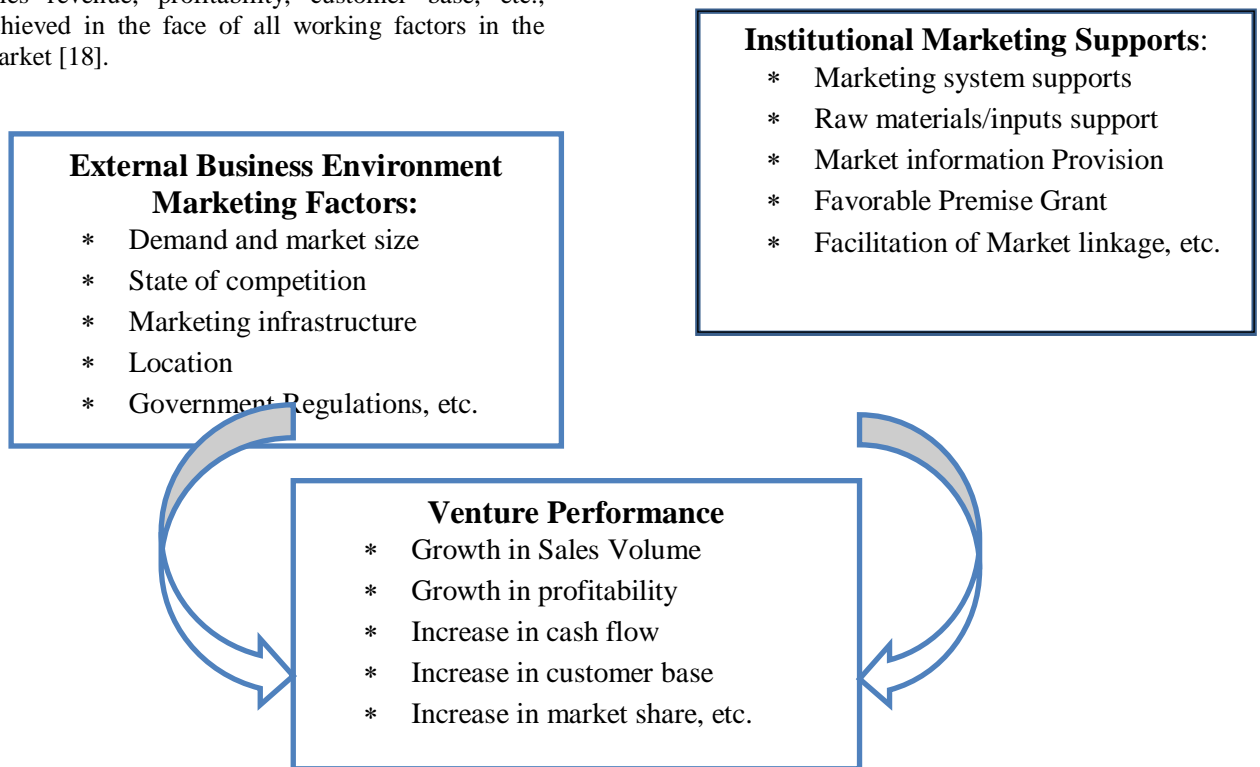

Fig. 1 Theoretical framework of the study
Source: own constructed framework from literature surveyed.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey and used survey tools to obtain both quantitative and qualitative information to assess the marketing challenges of the ventures. It is aimed at explaining the challenging marketing factors vis-a-vis their performance. The study was conducted on micro and small scale enterprises (MSEs) that have business operations in Dawro Zone of Southern Ethiopia and established their business in 2012 G.C. Meanwhile, MSEs were vague due to different approaches applied to define them. Therefore, the

However, Gill and Johnson (2010) gave provisions to adjust samples from the small-sized population by citing Fowler (2002), i.e., when the calculated sample size exceeds 10% of population size, n0 could be adjusted as:

$n_{(adj} =) \ n_0/(1+n_0/N)$, where and was changed sample size, n0 was initially calculated sample size and N was population size [20].

