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# International entrepreneurial marketing strategies of MNCs: Bricolage as practiced by marketing managers

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## ABSTRACT

The extant research lacks information on entrepreneurial marketing in large international firms. This study explores the international entrepreneurial marketing strategies of multinational corporations (MNCs), and its results reveal that MNC marketing managers use bricolage to develop international entrepreneurial marketing. A novel finding of the study is that the international entrepreneurial marketing strategies of MNCs include co-innovation, accelerating customer value, and international expansion based on regional market leadership. Marketing managers use both parallel and selective bricolage in their international entrepreneurial marketing. Environmental uncertainty and entrepreneurship culture are important drivers of the implementation of bricolage to develop international entrepreneurial marketing. The research findings can inform MNC management of the options available to utilize corporate venturing to facilitate bricolage and in turn to realize international entrepreneurial marketing strategies.

## 1. Introduction

International marketing plays a central role as multinational corporations (MNCs) seek market opportunities and expand globally (Douglas & Craig, 2006). Katsikeas (2003) reviewed advances in international marketing theory and practice and noted that the literature of the time underemphasized the potential of synthesizing existing knowledge and integrating context-specific findings to resolve managerial problems and stimulate future research and business practices. Moreover, the same author later expressed a need to introduce new concepts addressing critical international marketing management issues (Katsikeas, 2014). For instance, how can MNCs remain proactive, innovative, and flexible in their international marketing and avoid it becoming reactive and ultimately stagnant? In light of introducing new marketing concepts, scholars have developed the notion of entrepreneurial marketing being “the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation” (Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2002, p. 5). At the interface between marketing and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial marketing has been a focus of research since the 1980s and seeks to understand the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (e.g., Bjerke & Hultman, 2002; Hills, 1987; Whalen & Akaka, 2016).

In international marketing research, the theoretical perspectives of international entrepreneurial marketing have been devised based

largely on studying marketing behavior in international new ventures or born global firms (Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2011, 2013; Mort, Weerawardena, & Liesch, 2012). The assumptions underlying the literature are that large and established international firms such as MNCs use a traditional marketing approach, whereas smaller and younger international firms such as born globals adopt entrepreneurial marketing strategies (Bjerke & Hultman, 2002; Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2011; Kotler, 2003). The argument goes that conducting international marketing activities in smaller and younger entrepreneurial firms is especially difficult due to those firms’ limited resources and capabilities; and because their smallness, newness, and foreignness restrict the access to supplementary resources and networks (Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2013). Therefore it is important to apply entrepreneurial marketing to overcome these challenges (Hills, Hultman, & Miles, 2008). Moreover, there are often stronger internal obstacles to the entrepreneurial approach to marketing in large firms than in smaller entrepreneurial firms (Bjerke & Hultman, 2002; Carson, Cromie, McGowan, & Hill, 1995). That might be because large firms can become mired in formulated marketing and lack the creativity of marketers in start-up firms during the entrepreneurial stage (Kotler, 2003; Miles & Darroch, 2006).

Research should challenge the assumption that MNC marketing is more traditional whereas born global marketing is more entrepreneurial, and ask how MNCs could conduct entrepreneurial marketing. This approach is valid because entrepreneurial marketing can trigger the innovation of products, processes, and strategies, and also

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enable the more effective and efficient renewal of competitive advantage in established organizations. Entrepreneurial marketing could thus offer a way for large firms to remain innovative and competitive in marketing terms (Miles & Darroch, 2006). However, the existing research fails to offer clear findings on how to develop international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in MNCs.

Furthermore, the previous literature emphasizes the critical role middle managers play in the strategy development process of MNCs (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Ling, Floyd, & Baldrige, 2005). Their intermediate position enables them to serve as important interfaces between disconnected actors and domains in the organization, and to judge whether strategic issues are being considered in the appropriate context (Browne, Sharkey-Scott, Mangematin, Lawlor, & Cuddihy, 2014; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1999), in order to realize the strategies in practice. Compared to an “intended strategy”, a “realized strategy” emerges not only as a result of policy emanating from the top level of the organization, but also following actions arising at the middle level (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 257). Accordingly, this study focuses on middle-level marketing managers to illustrate the development of MNC marketing strategies. The current international marketing literature has neglected the individual level, that is, the study of managers. Consequently, scholars have suggested new research should investigate the role played by marketing managers in the global firm, because that group engages in activities that result in marketing strategies (Cavusgil, Deligonul, & Yaprak, 2005). Therefore, the research question of this study is formulated as: *How do marketing managers develop international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in MNCs?*

