Customer-centric influence of entrepreneurial marketing on business performance of hotels in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis

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Abstract
The ravaging COVID-19 pandemic has forced hotels in developed countries to adopt entrepreneurial marketing (EM) practices as a resilience strategy. However, there are few studies in Nigeria on how EM practices have been used in the hotel industry for their survival and growth. The study examines the customer-centric influence of EM on business performance of hotels in Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis. Using a cross-sectional survey design, we collected primary data from 578 owner-managers and top managers of 66 hotels in Lagos and Yola in Nigeria using structured questionnaires. Respondents were selected based on the purposive sampling technique. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Version 21). Three regression estimations are reported. The estimation in model 1 indicates that calculated risk-taking dimension has a significant positive influence on general performance, while the proactiveness, innovativeness, value creation, resource leveraging, opportunity to focus and customer intensity dimensions do not. The estimation in model 2 suggests that calculated risk-taking and customer intensity dimensions have a significant positive influence on revenue per room, while the other five EM dimensions do not. The estimation in model 3 indicates that calculated risk-taking dimension has a significant positive influence on market share, while the six EM dimensions do not. The owner-managers and top managers of hotels should fortify and upscale the weak EM dimensions as a resilience strategy for recovery from the ravages of the COVID-19 crisis. We bridge the gaps in the literature by providing interesting insights into the potential value of the adoption of EM as a post-COVID-19 recovery strategy by the hotel segment of the hospitality industry in the developing context of Nigeria. We also validate the applicability of RBT in predicting the influence of EM dimensions on performance in the developing context.

Keywords Customers · Entrepreneurial marketing · Hotels · Nigeria · Resource-based theory

Introduction
The hotel is an important segment of the hospitality industry that provides short-term accommodation and other beneficial services to individuals, pleasure seekers, tourists and other customers. The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 crisis put the global hospitality industry in pandemonium with monumental setbacks. In the United States, the hotel industry alone lost an estimated sum of over $30 billion between March 2020 and May 2020 (Ozdemir et al. 2021). Hotels in the United Kingdom were terribly impacted by the pandemic, as they witnessed low occupancy rates and a drop in revenues within a short period of time, and 75 million jobs are forecasted to be at risk of being lost because of a 30% reduction in international tourism arrivals (Spanaki et al. 2021). In China, bookings cancellations at the peak of the pandemic have escalated, causing 75% of hotels to close down operations (Bakar and Rosbi 2020). In several other parts of the globe, many hotels have temporarily suspended operations, while others have closed permanently (Sharma and Nicolau 2020). Unfortunately, the public health strategies imposed on businesses and people to mitigate ravages, such as temporary lockdowns, social distancing, mandatory stay-at-home orders, travel and mobility restrictions, terribly affected hospitality businesses, resulting in a huge decrease in the demand for businesses and services (Bartik et al. 2020; Gursoy and Chi 2020).
With the increase in entrepreneurship, academics have begun to take note of differences in the way successful entrepreneurial organizations and individuals market their business in comparison with larger firms that utilize traditional marketing practices (Morris et al. 2010; Sofia 2016). Over the years, various scholars have discovered that entrepreneurial firms often possess certain characteristics that differentiate them from traditional firms (Morris et al. 2010; Morris et al. 2002). Furthermore, research shows that individual and corporate entrepreneurs tend to be more innovative, less risk-averse and more opportunity-driven than larger firms who have access to huge resources for implementing traditional marketing methods (Sofia 2016). As good as the traditional marketing methods are, they are less helpful for the entrepreneurial marketers for responding to contemporary challenges (Nwankwo and Kanyangale 2022). As more studies emerge, scholars agree that EM exemplifies the interface of marketing and entrepreneurship, focusing on innovation and change as its primary functions (Collinson and Shaw 2001; Nwankwo and Kanyangale 2022). Several sectors in developed and developing countries have implemented entrepreneurial marketing to achieve their set performance goals (Anwar and Daniel 2016; Rashad 2018; Rezvani and Fathollahazadeh 2020).

In other climes, there are empirical studies on how EM has been applied in the pandemic era to sustain operations. In Lebanon, it was reported that in keeping businesses afloat, hotel managers have become more strategic by running safety-conscious operations across all departments, focusing on local tourists rather than completely dependent on foreigners to optimize revenue and increasing flexibility in bookings and cancellations to incentivize customers. Shifts are expected to be made, making operations in hotels more technologically aligned and focused (Yacoub and ElHajjar 2021). In the United States, economy hotels deployed a resilience strategy to sustain operations, save jobs and boost revenues, whereas luxury-scale hotels experienced the largest decline (Spanaki et al. 2021).

What is not clear is how EM practices have been used in the hotel industry in the developing context of Nigeria. The need for an acceptable understanding of EM strategies and their applicability to entrepreneurial firms is an issue of critical concern to many scholars, entrepreneurs and employees of such firms (Otika et al. 2019). To bridge the gaps raised above, the current study examines the customer-centric influence of entrepreneurial marketing on business performance in Nigeria’s hospitality industry during the COVID-19 crisis. In specific terms, the study seeks clarity on entrepreneurial marketing practices in hotels, the extent to which the EM dimensions are being applied a recovering strategy, and the impact of EM dimensions on hotels’ performance. Based on a careful literature search conducted, there has been no previous research done on this topic issue in Lagos, Nigeria. The research problem is stated in two broad questions: “What are the EM dimensions of hotels in Lagos and Yola, Nigeria during the COVID-19 crisis? To what extent have EM dimension impact the business performance of hotels?”.

