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The Model of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) Among Agropreneurs in the Emerging Markets: A Conceptual Framework[1]

El Modelo de Marketing Emprendedor (EM) Entre Agroemprendedores en Mercados Emergentes: Un Marco Conceptual



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I. INTRODUCTION

It is highlighted that agricultural sector deemed as one of the important sectors or industries particularly in Malaysia. According to the World Bank, agriculture contributed 4 percent of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018, contributed to over 25 percent of GDP in some emerging economies. In Malaysia, due to the expansion of other industries including manufacturing and services, Malaysia's contribution from agriculture to GDP is now lower than it was when the nation got its' independence (New Straits Times, 2022).

The sector serves as a strategic tool in increasing the availability of the country's food stocks while achieving food security for sustainability. However, a study conducted by Pawlak and Kolodziejczak (2020) claimed that despite the global understanding over higher food consumption worldwide in coming years, the production or supply to meet such demand particularly from the agriculture industry is still questionable. It is asserted that a practical or sustainable solution for this impending global issue is by increasing the production as well as the quality of agriculture activities (www.unglobalcompacts.org).

In its' pledge to promote sustainable food and agriculture systems worldwide, the United Nation (UN) drafted specific strategy which involved various stakeholders. The involvement of the government, business entities, professionals, academics and society are required to inspire a wiser and practical policy as well as actions in creating

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research aims to give an opportunity, value creation and innovation to the agropreneur's model farm in the emerging markets in implementing the new cost reduction practices in their farms using organic fertilizer. The performance of Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is the dependent variable, while the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) namely, i) proactiveness, ii) opportunity focus, iii) innovativeness, iv) resource leveraging and, v) value creation act as the independent variables. While government support programs (GSPs) measured as a mediator in this study. The model of structure for agropreneurs practices is conceptualized based on the Research Advantage Theory (RA). This research will employ a mixed-method design through explanatory sequential approach. The data collection started with quantitative and followed by qualitative approach in order to achieve the study objectives. This study anticipated findings which could elucidate the importance of entrepreneurial marketing dimensions on the performance of the agropreneur businesses as well as the moderating role of the government support program in affecting the relationship between the aforementioned constructs. The impact could be seen in the agricultural sector, especially agropreneurs in emerging markets. From the societal and economic perspective, the new intervention of several agencies and the innovation used of fertilizer are expected to improve the farmers and their products. Other farmers could implement the result and also help them increase their income. This research could theoretically contribute to both marketing and entrepreneurship literature on the significance of entrepreneurial marketing practices particularly among agropreneurs. As a practical implication, this study offers useful insight for the government agencies to effectively strategies and formulate its' efforts in the government support programs designed. This will help particularly the SME agropreneurs to sustain in the market eventually.

RESUMEN DEL ARTÍCULO

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo brindar una oportunidad, creación de valor e innovación a la finca modelo del agroemprendedor en los mercados emergentes al implementar las nuevas prácticas de reducción de costos en sus fincas utilizando fertilizantes orgánicos. el desempeño de las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYME) es la variable dependiente, mientras que las dimensiones del marketing empresarial (EM), a saber, i) proactividad, ii) enfoque de oportunidades, iii) innovación, iv) aprovechamiento de recursos y v) valor la creación actúan como las variables independientes. Mientras que los programas de apoyo del gobierno (GSP) midieron como mediador en este estudio. El modelo de estructura para las prácticas de los agroemprendedores se conceptualiza con base en la Teoría de la Ventaja de la Investigación (RA). esta investigación empleará un diseño de método mixto a través de un enfoque secuencial explicativo. La recopilación de datos comenzó con un enfoque cuantitativo y siguió con un enfoque cualitativo para lograr los objetivos del estudio. Este estudio anticipó hallazgos que podrían dilucidar la importancia de las dimensiones del marketing empresarial en el desempeño de los negocios agroemprendedores, así como el papel moderador del programa de apoyo del gobierno para afectar la relación entre los constructos antes mencionados. El impacto podría verse en el sector agrícola, especialmente en los agroemprendedores en los mercados emergentes. Desde la perspectiva social y económica, se espera que la nueva intervención de varias agencias y la innovación utilizada de los fertilizantes mejoren a los agricultores y sus productos. Otros agricultores podrían implementar el resultado y también ayudarlos a aumentar sus ingresos. Esta investigación teóricamente podría contribuir a la literatura de marketing y emprendimiento sobre la importancia de las prácticas de marketing empresarial, particularmente entre los agroemprendedores. Como implicación práctica, este estudio ofrece información útil para que las agencias gubernamentales formulen estrategias y formulen sus esfuerzos de manera efectiva en los programas de apoyo del gobierno diseñados. Esto ayudará particularmente a los agroemprendedores de las PYME a mantenerse en el mercado eventualmente.

inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agriculture and food systems to be delivered (www.unglobalcompact.org).