By considering 95% confidence interval or za/2 = 1.96, estimated population proportion p= 0.5 and precision range d= ± 5% we found 384 enterprises. When this sample size was adjusted by

the second formula, 222 ventures were adequate for this research and data collection was performed in these enterprises.

Out of 6 districts in Dawro Zone administration, 3 sections (Loma, Mareqa and Tarcha) were randomly selected. In each community, the stratified allocation was made based on the five sub-sectors of enterprises viz., construction, manufacturing, retail business, urban agriculture and service. Depending on the stratum size, the individual firm was selected based on the lottery method to bring the sample's representativeness by giving an equal chance to address all economic units in the sector. Individual respondents were delegated from their venture depending on their responsibility and relative information power. The respondents were given a questionnaire that involved both closed and open-ended items in scrutinizing the marketing challenges facing their experiences. Information that augments data obtained from sector participants has also been collected through semi-structured interviews. The closed-ended items in the questionnaire were pilot tested for reliability and found to be 0.812 for Cronbach's α that has been in an acceptable range. Spss V.20 was employed to see the patterns among the data set, and Pearson coefficient of correlation was used to know the strength of the relationship of marketing factors with venture performance.

V. RESULTS

A. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Ventures

According to the sampling design, the unit of analysis was a venture, and the questionnaire was administered to individuals drawn from 222 MSEs. 201 complete questionnaire booklets were returned, i.e., the response rate was 90.54%. The average founding members of a single enterprise involved in this study was 5 members that range from 2-to 10 members. The year in operation or age of the enterprise also ranges from 0.2-5 years. But the average age of the ventures was 3.87 years, with the standard deviation of 2.05 years showing high variability among MSEs in their age. Concerning their start-up capital, it ranges from 5,000.00-189,000.00 Ethiopian Birr. That means almost all of the business enterprises were started their business at the micro-level. They constitute all the sub-sectors in the MSE business, as indicated in the following table.

Table 1. MSEs in Different Sub Sectors

Sub Sectors	Freque ncy	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Manufacturing	18	9.0	9.0	9.0
Construction	22	10.9	10.9	19.9
Urban Agriculture	16	8.0	8.0	27.9
Service	40	19.9	19.9	47.8
Retail	105	52.2	52.2	100.0
Total	201	100.0	100.0	

Source: Spss v.20 Output of the Survey Data (2017).

B. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

As the respondents were drawn from MSEs, among 201 respondents, 59.2% were male, and the remaining proportion (40.8%) was female. Almost 82% of the respondents lay below the age of 35 years, and the rest, 18%, were greater than 35 years of age. Concerning their marital status, 52.2% of them were married, and 47.8% were not engaged. A significant portion of the respondents (87.6%) attended secondary education or higher levels. Among the respondent's majority (78.1%) didn't have jobs earlier than beginning in MSEs. But only 21.9% quit their former jobs to start a business in MSEs, and only 2.5% (5) of the respondents do have additional income-generating jobs. But the remaining large number of the respondents (97.5%) used to survive in MSE as a sole source of their personal income for their livelihood.