We advance the frontier of knowledge in the field of EM in two ways. First, we conducted a further empirical study to validate EM with seven dimensions in the developing context of Nigeria. Second, we seek to understand the influence of EM as a resilience strategy for small organizations, especially hotels, in the period of the COVID-19 crisis against the backdrop of the argument that the suitability of organizational constructs and strategies is better determined in periods of uncertainty and economic turbulence. Alqahtani and Uslay (2020) noted that business organizations operating in volatile, uncertain and highly competitive environments need to deploy EM to remain relevant, competitive and sustainably healthy. Since the emergence of EM in the entrepreneurship and marketing literature, there has been no consensus on its definition and number of dimensions (Kilenthong et al. 2015; Sodhi and Bapat, 2020). There 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 EM dimensions reported in different empirical and theoretical works. The 4 EM dimensions that have been reported in some studies are entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and innovation orientation and customer orientation (Manishimwe and Raimi 2021). However, Sodhi and Bapat (2020) empirically confirmed five EM dimensions. The six EM dimensions of Kilenthong et al. (2015) comprised growth orientation, opportunity orientation, total customer focus, value creation through networks, informal market analysis and closeness to the market. According to Hisrich and Ramadani (2017), the seven underlying EM dimensions are proactiveness, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking, innovativeness, customer intensity, resource leveraging and value creation. The eight dimensions of the EM construct of Alqahtani and Uslay (2020) include innovation, proactiveness, value creation, opportunity focus, resource leveraging, networking, acceptable risks and inclusive attention. Furthermore, Nwankwo and Kanyangale (2020) explicated nine EM dimensions that include proactiveness, innovativeness, customer intensity, risk-taking, opportunity focus, resource leveraging, market sensing, teamwork and value creation. In the absence of consensus on the specific number of EM dimensions, the current study adopted the seven EM dimensions of Morris et al. (2002) that have been widely used and validated by scholars in their empirical studies. The selected EM dimensions are described as essential to adapting entrepreneurial marketing behaviours (Kilenthong et al. 2015). Scholars explained that four of the EM dimensions (proactiveness, calculated risk-taking, innovativeness and opportunity focus) relates to entrepreneurial orientation aspect of an organization, while other three dimensions (resource leveraging, value creation and customer intensity)
relate to marketing orientation aspect of an organization (Morris et al. 2002).

Apart from the introduction (section ‘Introduction’) above, this chapter is structured into five sections. Section ‘Literature review’ focuses on the literature review with a focus on important thematic issues such as the theoretical framework, EM definitions, dimensions and hypothesis development. Section ‘Methodology’ explains the research methodology. Section ‘Findings’ presents the findings/results of the empirical study. Section ‘Discussion of findings’ discusses current findings in relation to previous findings. Section ‘Conclusion, implications, limitations and further research direction’ concludes with implications, limitations and further research directions.

Literature review

Theoretical framework

For the current study, the resource-based theory (RBT) provides a sound theoretical underpinning for validating the research model, and explaining the influence of the EM dimensions on business performance of hotels during the pandemic period. In the field of marketing and entrepreneurship, RBT has been used consistently as a framework for explaining and predicting competitive advantages and performance outcomes, particularly how the internal capabilities and resources of business organizations boost competitive advantage, thereby stimulating performance outcomes (Alvarez and Busenitz 2001; Kozlenkova et al. 2014; Hitt et al. 2016). With regard to its application, McWilliams and Siegel (2001) reinvented the RBT framework as a profit maximizing for CSR. The RBT also underpinned the CSR framework for creating and capturing strategic value for corporations (McWilliams and Siegel 2011). The leading proponent of RBT, Barney (2001), explains that RBV suggests that firms often achieve better performance by virtue of access to internal resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare and difficult to imitate and substitute by competitors.

We argue in this paper that hotels leverage seven EM dimensions (internal capabilities and resources) to enhance their competitive advantages and performance outcomes during pandemic crises. Theoretical and empirical works explicate that when the seven core EM dimensions (proactivity, innovativeness, resource leveraging, value creation, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking and customer leveraging) are strategically deployed into business operations, they have consistently been found to create competitive advantages and impact performance measures (Majovski and Davitkovska 2017; Alqahtani and Uslay 2020). Thus, the seven EM dimensions are strategic internal capabilities and resources that are valuable, rare and difficult to imitate and substitute by competitors if used effectively and efficiently by hotel managers. More importantly, the unique capabilities or internal resources that RBT represents enable firms that have these intangible assets to achieve a desirable competitive advantage/positioning advantage (Zhang and Zhu 2016).

Entrepreneurial marketing

As modern approaches to marketing activities surface, scholars have heavily contributed to its major development. Studies on entrepreneurial marketing and its dimensions have also been primarily investigated by these researchers. A variety of definitions for entrepreneurial marketing and its dimensions have been suggested by many scholars. The study of EM and its dimensions has helped shape the way marketing activities have been used by organizations, including hotels. In some countries, such as Jordan, a study shows that entrepreneurial marketing had been implemented in some hotel marketing practices to influence a positive relationship with the hotel’s performance (Al-Manasra et al. 2013). Another study conducted in Turkey showed that EM concepts had great significance when adopted and effectively used by boutique hotels in their marketing activities (Kurgun et al. 2011). Scholars’ curiosity of “what does it mean for marketing to be entrepreneurial?” is what gave birth to the term entrepreneurial marketing (Morrish et al. 2010; Sofia 2016). Murray and Tyebjee in the 1980s were the first scholars to connect the field of marketing and entrepreneurship (Sofia 2016). Entrepreneurial marketing has been an area of marketing practices rich in knowledge and definitions. Morris et al. (2002) define EM as “the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation”.

An interface between marketing and entrepreneurship that integrates marketing and entrepreneurship through the concepts shared by the two fields (Morrish et al. 2010) is another definition presented. As researchers have found a natural connection between entrepreneurship and marketing, they have discovered that entrepreneurs practice several activities centred on marketing theories (Collinson and Shaw 2001). Collinson and Shaw (2001) proposed three ways in which both fields are related: “they are both change-focused, opportunistic in nature and innovative in their approach to management” (p. 761). They further mention how marketing and entrepreneurship exist in two areas: “one where market conditions are continuous and entrepreneurship aids the process of identifying unperceived needs and second, on a discontinuous market where entrepreneurship guides marketing strategy to develop existing needs in a new environment” (Collinson and Shaw 2001; Sofia 2016). Nevertheless, some scholars argue that being an entrepreneur does
not necessarily mean one actively practices entrepreneurial marketing (Pitt et al. 1997).

According to Hills et al. (2008), a firm can only be entrepreneurial if only they are innovative, have high growth, have superior knowledge of customers and markets and are high tech in nature. They further proposed that larger firms can practice entrepreneurial marketing (Hills and Hultman 2011a, b). Another angle of EM definition is described as “the overlapping aspects between entrepreneurship and marketing; therefore, it is the behaviour shown by any individual and/or organization that attempts to establish and promote market ideas, while developing new ones to create value” (As cited by Sofia 2016, p. 16). To support this definition, Morris et al. (2002) stated that the focal point of entrepreneurial marketing is innovative value creation, on the assumption that value creation is a prerequisite for transactions and relationships (p. 8). Based on the assumption that all firms, regardless of their age or size, Sofia (2016) concludes that entrepreneurial marketing is an external and customer-focused approach to marketing exploiting the innovative, opportunity seeking and focusing on creating value for customers and relationships aspects of an entrepreneurial mindset. The literature presented would help strengthen the finding of the study.