However, persistent issue arises whereby many low-income countries are not capable to cope with such pledge or production demands. There is a gap in fulfilling the demand due to shortage of technology and expertise from the countries which has limited immediate solutions (Pawlak & Kolodziejczak, 2020). Thus, an effective measure is required in order boost the food or agriculture production where financial support is necessary to encourage research and development (R&D) activities within the industry to support the agenda.

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From the global food security perspective, both food insecurity and undernutrition remain to be biggest challenges in achieving zero-hunger mission (Michailidis & Lazaridou, 2020; Valdes, 2019). Valdes (2019) posited that despite the fact that establishing food security is desirable regardless of the political system or socioeconomic situations in place, it is particularly significant in developing countries. This is due to the fact that the growth of world's population has increased and food security is further threatened with the escalating severity of weather disasters like floods, droughts, extremely wide temperature swings, or heavy rain.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), a specialized agency of the UN which leads international efforts to overthrow hunger, there are about 13 percent of the developing countries' population are undernourished (Cassimon, Fadare, & Mavrotas, 2022). While Porkka et al. (2017) stated that a damning fact which anticipated a worsening issue in feeding the whole world's population in future years. In 2018, it is projected that an increase between 59 to 98 percent of food consumption is expected for over 9 billion population worldwide (Tian et al., 2021).

Therefore, there is an urgent need for every economics to lift up their individual agricultural productivity by over half of the current productivity to feed the entire world's population by 2050 (McKenzie & Williams, 2015). Foley et al. (2011) asserted that by 2050, the amount of food produced must quadruple to keep up with global demand. Therefore, this study integrates cost-effective farming practises through entrepreneurial marketing with an emphasis on food security and poverty reduction.

1.1. Background of the Study

KEYWORDS
Entrepreneurial marketing, Agropreneurs, model farms, modern farming, research advantage theory.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Marketing empresarial, Agroemprendedores, fincas modelo, agricultura moderna, teoría de la ventaja de la investigación.

In Malaysia, it is recorded that SMEs which include micro-enterprises dominated the percentage of business establishments whereby over 98 percent of total business population (Kamarudin, Mohamad, & Jaafar, 2023b). A report from Department of Statistic Malaysia, DOSM (2017) recorded that this category of business contributed slightly above 40 percent in the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Given its' significant contribution both in economic development as well as employment opportunity (Raki & Shakur, 2018), various ministries and agencies have actively involved in their efforts and funding to boost the development of SMEs nationwide. The ministries and agencies including Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Cooperative Development (MEDC), Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) and Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) were among the active government bodies that serve such purpose (Kamarudin et al., 2021; Ali, Mohamad, & Bahador, 2018).

From the perspective of Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the ministry closely works with key agencies within the field such as Federal Agriculture Marketing Association (FAMA), Malaysian Agricultural Research And Development Institute (MARDI) and Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) developed various developmental programs to support SME entrepreneurs (www.moa.gov.my). RISDA for instance has a special program called Program Pembangunan Usahawan which covers various business functional areas of product development, marketing, promotion and networking (www.risda.gov.my).

It is evident from the funding allocation given by the government towards the development of SMEs in the country. As estimated of over RM15 billion were allocated for the development of SMEs which covers various packages and initiatives such as training and development program, funding and grant availability, business consultation as well as financial assistances (Kamarudin et al., 2023b). These efforts seem to be parallel with the national agenda or direction in term of cultivating entrepreneurial culture within the community while strengthening the economic locally (Zainol et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, most of the SMEs' development program less emphasize on the topic of entrepreneurial marketing particularly among agropreneurs in Malaysia. It is highlighted that most of the

training and development program are specifically designed in addressing those conventional issues or subject matters such as product, financial management and operation (Kamarudin et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2018; Munoz et al., 2015). Therefore, this study which focuses on the implementation of entrepreneurial marketing among agropreneurs could shed some new insights on a more practical mechanism towards improving the performance of SME businesses.

1.2. Problem Statement

According to a report in Free Malaysia Today (2022), farmers now have to struggle in the face of rising prices that cause an increase in the cost of agricultural production. The former minister of agriculture and agro-based industry, Salahuddin Ayub, said this should be seen in light of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war that has triggered an increase in fertilizer prices at the global level.

Climate change crisis and weather uncertainty, the risk of bad weather will affect crops and eliminate production resources. Therefore, the government needs to state a better solution to the three main problems: (i) the increase in fertilizer prices and operating costs, (ii) the plight of local farmers and producers and (iii) the instability of food supply security for the future.