C. Marketing Environment

The external marketing environment in which the enterprise operates poses challenges on the one hand and forwards indispensable market opportunities from several directions on the other hand. But only 6 major factors in the task environment were considered in close-ended questions to see the cumulative strength of environmental factors in posing threats to MSEs business operation. These are the market size and demand, state of the competition, market infrastructure base, location of the business, input supply, and government laws and regulations related to business practice in MSEs and each business category that were relatively deemed to represent environmental factors in this study. The same 5-point Likert scale, from strong positive influence to strong negative influence, was applied to collect the data. But transforming the responses/data to three categories (favourable for mean > 3.5, normal for 2.51-3.5 and unfavourable environment for the mean of ≤2.5) was made to make clear the situation in the marketing environment. Based on the data of external marketing situations presented, the proportion of valid responses shows the severity of posing negative influences.
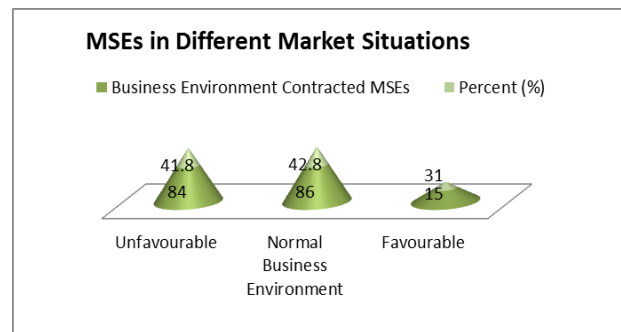

MSEs in Different Market Situations

■ Business Environment Contracted MSEs   ■ Percent (%)

	Unfavourable	Normal Business Environment	Favourable
Percent	41.8	42.8	31
Contracted	84	86	15

Fig. 2 Chart showing different business situations that face the MSEs

Source: Spss v.20 Output of the Survey Data (2017).

The mean score of environmental situation rating was 1.74 with a standard deviation of 0.71. Moreover, the results are shown in the chart also gave us that 41.8% of them pronounced that the external environment has a negative influence on the business undertakings of their enterprises as survey respondents indicated that the challenges in the market environment during introduction were weighed as serious for most of the enterprises. Among the prominent introduction problems, poor customer understanding, attraction, handling and retention coupled with low awareness and/or negative attitudes of clients in the market resulted in very slow sales of products over a longer period. Ultimately this resulted in the loss of commitment, helplessness and finally, disagreement of the members with each other in most of the ventures. The other critical problems emphasized by the operators were the infrastructural problems, mainly transportation, utilities, premise (its availability and size), limited working capital position, etc.

D. Institutional Marketing Support

To see the overall picture of marketing supports incapacitating the enterprises, the response set from the questionnaire was transformed to three categories viz., the poor support level for which the aggregate mean of the 9 support services was <2.5; moderate level support for mean score of 2.75 - 3.75; and satisfactory support for mean > 3.75. The overall respondents rating for institutional marketing support means score rating was 1.56, and its standard deviation was 0.63 in the transformed data as revealed above in the table.

Based on this categorization of the whole support package in marketing, 51.2% of the respondents, more than half of the respondents, claimed that the support services were not adequate for MSEs. The next larger proportion of the respondents, 41.3%, also rated the support services as moderate. However, only 7.5% of them were satisfied by the marketing support schemes provided for them in marketing their products and services, as displayed in the following graph.
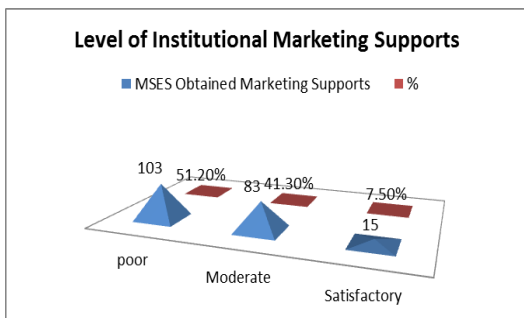

Level of Institutional Marketing Supports

■ MSES Obtained Marketing Supports   ■ %

103   51.20%
83   41.30%
7.50%
15

poor
Moderate
Satisfactory

Fig. 3 Levels of Institutional Marketing Supports Given to MSEs

Source: Spss v.20 Output of the Survey Data (2017).

Besides the close-ended questions, from the responses for open-ended items, it was hardly concluded that the support service was adequate because the number of enterprises that obtained the support were few in number, and the participation of partners, including the MSE operators themselves, was too low to bring effectiveness in marketing. Moreover, the enterprises prefer transaction linkages with government offices to rely on the sales revenue from public purchase expenditures as the main market to rely on for selling their product and sales revenue to other self-sustaining supports. In the case of training, it was the least preferred support service, and in some difficult situations, operators refused to participate in marketing training sessions even though they were invited to the same. For similar items in the open-ended item, the respondents replied that financial supports or supports that brought opportunities to sell out their products as soon as possible were given preferential priorities over others.