Entrepreneurial marketing in the hotel industry

Hotel industry research with regard to entrepreneurial marketing is well reported in developed countries. However, this is not the case in developing countries, where there are limited studies in this field despite its significant contribution to economic growth. In research done in Jordan, it was found that there is a strong positive relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and performance indicators (service quality, competition, cost reduction and customer satisfaction) in Jordanian hotels (Al-Manasra et al. 2013). Another relevant literature carried out in the province of Izmir in Turkey on Boutique hotels aimed to identify major dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing concepts and determine to what extent their marketing approaches were consistent with the entrepreneurial marketing approaches (Kurgun et al. 2011). This research was conducted in nine hotels, and the data collected were collected through in-depth interviews, which were evaluated and interpreted in terms of the seven main dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (proactiveness, value creation, innovativeness, opportunity focus, resource leveraging, calculated risk-taking and customer intensity). The results show that these dimensions of EM were internalized and applied to the marketing practices of boutique hotels in Turkey (Kurgun et al. 2011). Based on Morris et al.’s (2002) study, EM has played an important role for small- to medium-scale enterprises, which makes Boutique hotels an interesting field of research in marketing studies. The research suggests that further research should be conducted in other regions to confirm, contradict and generalize its results (Kurgun et al. 2011). This research can be considered to be very similar to what we are trying to examine in Lagos, Nigeria. As our study identifies the entrepreneurial marketing practices of hotels and to what extent, the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing are practised in selected hotels in Lagos and Yola, Nigeria.

Entrepreneurial marketing dimensions

For a marketing practice to be distinguished from traditional marketing activities, it must be characterized by these seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing (Morris et al. 2002). In the definition of entrepreneurial marketing presented by many scholars in the previous sections, distinctive characteristics were attached to entrepreneurial marketing to identify its uniqueness. Entrepreneurial marketing is defined as “the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resources leveraging and value creation” (Morris et al. 2002). Kraus et al. (2010) define entrepreneurial marketing as “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders, and that is characterized by innovativeness, risk-taking, proactiveness and may be performed without resources currently controlled”. Each of these definitions embodies the dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing. With these definitions, Morris et al. (2002) proposed the seven core dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing, proactiveness, innovativeness, resource leveraging, value creation, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking and customer leveraging. These seven dimensions were used in previous literature to assess EM in boutique hotels (Kurgun et al. 2011) in Turkey and to discover how effective they are to the overall success of these hotels. Another study conducted in Jordan used these dimensions to relate to some performance indicators and concluded some positive relationships between them (Al-Manasra et al. 2013). Another study conducted in Enugu in Nigeria found that the application of entrepreneurial marketing practices stimulates the competitive advantage of small and medium-sized enterprises (Otika et al. 2019). Several empirical studies have been conducted using the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing.

| Marketing principles | Entrepreneurial marketing | Traditional marketing |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Concepts             | Innovation-oriented:     | Customer-oriented:    |
|                      | Idea-driven, intuitive    | Market-driven, product |
|                      | assessment of market      | development follows    |
|                      | needs                    |                       |
Proactiveness

Bateman and Crant (1993) mention a “proactive behaviour” as a dispositional construct that identifies differences between people in the extent to which they take action to influence their environments. The authors further describe proactiveness as taking action to influence an organization’s environment (Bateman and Crant 1993). Proactivity can be described as a personal initiative that can have a positive impact on individual and organizational performance (Frese and Fay 2001). Morris et al. (2002) emphasize the importance of leading customers by making dynamic changes. This proactive dimension of entrepreneurial marketing addresses a firm’s adaptation to environmental scanning and how they act before a change to better serve customers and markets (Otika et al. 2019). Proactiveness shows the self through actions in a formulation of “stated belief” and the implantations of these beliefs (Boohene et al. 2012). A proactive characteristic allows a firm to be among the first to act on changes and needs in the market and as such have a first-mover advantage (Otika et al. 2019). According to Morris et al. having a proactive orientation leads to using marketing variables as both a means to create change and adapting to change (2002). Thus, our first hypothesis: $H_1 =$ Proactiveness has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Innovativeness

Morris et al. (2002) propose that being innovative focused ranges from opportunity identification and concept generation to technical support and creative augmentation of the firm’s recourse base. Innovation-oriented marketing actions enable the firm to focus on ideas that lead to new markets, products or processes (Otika et al. 2019). Entrepreneurs who practice entrepreneurial marketing tend to be innovation-oriented, as they are driven by their ideas and intuition, rather than being customer-oriented, which is driven by market needs assessments (Morrish 2011). It is a property or trait that emerges from a complex set of internal and external relationships (Cooper and Schindler 2000). As part of the marketing culture, Morris et al. (2002) propose innovativeness as a “philosophy that promotes new and different solutions, leading the customer, and the firm as innovation factory”. Innovation comes in many different forms: technological innovativeness—primarily consisting of research and engineering efforts aimed at developing new products or processes; and product-market innovativeness—consisting of market research, product design and innovation in advertising and promotions (Olanye and Eromafuru 2016). The effectiveness of innovativeness in an organization would give a competitive advantage. Morris et al. (2002) propose that managers should continually search for new ways to improve their operational activities, including new segmentation, customer communication and service level, as innovativeness is a great tool for gaining a competitive advantage. This leads to the second hypothesis: $H_2 =$ Innovativeness has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Resource leveraging

Morris et al. (2002) define leveraging as doing more with less. According to Morris et al. (2002), the study suggests that they are different forms in which resources can be leveraged. First, using resources longer than others have done in the past, exploiting these resources more than others have been able to do, third, tapping into others resources for your gain and matching a resource with another to create bigger value (Morris et al. 2002). This dimension of entrepreneurial marketing addresses the ability to identify resources that have not been used to their full capacity and can also be adopted for other purposes, persuading those in control to let the market make use of it (Morris et al. 2002). In the literature, Morris et al. (2002) stated that the most important form of leverage is the adaptation of others’ resources to carry out marketing purposes. In a study done by (Kurgun et al. 2011) to measure the resource leveraging dimension of entrepreneurial marketing, they found that hotel managers tend to use a mix of both insourcing and outsourcing depending on their current situation and its potential benefit to the hotel. In the same study, respondents mention that when finding a creative solution to internal resource maximization, “They paid close attention to self-improvement among staff which would then have a direct effect on their service quality” (Kurgun et al. 2011). Hence, the third hypothesis: $H_3 =$ Resource leveraging has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.
Value creation