In addition, a total of 25 small pepper and oil palm farmers from the Pasai and Siong areas here urged the Ministry of Plantation Industry and Commodity (KPPK) to monitor the price of fertilizer which has increased two to three times. The price of goods increased probably because of the war in Ukraine and Russia. The price of a 50-kilogram (kg) bag of fertilizer for pepper rose from RM50 to RM220 to RM250. As for the price of fertilizer for palm oil, he said it rose from RM1,400 per metric ton to RM3,500 per metric ton (Utusan Borneo, 2022).

Studies suggested that few issues in implementing entrepreneurial marketing among Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) claim that the absence of a traditional marketing plan is viewed as a lack of marketing activity in these businesses. (Shuremo, Illés, & Dunay, 2021). This study aims to help the agropreneurs in Terengganu to instil EM in their agricultural practices based on the dimensions of innovativeness, value creation, opportunity, resource leveraging and proactiveness.

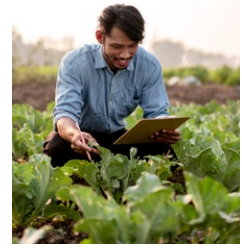
According to The Star (2022), unfortunately, the agricultural sector still lags behind other sectors, such as services and manufacturing. This raised the concern over the national food security. The Statistics

Department reported that the agriculture sector recorded a modest growth rate of 3.7 per cent in the third quarter of 2019.

1.3. Research Questions

This research develops several questions;

1. What challenges do agropreneurs face in emerging markets that influence their agricultural income?
2. What are the existing entrepreneurial marketing practices practised among entrepreneurs in an emerging market?
3. Do the entrepreneurial marketing dimensions influence the business performance of the agropreneurs of emerging markets?
4. Do the government support programs moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing dimensions and the business performance of agropreneurs in emerging markets?



1.4. Research Objectives

This research embarks on the following objectives;

1. To understand agropreneurs' challenges in influencing their agricultural income in emerging markets.
2. To examine the existing entrepreneurial marketing practices among emerging agropreneurs markets.
3. To examine the entrepreneurial marketing dimensions that influence the business performance of agropreneurs in emerging markets.
4. To examine whether the government support program moderates the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing dimensions and the business performance of agropreneurs in emerging markets.

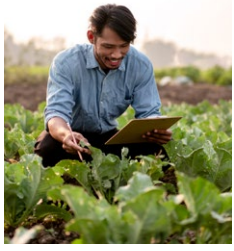
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Entrepreneurial Marketing

While marketing is important for all successful businesses, some would argue that it is even more crucial for small to mid-sized businesses (SMEs), because the loss or gain of one client can frequently determine the viability of the company. Researchers have noticed that traditional marketing strategies aren't always accessible or suitable for entrepreneurial enterprises (Becherer, Haynes & Helms, 2008).

In recent years, entrepreneurial marketing (EM) has gained the momentum and referred as the marketing initiatives for start-up businesses. Given the significant portion of economic activity that may be attributed to these types of enterprises, marketing analysis in new and small operations is a crucial topic, we contend that EM is more than that; it can also be used to define marketing initiatives with an entrepreneurial spirit, regardless of the size or age of the business or venture.

Additionally, future EM research may also explore the various ways that EM can be adapted and practised in any size and age of particular firm (Kraus, Harms & Fink, 2010). Beverland and Lockshin (2004) defined entrepreneurial marketing as an adaptation of marketing theory towards small businesses in order to address their particular needs.



These adaptations must simultaneously address many issues: opportunity, innovation, risk, and resource constraints. For the SME, the source of these actions is likely to be an individual owner/operator. EM relates to growing small businesses by implementing marketing efforts through entrepreneurship (Bjerke and Hultman, 2002). EM is also known as the overlapping element between entrepreneurship and marketing which includes the action or behaviour shown by individual and organisation to promote new ideas and at the same time generate new ones with the aim to create value (Gontur et al, 2022).

EM utilizes a “big picture” perspective and focuses on creative approaches towards innovation, risk management, innovativeness, resource leveraging and value creation (Hendijani Fard & Seyyed Amiri, 2018). Entrepreneurial marketing refers to a variety of marketing actions that an organisation will engage in, especially in a volatile marketing climate. Entrepreneurial marketing has been proposed as the most successful when there is major environmental change and resources are restricted (Becherer & Maurer, 1997).