E. Influence of Marketing Factors on Venture Performance

Based on the self-appraisal of the MSE participants involved in the survey, only 15.4% were well-performing in their markets. But nearly 45% of the respondents reported that their firm was performing below average. The remains of respondents clarified that their venture was besieged to survive in nearly average performance as indicated by the mean performance score of the sample of 1.70 and standard deviation 0.72. The factors that contributed to this low level of venture performance was mainly in-house marketing problem and considerably from the external marketing factors.

a) t-test Inference

The descriptive statistics of the independent variables that are external to MSEs and the dependent variable business performance were seen in detail. Here we were able to see the relationships that might exist between these factors and performance. To this end, the parametric approaches of student's t distribution/t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used since the normality assumptions to use the test were fulfilled. Using a one-sample t-test indicated that the estimate of true mean of institutional marketing supports score lies between 1.4745 - 1.6499 at 95% confidence level since calculated t-value = 35.14 at 200 degrees of freedom was greater than the critical value. Therefore, the population parameter estimate for the mean was statistically significant at a 95% confidence level, and the institutional marketing supports were not considered satisfactory by MSE

participants. Furthermore, external marketing context was estimated at between 1.638 - 1.835 at 95% confidence level for mean rating score for its business environment favorableness where t-value is 34.63 at 200 degrees of freedom. Henceforth it is right to conclude that in the study area, the marketing environment was challenging for MSEs.

b) Pearson's Correlation Coefficient

The existing relationships amongst the variables have been seen using Pearson's correlation coefficients. Spss V.20 output for correlation matrix showed that the relationship between the external marketing context and institutional marketing supports (r =0.63) was demonstrated a strong direct relationship. That means when there are adequate institutional marketing supports. The environmental marketing factors become favourable for the enterprises in the market. The relationship of business performance and each of the marketing factors were also positive, and its coefficient of correlation (r) was 0.67 with external marketing factors from the environment and 0.58 with institutional marketing supports, and the relationships were statistically significant at 99% level of confidence. Therefore, it was possible to conclude that the marketing factors have a significant contribution to MSE performance and to deduce lacking any one of them could challenge the ventures and jeopardize their performance in the market.

VI. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In the survey area, it was evidenced that MSEs still contribute to the economic participation of people who have little skills, low educational status and few job opportunities respondents as 78% of the respondents do not have a prior job. Including those who had previous income-generating jobs were turned to rely only on their MSE income, and the figure 97.5% shows the proportion of the respondents who sustain their lives and family based on the venture created income only. Thus identifying their market challenges and devising mechanisms of alleviating these factors has economic benefits, and it was the inclusion of the society at large.

In figuring out the external marketing environmental factors posing threats to the ventures, the serious problem in the external environment considered by the respondents was the poor infrastructure base of the zone followed by locational disadvantages and related input supply problems. The overall cumulative environmental factors influence was considered negative by 42% of the respondents, and only 15% of the respondents were replied that their enterprise was auspicious and favoured by the environment. Moreover, among those enterprises that contracted unfavourable environments, 76.2% performed below average, and

only 1.2% had above average business performance. On the other hand, among the enterprises operating under a favourable marketing environment, 68% performed well, and no (0%) enterprise performed below average.