Value creation is one of the crucial dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing. Morris et al. (2002) argue that “the task of the marketer is to discover untapped sources of customer value and to create unique combinations of resources to produce value”. It is the responsibility of the marketer to continually investigate each marketing mix element to discover new ways of providing customer value (Morris et al. 2002). According to Kotler (2003), there are two ways to create value: expanding the benefits of value offerings for customers and reducing the cost of acquisition, use and distribution of the product and services offered by the enterprise to customers (Kurgun et al. 2011). To improve performance outcomes, entrepreneurs tend to find new ways to create value (Becherer et al. 2008). This leads us to the fourth hypothesis, $H_4$: value creation has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Opportunity focus

Morris et al. (2002) best define this dimension as “the recognition and pursuit of opportunity” as being fundamental to entrepreneurship. Opportunities are the untapped market position in gaining a sustainable profit potential (Morris et al. 2002). Berger and Kuckertz explain the opportunity to focus as “the marketing activities that are directed towards identifying and exploiting opportunities to capture vacant market positions with sustainable profit potential”. Becherer et al. (2008) define the opportunity to focus as the ability to select the right opportunity that influences success for the firm. The knowledge of an available opportunity by an organization helps them make the right decision at the right time (Nehal 2018). Entrepreneurial marketers need to constantly search for opportunities that are neglected by other firms to be able to serve unsatisfied customers before their competitors (Kilenthong et al. 2015). Further studies indicate that entrepreneurial marketers are not restricted to resources available only to them but rather pursue opportunities in the belief that they can gain the resources they need (Morris et al. 2002). For marketing activities to be opportunity focused, the environment must be understood as dynamic and act proactively towards it (Berger and Kuckertz 2018). In the past, the major concentration has been geared towards environmental scanning activities; with entrepreneurial marketing, it is suggested that the firm emphasizes that the opportunity should be treated as a creative process (Morris et al. 2002). Furthermore, in real-time proactive intelligence is exploited to find untapped opportunities. Therefore, leading to the fifth hypothesis: $H_5$: Opportunity focus has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Calculated risk-taking

In entrepreneurial marketing, this attends to the “employment of initiatives to mitigate risks through alliances, test markets, trial launches, lead user research” (Morris et al. 2002). This dimension of entrepreneurial marketing tends to be inevitable for marketers who embark on innovation, as it involves a high level of risk-taking, as its outcomes are always uncertain. Miles and Darroch (2006) argue that entrepreneurial marketers cannot be considered gamblers, as there are “risk accepters” who understand the implication of innovation in the social, technological and economic environments as it is uncertain. The entrepreneurial marketer sorts to examine the factors of the external environment such that it reduces environmental uncertainty and the firm’s vulnerability and adopts the task environment in which the firm operates (Morris et al. 2002). Morris et al. (2002) suggest managing resources such that they can easily be devoted to or withdrawn from new projects, hence making the firm more flexible in its decision making. This leads us to the sixth hypothesis: $H_6$: Calculated risk-taking has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Customer intensity

The quest to embrace creative approaches to customer acquisition, retention, and development is part of entrepreneurial marketing (Morris et al. 2002). Firms that effectively use entrepreneurial marketing recognize their customers as the reason for them being in business (Otika et al. 2019). A firm exists to serve its existing and potential customers. According to Becherer et al. (2008), an organization being customer-centric” is an innovative approach to create, build and sustain a customer relationship. The study argues that customer intensity is emphasized on some forces in the organization. For entrepreneurial marketers, customers are seen to be the top priority; hence, marketers are known to be adaptive, flexible and able to be creative to adjust to their customer’s preferences (Kilenthong et al. 2015). According to Morris et al. (2002), the customer intensity dimension establishes a dyadic relationship, where the firm and the customer connect at an elementary level. Leading us to the last hypothesis, $H_7$: Customer intensity has a significant influence on the performance of hotels during the COVID-19 crisis.

Methodology

Research design, population and sample

Leveraging resource-based theory (RBT), the study adopted a quantitative research method and descriptive
survey research design to validate the formulated hypotheses. For validation of this research, the seven entrepreneurial marketing dimensions from the literature were used to develop the questionnaire (Morris et al. 2002). Statements for the seven EM dimensions were utilized to explore the existence of entrepreneurial marketing practices. The population comprised owner-managers and top managers of hotels in Lagos and Yola. Lagos has over 2000 hotels with an estimated room supply of approximately 70,000 rooms (Agusto and Co 2020). There is no sample frame for hotels in Yola, Hotel Booking Limited (2022). Faced with this challenge of a lack of a sample frame, a sample of 770 hotel managers and top managers was selected through purposive sampling in view of an infinite population. The owner-managers and top managers of hotels are the unit of inquiry. The required primary data were therefore collected from the 700 owner-managers and top managers of using structured questionnaires. The purposive sampling technique was used because not all hotels in the sample locations are sufficiently knowledgeable about the phenomenon being investigated. The questionnaire instrument was adapted from several sources. The seven EM dimensions were adapted from Morris et al. (2002) and Osuagwu (2020).

The reliability of the research questionnaire, that is, the internal consistency and stability was tested using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. The reliability tests gave Cronbach’s alpha of 0.925 for the EM construct measured with 33 items, and 0.756 for business performance construct measured with three items. Since the values of both constructs were greater than 0.700, each of the constructs was considered to be reliable (George and Mallery (2003). Instrument validity was ascertained using face and construct validity tests. With respect to the face validity, the draft of the questionnaire was shared with other colleagues for constructive feedback that was incorporated. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to test the construct validity using a threshold loading of 0.50 and eigenvalues greater than 1.0. After the test, all the factors with less than 0.50 loadings were dropped and removed following the opinion of Field (2000).

At the end of the data-gathering phase, a total of 578 responses were received, corresponding to a response rate of 75.1%. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, frequency tables and percentages were used to report the demographics, while three regression models were used to test the hypotheses. The response was based on the Likert scale: 6 = Very High Extent, 5 = High Extent, 4 = Average Extent, 3 = Low Extent, 2 = Very Low Extent and 1 = No Extent at All. The response rate was 75%, which was equal to 578 questionnaires returned. Common method bias was also measured, which indicated that all responses provided were reasonably certain. The data treatment techniques were regression analysis with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 21). Several constraints were encountered in this study. Due to the global pandemic of the COVID-19 virus and the policy of social distancing, it was very difficult for respondents to provide more details and return questionnaires. Additionally, the cost incurred in going to hand out the questionnaire was immense. The research model that explains the influence of 7 EM dimensions (Independent variables) on Business Performance (Dependent variable) is shown in Fig. 1.