2.2. Entrepreneurial Marketing Dimensions

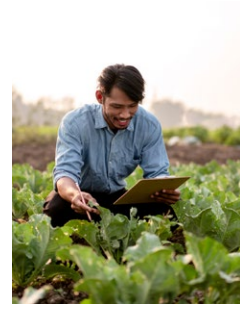
2.2.1. Proactiveness

Proactiveness is considered as one of the important attributes to be possessed by an entrepreneur (Kuratko, 2022). In the earlier citation, proactiveness is defined as an action to revamp a business environment by considering two important processes of predicting

the issues and challenges to be faced by the business and secondly, react towards the aforementioned information or inputs (Bateman & Crant, 1993).

While Hendijani Fard and Seyyed Amiri (2018) categorised proactiveness as how a business opportunistically reflects and responds towards a market, either serve the current market or creating new ones. In addition, proactiveness could be exploited for the business benefits in terms of reviewing or re-analyzing the situation in order to reduce risk and uncertainties (Becherer, Helms, & McDonald, 2012).

Looking at the current business landscape, the attribute is inevitably important to be possessed by an entrepreneur (Kamarudin et al., 2023b; Fontana & Musa, 2017). Fontana and Musa (2017) stressed that proactiveness in the business is one of the critical success factors in facing stiff competition as a result from globalization as well as uncertain market environment. From the marketing perspective, proactiveness of a business allow them to evaluate their strength and weaknesses to be exploited and improved respectively.



Studies by Fink et al. (2020) and Eggers et al. (2017) showed the examples of how a business could be proactive in exploiting the technology. The usage of social media platforms, up-to-date marketing devices or even make the most of the available databases in the market can be an effective tool towards success. Should the business have a limited knowledge and skills on how to use those tools, they must be proactive to reduce those discrepancies for the benefits of the business in the long run (Fink et al., 2020).

2.2.2. Opportunity Focus

The second dimension namely opportunity focus involves both recognizing and exploiting every possibility existed within the business environment (Becherer et al., 2012). In fact, it is deemed as critical in the development of small (or micro) businesses. Having such attribute will allow continuous growth and expansion for the business while firming their presence and existence in the market (Morrish & Jones, 2020; Becherer & Helms, 2016; Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2002).

From the resource abundance perspective, SMEs are inferior in their financial, human capital, technology and networking to compare with their large corporations' competitors (Kamarudin et al., 2021). However, opportunity focus could be seen as the counter measure

for SMEs to sustain and remain relevant in the market (Becherer & Helms, 2016; Gilmore, 2011). Becherer and Helms (2016) highlighted that opportunity recognition and exploitation among SMEs is a critical marketing move which could guarantee a success to that category of business.

The assessment of a market potential is done by seeing the degree of a business' fitness in terms of its capability and resources. Becherer and Helms (2016) mentioned that a business might not have a handful resources and capabilities in possession but still could achieve a great success. This is when the business effectively selects the right opportunity that determines their success in the near future (Rashad, 2018).



2.2.3. Innovativeness

In the context of EM, innovativeness can be explained as an innovative-drive in businesses' marketing measure which allow businesses to focus on new ideas which could lead towards new processes, products and even markets (Becherer et al., 2008). In addition, Becherer et al. (2008, p.46) posited that the success in implementing innovative marketing of a business can be translated in the form of highly innovative new market creator or the incremental market builder.

In order to provide a truly unique value to the customer, the market maker must depart from previous solutions (Becherer & Helms, 2016). In other words, a business should creatively and innovatively evolve their ideas in terms of the product and services offered to stay ahead, especially within a competitive market environment (Sari et al., 2023). From here, the business is able to achieve the competitive advantage and able to enjoy the benefits from being the market leader.

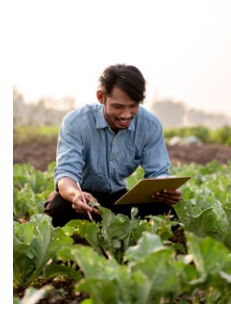
Moreover, there is another benefit of having innovativeness attribute within EM practices. Buccieri and Park (2022) highlighted that innovativeness could help a business (particularly SME) to have knowledge-focused capability. Such capability allowing entrepreneurs to establish highly competitive niche markets with strong barriers to entry that produce long-term success. It is mentioned that entrepreneurs are responsible to design a set of knowledge-based marketing initiatives and transformational processes that will be used to comprehend customer preferences and generate innovative products (Buccieri & Park, 2022, p.97).

2.2.4. Resource Leveraging

The next dimension in entrepreneurial marketing is resource leveraging whereby it is involved with a creative and synergistic process in marketing practices, rather than merely effectively utilising limited resources. In certain circumstances, it recognises a resource that others have missed (Ha et al., 2021; Morris et.al., 2002).