This finding was in line with the empirical evidence [12] outlining factors threatening MSE marketing success as inadequate infrastructure, market heterogeneity, a chronic shortage of resources, unbranded competitions, etc. Similarly, [21] but the issues barricading the performance of enterprises as particularly related to marketing are exogenous macro or endogenous environmental factors. The challenges identified here in this investigation lie in the infrastructure position of the study area. On the one hand, input supply from distant sources increases the transportation cost, risk and lead time of the inputs. On the contrary, product transportation to profitable markets was very demanding. Utility services were also inaccessible and built up the environmental challenges of MSEs in the study area that is why the poor rating of arranging favourably located premises from the marketing support part and still tempting the administrative units in contrast to the rhetoric of supporting the sector. Thus, the improvement of the overall business and investment environment is much more effective for supporting the longer-term development of SMEs than financial and fiscal incentives, which could create distortions in resource allocation [22].

About 51.2% of the respondents acclaimed the inadequacy of the supports, and only 7.5% of them reported that they obtained satisfactory provisions in their business. Moreover, in sub-sectors like urban agriculture, 0% of MSE participants in the survey gave satisfaction feedback on the marketing supports. However, 60% of MSEs obtained satisfactory support in marketing was also exhibited the best performance in their business undertakings, but no enterprise performed below average. But when the support was not adequate, the result was the opposite, i.e., 71% of the enterprises that were not supported well performed poorly.

As indicated in a semi-structured interview, the supports were always concentrated on transactional connections, and they concentrated on giving fish but not on the ways of catching those fish on their own. That means supports that were provided to the ventures were not only inadequate but did not consider the real need of the enterprises. Supports merely provided based on the government expenditure-based sales to procure MSEs' products. This could increase dependency syndrome on the venture and make them fond of help in all the situations from the cradle to the grave. Providing capacity building like training in modern management systems or on (simple) information and communication technologies would help SMEs in strengthening marketing capabilities [22]. In the

same vein, Osinde et al. (2013) posited government should take a leading role by providing an enabling environment [23].

VII. CONCLUSION

When we see institutional marketing supports in comparison with the prescriptions provided in earlier literature, firstly, they were not considered adequate vis-à-vis to the marketing context challenges. Secondly, they are not directed to solve the marketing problems enterprises bump into. Above all, the marketing supports provided to solve both internal marketing limitations of the enterprises, and external environmental challenges were inadequate in amount as well as poor in quality. As a result, it couldn't solve the challenges in marketing for ventures. In crude terms, the marketing supports were deficient in breaking the intricate web of influences of internal marketing hurdles and external adverse restraints. However, this study exposed marketing characteristics of successful enterprises from the experience of those that accomplished excellently in their venture financial and market performance as key success factors.

VIII.   RECOMMENDATION

It is better to see the business context before supporting enterprises in marketing aspects. Moreover type of support that ought to be sought from other partners should base these evaluations and have the ability to create internal strength of the venture, which is the rather real need of the support than the cooked cake version of transactional facilitation. Similarly, promoters of the sector must also support these mentioned moves of the enterprises. Besides, it still requires attitudinal changes and paradigm shifts in the support process.

Extensive training will be a prerequisite to bringing marketing perspective changes in the MSE business. Secondly, creating a conducive business environment in general and infrastructural facilitation specifically has also a paramount advantage of encouraging the enterprise as it has been seen in the survey. Finally, the overall marketing support scheme will base the need assessment of enterprises in the marketing support and should be redirected in order to address the real marketing gap of the enterprises. Having realized the importance of marketing practices, there is a prescription for creating new innovative marketing strategies to adapt to their challenges [5]. Such as utilizing various marketing digital tools and internet platforms like Facebook, mobile applications for customers, and CRM as plausible solutions[24].

IX. IMPLICATIONS

Concerning the relative influence of marketing factors, business environment favorableness has higher bearings in business performance than the supports that are deemed to bring MSE marketing effectiveness. To see locational disparity or conformance of the study replicating similar studies makes sense. It is also important to investigate the in-house marketing capabilities and firms marketing orientation and their effect on venture performance. However, the limitations of the semi-exploratory nature of this descriptive study in the assessment of marketing challenges of new MSE ventures illuminated the need for a detailed investigation of all the variables and the magnitude of influence of each of the factors on venture performance.

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