**Fig. 1** The research model explains the influence of 7 EM dimensions (independent variables) on Business Performance (dependent variable). The model is underpinned by the Resource-Based Theory

**Independent Variables**

| Entrepreneurial Marketing |
|---------------------------|
| Proactiveness             |
| Innovativeness            |
| Value Creation            |
| Opportunity Focus         |
| Resource Leveraging       |
| Customer Intensity        |
| Calculated Risk-Taking    |

**Dependent Variable**

| Business Performance |
|----------------------|
| General Performance  |
| Revenue Per Room     |
| Market Share         |

**Findings**

**Descriptive analysis**

The study confirmed the existence of EM practices among small hotels. However, owner-managers and marketing managers do not have a full understanding of EM strategy as a tool for positioning and achieving a competitive advantage.

The results for the proactiveness dimension in Table 1 indicated that 10% of the respondents believed that their organizations to a very high extent consistently monitor and
improve their marketing methods during the pandemic crisis, 40% opined to a high extent, 40% favoured an average extent and the remaining 10% of the respondents favoured to a low extent.

Besides, 30% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization put strong emphasis on continuous improvement in its product delivery process, 60% believed to a high extent and 10% believed to an average extent.

Moreover, 50% of the respondents believed that to a very high extent, their organization is frequently one of the first in the community to alter its marketing methods, 40% believed to a high extent and 10% opined to an average extent. With regard to a strong tendency to be ahead of competitors in its marketing activities, 40% of the respondents believed this is true to a very high extent and 60% believed to a high extent.

With regard to the innovativeness dimension, Table 2 indicates that 40% of the respondents opined that to a very high extent, their organization places a strong emphasis on new and innovative approaches for acquiring new customers during the pandemic crisis, 40% believed to a high extent and 20% believed to an average extent. Additionally, 40% of the respondents were of the view that to a very high extent, innovation is the key to achieving a competitive advantage in their hotels, 50% believed to a high extent and 10% believed to a low extent. Moreover, 40% of the respondents noted that to a very high extent, their hotels most often first take the lead to introduce new goods/services, 40% believed to a high extent and 20% believed to an average extent. In addition, 20% of the respondents explained that to a very high extent, their hotels most often initiate/start goods/services that other competitors copy, 40% believed to a high extent and 40% believed to an average extent. Finally, 10% of the respondents opined that to a very high extent, their hotels emphasize innovativeness in marketing activities, 40% believed to a high extent and 50% believed to an average extent.

With respect to the resource leveraging dimension, Table 3 reveals that 50% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels use resources for more than one purpose during the pandemic crisis, 40% picked to a high extent and 10% subscribed to an average extent. Another 10% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization spends considerable resources continually trying to learn more about each of its customers/clients during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed to a high extent and 40% believed to an average extent. Additionally, the results indicated that 40% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organizational staff contributed many ideas to innovations undertaken in their hotels during the pandemic crisis, 30% believed to a high extent and 30% believed to an average extent. They indicated that 50% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization uses other resources for its gain in marketing approaches, 40% believed to a high extent and 10% believed to an average extent. Finally, 60% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels emphasize resource leveraging during the pandemic crisis and 40% believed to a high extent.

### Table 1 Proactiveness dimension of hotels

| Proactiveness dimension                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 My hotel consistently monitors and improves its marketing approaches/methods during the pandemic crisis | 10%| 40%| 40%| 10%| NIL|    |
| 2 My hotel puts strong emphasis on continuous improvement in its product delivery processes during the pandemic crisis | 30%| 60%| 10%| NIL|    |    |
| 3 My hotel is frequently one of the first in the community to alter its marketing methods during the pandemic crisis | 50%| 40%| 10%|    |    |    |
| 4 My hotel emphasizes proactiveness, that is, a strong tendency to be ahead of competitors in its marketing activities during the pandemic crisis | 40%| 60%| 0  |    |    |    |

### Table 2 Innovativeness dimension of hotels

| Innovativeness dimension                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 My hotel puts strong emphasis on new and innovative approaches for acquiring new customers during the pandemic crisis | 40%| 40%| 20%| NIL|    |    |
| 2 Innovation is the key to achieving competitive advantage in my hotel during the pandemic crisis | 40%| 50%| 10%|    |    |    |
| 3 My hotel is, most times, the first to introduce new goods/services                   | 40%| 40%| 20%|    |    |    |
| 4 My hotel, most times, initiates/starts goods/services that other competitors respond to or copy during the pandemic crisis | 20%| 40%| 40%|    |    |    |
| 5 My hotel emphasizes innovativeness, by putting strong emphasis on developing new goods/services & processes) in its marketing activities during the pandemic crisis | 10%| 40%| 50%|    |    |    |
On value creation, Table 4 indicates that 60% of the respondents believed that to a very high extent, every employee in their hotels has a real passion for continually changing the way goods/services are marketed during the pandemic crisis and 40% agreed to a high extent. Similarly, another 60% of the respondents opined that to a very high extent, their hotels continuously try to find new ways to create value for its customers/clients, and 40% believed to a high extent. Moreover, 70% of the respondents agreed that to a very high extent that in their hotels, employees contribute to ideas to create value for customers during the pandemic crisis, and 30% believed to a high extent. Finally, 70% of the respondents agreed that to a very high extent, their organization emphasizes value creation in its marketing activities during the pandemic crisis, and 30% believed to a high extent.

With a specific focus on the opportunity focus dimension, Table 5 indicates that 20% of the respondents believed that to a very high extent when new market opportunities arise, their hotels quickly act on them during the pandemic crisis, 40% believed that this is the case to a high extent, and the remaining 40% believed that the opportunity focus behaviour of their hotels is factual to an average extent. Whereas 30% of the respondents were of the view that to a very high extent their hotels continuously pursue new business opportunities during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed this is the case to a high extent, and 20% settled for an average extent. Further results revealed that 20% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization excels at identifying marketing opportunities during the pandemic crisis, 40% believed to a high extent and 40% believed to an average extent. Moreover, 10% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels always monitor market trends, including the future needs of their customers during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed to a high extent, 30% believed to an average extent, and 10% believed to a very high extent.