A study by Ha et al. (2021) claimed that resource leveraging helps SMEs to unlock new opportunity as well as possibilities in the market. Instead of being confined by limited resources, the company devises an inventive marketing plan. As a result, the organisation can access resources to do more with less, typically lowering risk through increased leverage. SMEs have greater chance to succeed when they are effectively managing the resources and one of the ways is through employing a resource-leveraging technique such as resource sharing as well as outsourcing in completing a task or project (Astuti & Balqiah, 2020).

In the current market, industries are fuel by the emergence of various technologies that could be beneficial to the business. The introduction of mechanical technology, blockchain, Internet of thing (IoT) could be a handful tools to be exploited by SMEs. However, Astuti et al., (2019) highlighted that due to its' face pace expansion, it is almost impossible for the business community particularly SMEs to keep up with the latest trends. Therefore, leveraging businesses' resources in terms of knowledge, ideas, human capital, creativity and innovation as well as technology is the key towards SMEs sustainability (Ha et al., 2021; Astuti & Balqiah, 2020).

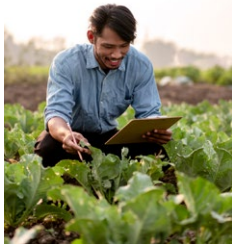


2.2.5. Value Creation

Relationships and interactions require the development of value. The firm's ongoing mission is to prospect each marketing mix component for new sources of client value (Morris et al., 2002). Effective businesses focus on the value creation activities that are most aligned with their strategic goal within their competitive niche, While value creation is necessary for exchange (Gontur et al., 2022). According to Sadiku-Dushi, Dana, and Ramadani (2019), the difference between both entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and traditional marketing is rather obvious. The main focus of entrepreneurial marketing is more on inventing value creation, while traditional marketing focuses on the business transaction or the customer relationship (Morris et. al., 2002). Additionally, EM

is urgently required particularly in the current volatile and uncertain markets which the idea of traditional marketing is obsolete (Sadiku-Suchi et al., 2019).

As a result of EM practices, entrepreneurs started to reap the benefits in terms of favourable results and performance when new ways open up for discovering new value for the business (Polas & Raju, 2021; Wright & Schultz, 2018). As an example, the shift of using artificial intelligent (AI) has been adopted by many entrepreneurs during post-pandemic era. Here, knowledge is the fundamental of development to finely gauge the entire entrepreneurial situation, and it becomes necessary to analyse the entrepreneurship process in a fresh perspective (Polas & Raju, 2021).



In view of the AI technology and its' significance in bringing value, businesses particularly SMEs should embed it in their daily business operation. The technology could drive innovative entrepreneurship as well as improve social and economic situation for a quality living overall (Kamishima et al., 2018; Hjorth & Holt, 2016). Moreover, AI has significant influence to the governments, business communities, organisations, and communities where it serves as a facilitator and originator within entrepreneurship landscape (Obschonka & Audretsch, 2019; Sushil 2018).

2.3. Agropreneurs

Modern farming is becoming more popular with the younger generation (New Straits Times, 2022). The accomplishments of young "agropreneurs" acts as an attraction, inspiring other Malaysian youth to seek out the world of agriculture, which could help them escape poverty. The sector has the potential to assist the country in addressing the critical issues of young job loss and food security. Young agropreneurs who have succeeded in utilising new, innovative, and modern technology methods in the industry can act as role models for others and inspire them to follow in their footsteps.

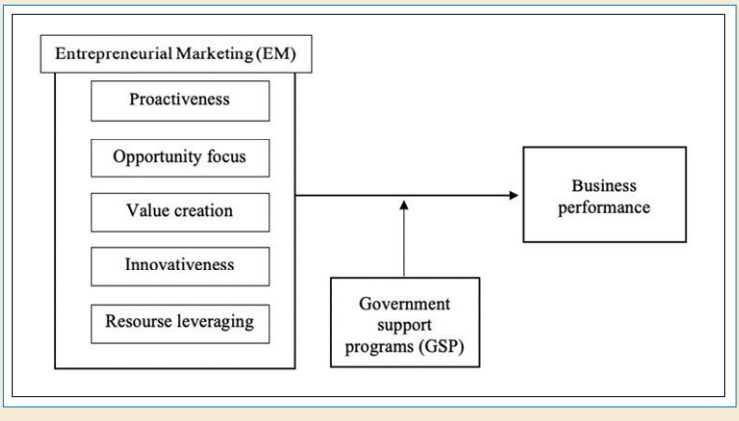
There is a need for the sector to shift from being dominated by older, less technologically proficient farmers to more modern, young farmers (The Star, 2021). Malaysia now relies far too heavily on foreign agricultural supplies. It is time for the country's youth, particularly tech-savvy graduates, to get involved in agriculture in order to improve the country's food security. To help them expand into international markets, they must be innovative and keep up with evolving technology.