Table 3 Resource leveraging dimension of hotels

| Resource leveraging dimension                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 My hotel uses its resources for more than one purpose during the pandemic crisis             | 40%| 40%| 20%| NIL|    |    |
| 2 My hotel spends considerable resources continually trying to learn more about each of its customers/clients during the pandemic crisis | 40%| 50%| 10%|    |    |    |
| 3 My hotel staff contribute a lot of ideas to innovations undertaken in your organization during the pandemic crisis | 40%| 40%| 20%|    |    |    |
| 4 My hotel uses others resources for its own gain in marketing approaches                      | 20%| 40%| 40%|    |    |    |
| 5 My hotel emphasizes resource leveraging (i.e. your organization tries to optimize usage of its resources and adopting for other purposes during the pandemic crisis) | 10%| 40%| 50%|    |    |    |

Table 4 Value creation dimension of hotels

| Value creation dimension                                                                                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 In my hotel, every employee has a real passion for continually changing the way goods/services are marketed in the firm’s business during the pandemic crisis | 60%| 40%| NIL|    |    |    |
| 2 My hotel continuously tries to find new ways to create value for its customers/clients during the pandemic crisis                                   | 60%| 40%|    |    |    |    |
| 3 In my hotel, employees contribute to ideas to create value for customers/clients during the pandemic crisis                                     | 70%| 30%|    |    |    |    |
| 4 My hotel emphasizes value creation, typically by find new ways of increasing the worth of the hotel for the customers in its marketing activities during the pandemic crisis | 70%| 30%|    |    |    |    |

Table 5 Opportunity focus dimension of hotels

| Opportunity focus dimension                                                                                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 When new market opportunities arise, my hotel very quickly acts on them during the pandemic crisis                                                  | 20%| 40%| 40%| NIL|    |    |
| 2 My hotel is continuously pursuing new business opportunities during the pandemic crisis                                                             | 30%| 50%| 20%|    |    |    |
| 3 My hotel excels at identifying marketing opportunities during the pandemic crisis                                                                    | 20%| 40%| 40%|    |    |    |
| 4 My hotel always monitors market trends, including future needs of its customers/clients during the pandemic crisis                                      | 10%| 50%| 30%| 10%| NIL|    |
| 5 My hotel emphasizes opportunity focus by identifying and recognizing opportunities before competitors) during the pandemic crisis                     | 10%| 60%| 30%| NIL|    |    |
low extent. Finally, 10% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization emphasized opportunity focus during the pandemic crisis, 60% believed to a high extent and 30% believed to an average extent.

On calculated risk-taking, Table 6 indicates that 20% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their organization has increased the number of services offered during the last 2 years despite the pandemic crisis, 60% believed to a high extent and 20% believed to an average extent. However, 30% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that when their hotels decide to pursue a new marketing direction during the pandemic crisis, it is done in stages to reduce the risks involved, 40% believed to a high extent and 30% believed to an average extent. Moreover, 30% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels’ marketing efforts tended to have a low level of risk during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed to a high extent and 20% believed to an average extent. Additionally, 20% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels typically use creative, low-cost ways to reduce risks associated with new marketing activities during the pandemic crisis, 40% believed to a high extent and 40% believed to an average extent. Last, 50% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels emphasize calculated risk-taking during the pandemic crisis and 50% agreed with the question to a high extent.

The descriptive results for customer intensity in Table 7 indicated that 20% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels create solid relationships with customers through their marketing efforts during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed to a high extent and 30% believed to an average extent. However, 20% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels are continuously finding new ways to build a strong customer relationship during the pandemic crisis, 50% believed to a high extent and 30% believed to an average extent. Furthermore, 60% of the respondents believed to a very high extent that their hotels’ marketing efforts reflect knowledge of what customers want from our goods/services during the pandemic crisis and 40% believed to a high extent. In addition, 50% of the respondents opined that to a very high extent, communicating with customers is a great way to identify innovation opportunities during the pandemic crisis and 50% believed that the statement is factual to a high extent. Another 50% of the respondents noted that to a very high extent, their hotels emphasize customer intensity during the pandemic crisis, 40% agreed to a high extent and 10% were of the view that the statement is factual to an average extent.

Table 6  Calculated risk-taking dimension of hotels

| Calculated risk-taking dimension                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 1  My hotel has increased the number of services offered during the last 2 years in spite of the pandemic crisis | 20%| 60%| 20%| NIL|
| 2  When my hotel decides to pursue a new marketing direction during the pandemic crisis, it does so in stages rather than all at once to reduce the risks involved | 30%| 40%| 30%|    |
| 3  My hotel’s marketing efforts tend to have a low level of risk during the pandemic crisis     | 30%| 50%| 20%|    |
| 4  My hotel typically uses creative, low-cost way to reduce risks associated with new marketing activities during the pandemic crisis | 20%| 40%| 40%| 10%| NIL|
| 5  My hotel emphasizes calculated risk-taking by taking on high-risk marketing efforts that offer the chance of a very high return | 50%| 90%| NIL|    |

Table 7  Customer Intensity dimension of hotels

| Customer Intensity dimension                                                                 | 6  | 5  | 4  | 3  | 2  | 1   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| 1  My hotel creates solid relationships with customers/clients through its marketing efforts during the pandemic crisis | 20%| 50%| 30%| NIL|
| 2  My hotel is continuously finding new ways to build a strong customer relationship during the pandemic crisis | 20%| 50%| 30%|    |
| 3  My hotel’s marketing efforts reflect knowledge of what customers/clients truly want from our goods/services during the pandemic crisis | 60%| 40%| 0  |    |
| 4  In my hotel, communicating with customers/clients is a great way to identify innovation opportunities during the pandemic crisis | 50%| 50%| 0  | 10%| NIL|
| 5  My hotel emphasizes customer intensity, by searching for innovative approaches to create, build and sustain its customer relationship during the pandemic crisis | 50%| 40%| 10%| NIL|    |
Regression analysis

From the analysis, the prediction of six EM dimensions on general performance, revenue per room and market share are reported in Tables 8, 9, and 10. In Table 8, the unstandardized coefficients that show the influence of proactiveness innovativeness, resource leveraging, value creation, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking and customer intensity on general performance are −0.007, 0.033, 0.064, 0.083, −0.056, 0.206 and 0.071. The estimation in Table 8 indicates that calculated risk-taking has a significant positive influence on general performance, while the other five EM dimensions do not.

In Table 9, the unstandardized coefficients that show the influence of proactiveness innovativeness, resource leveraging, value creation, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking and customer intensity on revenue per room are −0.036, −0.018, 0.014, 0.044, 0.011, 0.150 and 0.069. The estimation in Table 9 indicates that calculated risk-taking and customer intensity have a significant positive influence on revenue per room, while the other four EM dimensions do not.

In Table 10, the unstandardized coefficients that show the influence of proactiveness innovativeness, resource leveraging, value creation, opportunity focus, calculated risk-taking and customer intensity on market share are 0.082, 0.069, −0.013, 0.260, −0.037, −0.062 and 0.003, respectively. The estimation in Table 10 indicates that calculated risk-taking has a significant positive influence on market share, while the other five EM dimensions do not.

| Table 8 | Entrepreneurial marketing practices and performance |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Model   | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients |
|         | $B$ | Std. Error | $t$ | Sig. | Beta |
| (Constant) | 28.848 | 2.100 | 13.735 | .000 |
| Proactiveness items | −.007 | .054 | −.005 | −.125 | .901 |
| Innovativeness Items | −.033 | .047 | −.035 | −.687 | .492 |
| Resource leveraging items | .064 | .051 | .063 | 1.255 | .210 |
| Value creation | .083 | .075 | .056 | 1.096 | .274 |
| Opportunity focus | −.056 | .052 | −.048 | −1.077 | .282 |
| Calculated risk-taking | .206 | .067 | .136 | 3.076 | .002 |
| Customer intensity | .071 | .046 | .068 | 1.542 | .124 |

| Table 9 | Entrepreneurial marketing practices and revenue per room |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Model   | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients |
|         | $B$ | Std. Error | $t$ | Sig. | Beta |
| (Constant) | 14.733 | 1.474 | 9.992 | .000 |
| Proactiveness items | −.036 | .038 | −.039 | −.948 | .344 |
| Innovativeness Items | −.018 | .033 | −.027 | −.533 | .594 |
| Resource leveraging items | .014 | .036 | .019 | .383 | .702 |
| Value creation | .044 | .053 | .042 | .827 | .409 |
| Opportunity focus | .011 | .036 | .013 | .301 | .764 |
| Calculated risk-taking | .150 | .047 | .140 | 3.174 | .002 |
| Customer intensity | .069 | .032 | .094 | 2.151 | .032 |

| Table 10 | Entrepreneurial marketing practices and market share |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Model   | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients |
|         | $B$ | Std. Error | $t$ | Sig. | Beta |
| (Constant) | 11.178 | 1.553 | 7.199 | .000 |
| Proactiveness items | .082 | .040 | .084 | 2.082 | .638 |
| Innovativeness Items | .069 | .035 | .096 | 1.955 | .051 |
| Resource leveraging items | −.013 | .038 | −.017 | −.355 | .722 |
| Value creation | .260 | .056 | .231 | 4.671 | .200 |
| Opportunity focus | −.037 | .038 | −.042 | −.957 | .339 |
| Calculated risk-taking | −.062 | .050 | −.054 | −1.253 | .111 |
| Customer intensity | .003 | .034 | .004 | .084 | .933 |
Discussion of findings

The intent of the study is to empirically explore whether six EM dimensions influence the business performance of hotels in Lagos and Yola during the COVID-19 crisis. The result from the descriptive analysis indicates that the hotels surveyed actually manifested modest application of the six EM dimensions marketing dimensions in their operations, but these EM dimensions (except calculated risk-taking and customer intensity) do not have statistically significant influence on the three performance determinants. The reasons for the insignificant influence of many EM dimensions on the business performance of hotels are connected to two factors that have been well articulated in previous empirical studies.

The first factor arguably explains the inability of several EM dimensions to influence three performance measures of hotels in Lagos and Yola is the recessionary crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic. EM dimensions/practices are organizational-level constructs that have been reported to function well in periods of relative stability. With particular reference to the current study, the hotels in Lagos and Yola are operating in the period of instability and turbulence caused by the pandemic. Previous studies have explained that the entrepreneurial behaviour of businesses in periods of economic stability and turbulence differs (Lai et al. 2016; Sainidis et al. 2019; Weaven et al. 2021). In particular, the empirical study of Alqahtani and Uslay (2020) found that the EM-performance relationship is moderated by environmental factors. This explains why EM dimensions have been increased to eight with the addition of inclusive attention, meaning having a balanced attention to stakeholders (Alqahtani and Uslay 2020).

The second factor that plausibly explains the inability of several EM dimensions to influence three performance measures of hotels in Lagos and Yola is the lack of entrepreneurial leadership. Hotels such as other businesses require entrepreneurs or managers with entrepreneurial leadership to drive EM practices to impact organizational performance. The concept of entrepreneurial leadership presupposes that entrepreneurs are fit to be called leaders by virtue of their transformative actions that impact the performance of businesses and drive competitiveness (Leitch and Volery 2017; Parente et al. 2018). For organizations to succeed in periods of stability and uncertainty, they require entrepreneurs with entrepreneurial mentality, such as vision, problem-solving, decision-making, risk-taking and strategic initiatives (Fernald et al. 2005). Therefore, the six EM dimensions (an organizational-level construct) need human elements found in entrepreneurial leadership to influence general performance, revenue per room and market share. Moreover, Boonchoo et al. (2013) reported that the ability of hotels to effectively and efficiently apply the EM dimensions is largely dependent on which types of managers. They found that the type of owner management is positively associated with market orientation, negatively associated with growth aspirations and not significantly related to entrepreneurial orientation.

The hotels in Lagos and Yola, by applying EM practices during the COVID-19 pandemic with a reasonable but insignificant level of influence on business performance, have demonstrated the importance of integrating the concepts of entrepreneurship with marketing. To keep the hotel businesses afloat, EM plays a crucial role in hoteliers’ ability to gain customers and increase their revenue. In particular, EM is an indispensable tool that hotel managers can leverage to increase their bookings, market their uniqueness and create value for their potential customers (Revfne 2018). Moreover, scholars have recommended EM as a potent coping strategy (Osuagwu 2020) because as the economy recovers, hospitality businesses (tourism, restaurants, clubs and hotels) are expected to make substantial changes to their business operations to align with the sentiments of customers and employees on health and safety concerns (Gössling et al. 2020). Considering the complexities in the hotel business in cosmopolitan cities that are beehives of tourism, there is a need to adopt EM as an alternative marketing model that could be applied to raise the operational performance of small and medium companies (Sadiku-Dushi et al. 2019). The new paradigm of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) has the potential to help business organizations remain relevant and competitive in the period of uncertainties stemming from developments in science and technology and the associated influence of business cycles (Sadhi and Bapat 2020).