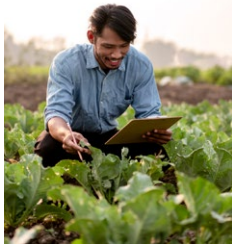
Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a crucial driver of economic development due to its ability to create income, generate employment, and improve the socio-economic landscape of a community. Although it has advantages, statistics suggest that young people's involvement in agribusiness is inadequate in Malaysia (Dardak et al., 2022).
According to Zainol et al. (2021), in Malaysia, many food crops such as leafy vegetables, chillies, cucumbers, tomatoes, and melons have been grown using fertigation farming technology. Modern farming using fertigation farming technology was considered as more promising among these since this high-valued fruit can give farmers with a higher profit. For instance, in Terengganu, Malaysia, farmers who employed this technology demonstrated that they could generate substantial profits despite incurring higher start-up costs (Utusan Borneo, 2018).

2.4. The Proposed Theoretical Framework

In this study, SME particularly agropreneurs business performance is acting as the dependent variable. Here, both financial and non-financial measure will be covered to measure the construct. Next, the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing namely, i) proactiveness, ii) opportunity focus, iii) innovativeness, iv) resource leveraging and, v) value creation will be independent variables in this study. Also, this study will examine the role of government support programs (GSPs) as a moderating variable between the relationship of dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing and performance of the business. **Figure 1** shows the theoretical framework of this study.

Figure 1. **Proposed Theoretical Framework**





2.4.1. The Underpinning Theory - Resource Advantage Theory

In this study, Resource Advantage (RA) theory is used to underpin the research framework. The theory suggests that agropreneurs in developing economies can utilize the Government Support Programs (GSPs) to increase the efficacy of EM as part of their firm resources. RA theory has demonstrated its ability to explain performance variations due to differences in relative positions of resource advantage. This means that RA theory is a valuable tool to conceptualize the relationship between small business and development (Grimmer et al., 2017; Hunt, 1997; 2003).

According to RA theory, the external factors can provide an advantage or disadvantages for the entrepreneurs to create a superior market position. Extending from Barney's (1991) work, RA theory stands that the firms' resources can include external factors such as institutions, regulations and markets. Additionally, the dimension of firm resources combined with the capacity gained in GSP, can amplify the effect of EM dimensions towards the firm's business performance.

In a study conducted by Nakku et al. (2019), RA theory found that GSPs are able to moderate the relationship between various dimensions of EM towards the business performance. On that note, this study proposes that entrepreneurs should adopt the EM dimensions in order to gain the competitive advantage through entrepreneurial marketing and thus, resulting in better overall business performance.

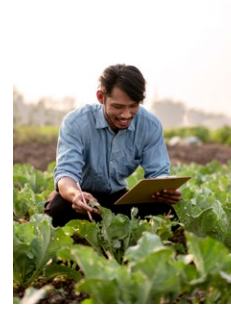
For instance, a small business can participate in GSPs in order to gain innovation capabilities and access to financial resources. This will allow them to cut costs, enhance the product value or create innovative business models and achieve competitive advantage (Covin & Miles, 1999). This study therefore, intends to develop theoretical arguments on the effect of GSPs towards the dimensions of EM, namely, proactiveness, opportunity focus, value creation, innovativeness, resource leveraging and business performance.

Specifically, this research argue that GSPs involves both the non-financial aspects namely, education in entrepreneurship and training, business advisory services, market information, business counselling, trade fairs, and missions as well as financial support programs (to access loans, credit guarantees, subsidies, and grants) – by which will increase the likelihood of the firm in improving their business performance.

2.5. Government support programs (GSPs)

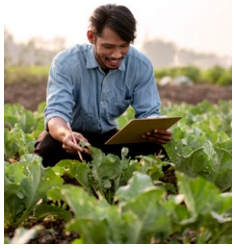
The government of many economies keep striving for the development of SMEs in their own countries. Various tools and mechanisms were initiated and called as government support programs (GSPs) (Kamarudin et al., 2023b). GSP is defined as a mean to support entrepreneurial ventures, particularly focuses for SMEs as part in embracing entrepreneurial activities to start a venture as well as to improve performance (Biru, Gilbert, & Arenius, 2021; Cancino, Bonilla, & Vergara, 2015).

It is mentioned that GSPs are helpful in easing through both financial and non-financial difficulties faced by SMEs. The program which consists of multiple assistance and guidance in terms business consultation, entrepreneurial training and development and financial facilities (Kamarudin et al., 2021; Valerio, Parton & Robb, 2014). The policymaker is specifically designed the program to upskill and improve SME owners' capabilities in terms of knowledge, skills as well as financial resources (Dennis, 2011).