A number of previous studies by Morris et al. (2002, 2007), Kurgun et al. (2011), Stokes (2000), Kraus et al. (2010) and Hills and Hultman (2011a, b) affirmed that EM is appropriate for small- and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs). Some literature in the hotel industry provides specific insights into the nexus of EM and business performance. Kurgun et al. (2011) found that EM concepts and practices that are widely used in the tourism sectors of the economy have not been adopted by boutique hotels to improve their service delivery and performance. In particular, the seven dimensions of EM (opportunity focus, proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking, leveraging, customer intensity and value creation) were adopted, internalized and applied by the hotels for marketing activities with positive operational results. Al-Manasra et al. (2013) found that entrepreneurial marketing practices have a significant positive relationship with performance indicators (service quality, competition, cost reduction and customer satisfaction) in Jordanian hotels. Boonchoo et al. (2013) found that the application of EM practices cuts across small and large
hotels, as both need EM to boost marketing and operational activities. Ladokun (2019), who examines the impact of EM strategies (Guerrilla and viral marketing strategies) on the performance of 154 medium-sized hotel businesses in Nigeria, found that both strategies have a significant impact on performance measured in terms of sales growth and brand image creation.

**Conclusion, implications, limitations and further research direction**

The study examines the influence of customer-centric EM dimensions on business performance measures in the hotel segment of the hospitality industry in two states in Nigeria (Lagos and Yola). At the end, three regression estimations were reported. The estimation in model 1 indicates that calculated risk-taking has a significant positive influence on general performance, while the proactiveness, innovativeness, value creation, resource leveraging, opportunity to focus and customer intensity dimensions do not. The estimation in model 2 suggests that calculated risk-taking and customer intensity have a significant positive influence on revenue per room, while the other five EM dimensions do not. The estimation in model 3 indicates that calculated risk-taking has a significant positive influence on market share, while the six EM dimensions do not. The findings clearly obligate that entrepreneurs venturing into the hotel business should adopt EM dimensions to improve their competitive edge to build value and attract customers. The adoption of EM as a marketing strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic improved hotels’ capabilities in the seven dimensions of EM, thereby fortifying and positioning them to compete effectively in a customer-centric business environment. Overall, the findings of this study have important academic, theoretical and managerial implications for academics and policymakers that are discussed below.

**Academic implications**

For academics, the results from the three regression models reinforce previous studies that EM dimension have significant influence on the business performance of small firms. Our study confirms the potency of the calculated risk-taking and customer intensity EM dimensions. The five others were not confirmed for two factors: (a) uncertainty caused by the pandemic crisis and (b) lack of entrepreneurial leadership by many hotel managers. The COVID-19 pandemic causative first factor constrained five EM dimensions from influencing the performance of hotels in Lagos and Yola. EM dimensions/practices as an organizational construct can function well in a period of relative stability. The lack of entrepreneurial leadership hinders five EM dimensions from influencing the performance measures of the sampled hotels. It has been proven in management that leaders are different from managers in several respects: uniqueness of both phenomena, role conceptualization, processes of doing things differ and both play different roles in organizations, among others (Zaleznik 1977; Toor 2011). Therefore, hotels operating during periods of uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic require entrepreneurs or managers with entrepreneurial leadership to drive EM practices to impact organizational performance. Our findings therefore extend the EM knowledge frontier by affirming that for all seven EM dimensions to impact business performance, there is a need for a mediating or moderating influence of entrepreneurial leadership and business cycle (stability and instability). Finally, the study has proven that EM is a better, enduring and resilient marketing strategy and hence should be preferred over conventional marketing.

**Theoretical implication**

We bridge the gaps in the literature by providing interesting insights into the potential value of the adoption of EM as a post-COVID-19 recovery strategy by the hotel segment of the hospitality industry in the developing context of Nigeria. Secondly, the current study validates the applicability of RBT in predicting the influence of EM dimensions on performance in the developing context.

**Managerial implications**

In the light of the findings, the following policy implications have emerged. First, if the seven EM dimensions are leveraged by hotel managers during the ongoing pandemic crisis and other recessionary periods, three business performance measures (general performance, revenue per room, market share) would be induced in the hotel segment of the hospitality industry. Second, the positive influence of calculated risk-taking and customer intensity is a strong indication that both are customer-centric dimensions of EM that hotel managers should consider when designing and implementing marketing strategies in the hotel segment of the hospitality industry in developing countries. Third, the policymakers and managers of hotels should fortify and upscale the weak EM dimensions as a strategy for recovery from the ravages of the COVID-19 crisis.

Despite the laudable academic, theoretical and policy implications explicated above, the current study, like other surveys in the field of management, has few limitations. First, the study is based on empirical evidence elicited objectively from 578 hotel managers and top employees.
from 66 hotels in Lagos and Yola cities in Nigeria. Evidently, the views of 578 owner-managers and top managers of hotels are modest, rich and insightful but may be inadequate and unrepresentative of the hotels in both cities in Nigeria. Second, the use of the purposive sampling technique is another limitation because of subjectivity and nonrandom attributes as a sampling technique. However, it was found relevant, useful and effective in this study because the target population is very large, and the study seeks owner-managers and top managers of hotels who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being investigated and are willing to participate in the study. Third, this study adopted a cross-sectional survey carried out in 2020, which means that changes in the behaviour of owner-managers and top managers of the hotels surveyed in the two cities in Nigeria (Lagos and Yola) over time are not taken into consideration. Finally, the preference for quantitative data collected through questionnaires as opposed to qualitative data through interviews is a limitation because the study has left out certain information that could best be elicited through interviews; it has also limited the respondent’s opinions on the issues being investigated.

Overall, the study is unique because it empirically opens the space for further studies on the mediating or moderating role of entrepreneurial leadership on the effect of EM on the business performance of hotels in periods of uncertainty. Future research may also consider replicating this study in other settings in South-South, South-East and Northern Nigeria to confirm and extend the frontier of the present study findings. Additionally, future research should increase the sample size and explore random sampling as opposed to the purposive sampling technique used at present. If the above are explored, they would positively aid generalization and prediction of future research outcomes. Future research may consider adopting a mixed-methods design for comparative analysis and enrichment of findings.

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