In most of the countries, GSPs are divided into two categories namely, i) financial and, ii) non-financial supports (Nakku et al., 2019). Financially, the supports are given by the government in terms of various grants offering such as matching grant and seed fund (Kamarudin, 2019; Zainol et al., 2018). Besides, the government through collaboration with other stakeholders and industry players like banks, government agencies and other financial institutions offers various incentives and loan facilities such as micro credit financing and credit guarantees to support the SMEs in the country (Kamarudin et. al., 2021).

While non-financial supports could be translated in the form of entrepreneurial training and development programs like workshops and seminars, entrepreneurial exhibitions, business consultation and advisory, networking programs as well as the availability of incubation centres (Kamarudin et al., 2023b; Ali et al., 2018; The Economic Planning Unit, 2016). These supports believed to be beneficial for the SMEs in improving businesses' capability particularly in terms of knowledge, ideas, skills and networking (Kamarudin et al., 2021; Nakku et al., 2019).



3. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Mixed-Method Approach

This research will adopt a mixed-method approach. Mixed method approach is a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection, combining both types of data and employing different research design with their own philosophical stances and theoretical frameworks (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Conducting a mixed-method approach is deemed to add methodological robustness and develop an integrated strategy– which is suitable to tackle complicated issues (Ivankova & Wingo, 2018). Several studies have explored how small businesses' qualitative and quantitative outcomes are impacted by the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (Sadiku-dushi, Dana, & Ramadani, 2019).

Additionally, a successful mixed-method research is able to generate scientifically sound, contextual relevance and a successful plan for intervention in action research (Ivankova and Wingo, 2018). By employing this method, the research is able to provide a solid foundation in encouraging other professionals and community to apply the intervention suggested (Ivankova, 2015).

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

To accomplish the research aims, an exploratory sequential mixed-method technique will be used. The data collection will be conducted in FOUR (4) stages, namely Stage 1- Preliminary study, Stage 2- EM Survey (Quantitative), Stage 3 - Action Research (Engage with Model Farm), and Stage 4 - In-depth interview (Qualitative). A mixed method explanatory sequential design where quantitative data will be collected followed by qualitative data collection to explain the quantitative deeper (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data collected will provide an overview of the research problems and issues faced by the local farmers. Then, deeper probing and exploration are needed through a qualitative approach to understanding further how entrepreneurial marketing can best be instilled among the farmers.

Stage 1: Preliminary Study

This stage aims to explore the challenges faced by agropreneurs in emerging markets. Therefore, a focus group involving five (5) agropreneurs will be conducted conversationally to understand the

challenges they face as agropreneurs. The questions to be prompted for the focus group will be open-ended, starting with some essential questions like “Can you please share your background and what agriculture practices have you been involved in?” followed by “Can you share the challenges that you have experienced or currently experience that affect your agricultural income?”

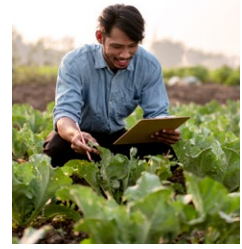
Stage 2: EM Survey (Quantitative)

The second stage aims to examine the existing practices of EM among agropreneurs in emerging markets. Questionnaires will be designed and distributed to agropreneurs in the respective target area. Data collected will be analyzed using SPSS. This stage is exploratory to understand the elements of EM being practised among the agropreneurs.

Stage 3: Action Research (Engaging with a model farm)

The third stage involved selecting one agropreneur from the first stage as a model farm to introduce the elements of entrepreneurial marketing. The aim here is to look deeper into the challenges faced in sustainable agricultural practices and provide some guidance on the best way to deal with the challenges based on the dimension of EM.

This stage may involve discussion, consultation and suggestions for possible solutions to the problem. It may take 3 - 6 months of engagement to instil the elements of EM in the model farm agropreneur.



Stage 4: In-depth interview (Qualitative)

The final stage aims to explore how the elements of EM help the selected agropreneur from Stage 3 manage the challenges they faced throughout the intervention introduced in Stage 3. An in-depth one-on-one interview as it served as the best method to have a deeper understanding of someone’s experiences (Kamarudin et al., 2023a). In this context of the study, the interview will be conducted with the agropreneur to understand their feelings and thoughts about practising EM within their agricultural practice.

3.2.1. Population and Sampling

The population in this study are entrepreneurs involved in plantation activities such as palm trees, rubber, paddy and others in Malaysia. The participants will be recruited through snowball and convenience sampling. They must be involved in entrepreneurial activities in the East Coast of Malaysia, Terengganu, Kelantan and Pahang. The three states are chosen as context mainly due to their local nature,

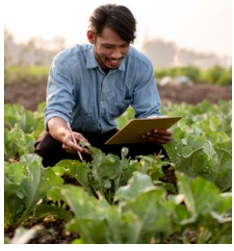
where 70 per cent of the local people rely on fishing and farming as their primary source of income (Terengganu Darul Iman, 2019).

This is consistent with the government's national agriculture agenda in this region or locality. It is well documented in the state's strategic planning known as Pelan Strategik Pertanian Terengganu 2019-2023, declared that Setiu is the central hub for food production "Gedung Pengeluaran Makanan di Terengganu" where the aim is to address issues of food security in Terengganu (Terengganu Darul Iman, 2019).

3.2.2. Measurement and Instruments

The dependent variable in this study is business performance. The measures of business performance among agropreneur SMEs were used to determine the state of the business's success or failure. The items were adapted from the works of Craig, Dibrell, and Davis (2008) and Keh, Nguyen and Ng (2007).

This study's five dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) are the independent variables. The dimensions, namely, (i) proactiveness, (ii) opportunity focus, (iii) innovativeness, (iv) resource leveraging, and (v) value creation, were adapted from Becherer et al., 2008 and the moderating variable is government support programs (Nakku et al., 2019).



3.3. Data Analysis

For the quantitative approach, the survey in Stage 2 will be analyzed using the latest software of IBM SPSS version 29.0. In particular, the chi-square goodness of fit test (Chi-Square) measure could be used to see the differences between answers pre and post. Alternatively, this research can also use a simple T-test to measure the mean score of both answers and see the changes in observed and expected values recorded.

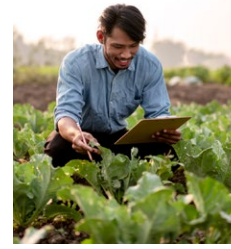
Meanwhile, the qualitative data will be analyzed using a six-step thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) with the assistance of Nvivo12 software. The software will organize the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews. Triangulation in the data sources will increase the credibility and validity of the research findings. In addition, the self-reflection analysis will also be conducted before and after the intervention of EM elements during Stage 3. Moreover, field notes and observations will also be analyzed. This will help to understand and examine the premise of EM among agropreneurs in Malaysia.

4. EXPECTED RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research is expected to positively impact various levels, including society, economy and nation. The selected farmers will benefit from the cost-effectiveness of agricultural practices. They will be exposed to the elements of entrepreneurial marketing that will give high potential in their agricultural practices. As such, the agencies involved will help those farmers collaborate and provide them with some incentives and training.

Moreover, structured training for agropreneurs could be done in collaboration with government agencies and other SMEs involved in agricultural products. Governments, agropreneurs and communities are also significantly influenced by AI. AI is a facilitator and the instigator of a substantial degree of entrepreneurial recognition. The efficiency of the programme is demonstrated in its business practises and performance improvement, which leads to a greater contribution to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

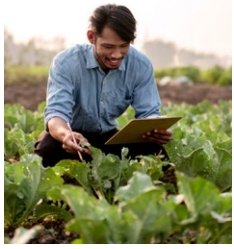
Based on the explanation above, this research could have a large and positive impact on a variety of stakeholders, including society, the economy, and the nation. An organised approach to entrepreneurship training can assist agropreneurs from a societal standpoint. The training could increase their knowledge and abilities, hence improving the business's performance.



5. CONCLUSION

This research is expected to positively impact various levels, including society, economy and nation. The impact could be seen in the agricultural sector, especially agropreneurs in Malaysia. From the societal and economic perspective, the new intervention of several agencies and the innovation used of fertilizer are expected to improve the farmers and their products. Other farmers could implement the result and also help them increase their income.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 2, commit the international community to achieve zero hunger by 2030 through a renewed focus on agricultural development for food security and nutrition (Bizikova et al., 2020). Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to instilling EM among agropreneurs in Malaysia. Since the focus is on food security and reducing poverty, the result of this research could also be used as a direction to other farmers in Malaysia, agencies involved in the agricultural sector and society.



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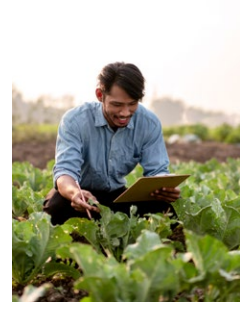
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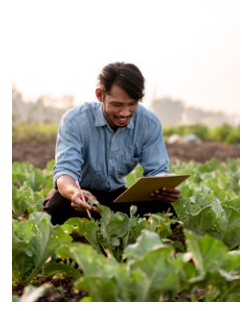
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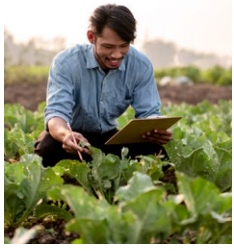


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NOTES

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