The current research chooses to adopt bricolage as the theoretical basis for its examination of the development of marketing strategies by MNC marketing managers. Bricolage is a process of combining various available resources to find workable solutions to problems, and to seize opportunities (Fisher, 2012). As such, bricolage encourages creativity and fosters entrepreneurial behavior (Baker & Nelson, 2005). The rationale for the choice of bricolage as the theoretical foundation is primarily that it focuses on individual actors’ behavior in the organization, which accords with the focus of the current study being marketing managers’ behavior in fostering entrepreneurship in international marketing. Second, bricolage emphasizes the creative leveraging of resource combinations (Baker, 2007). The importance of heterogeneous and idiosyncratic resource combination for MNCs is highlighted by the resource-based view (Barney, 1991, 2001; Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984) and the evolutionary theory of the MNC when firms expand into international markets (Gabrielsson, Seppälä, & Gabrielsson, 2016; Kogut & Zander, 2003).

This study makes important contributions to the literature. First, the research contributes to international marketing literature by addressing scholars’ calls for the use of a new marketing concept and work enhancing the conceptual foundation of international marketing research (Douglas & Craig, 2006; Katsikeas, 2014). It provides a contextualized investigation of the international marketing strategies of MNCs in a business environment heavily influenced by digitization. Second, the exploratory study contributes to entrepreneurial marketing literature by shedding light on how entrepreneurial marketing can be employed in MNCs. This is a timely response to scholars’ calls to develop the theoretical underpinnings of entrepreneurial marketing and its strategic use in large organizations (Kilenthong, Hultman, & Hills, 2016; Miles & Darroch, 2006), because entrepreneurial marketing cannot be conceptualized based solely on the activities of the small firms, young firms, or founder-operated firms scrutinized in the existing literature. Third, the research provides qualitative insights to complement marketing strategy development literature (e.g., Rosier, Morgan, Cadogan, 2010) by focusing on the critical role of marketing managers in developing entrepreneurial marketing strategies. Although significant research has been conducted on international marketing strategy, the number of studies addressing the activity of individual marketing managers is rather limited (Griffith & Hoppner, 2013). Finally, the

study contributes to entrepreneurship literature by illustrating how bricolage (Baker & Nelson, 2005) fosters entrepreneurship within the marketing function of an MNC. Extant research has thus far merely investigated bricolage in resource-constrained new firms (e.g., Desa & Basu, 2013; Senyard, Baker, Steffens, & Davidson, 2014). Hence, the study sheds light on the use of bricolage in larger international firms.

The paper is organized as follows. First, the relevant literature on international entrepreneurial marketing, the role of marketing managers in strategy development, and bricolage is reviewed. The next section presents the rationale for selecting a single case and the related methodological aspects. Then the findings of the study are explored and discussed to formulate propositions. The discussion and conclusion section includes a discussion of the contributions of the findings to the literature, the study’s managerial implications and limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. International entrepreneurial marketing

In 2013, the American Marketing Association (AMA) adopted the following as its official definition of marketing: “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA, 2013). International marketing refers to the application of that marketing concept across multiple countries. As a research field, scholars have identified three dominant issues in international marketing research: first, the managerial processes of foreign market expansion; second, the resulting ownership structures; third, the development, implementation, and assessment of strategies in international markets (Cavusgil et al., 2005). Applying the entrepreneurial marketing concept in international marketing research, international entrepreneurial marketing may be defined as the proactive discovery or creation of market opportunities in international markets in order to acquire and retain customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging, and value creation (Hallböck & Gabrielsson, 2013; Morris et al., 2002; Webster & Lusch 2013).

The entrepreneurial marketing concept consists of seven dimensions developed by Morris et al. (2002): (1) The *opportunity-driven* dimension refers to the recognition and pursuit of opportunities (Morris et al., 2002). Marketing efforts are made to establish new market positions rather than to engage in direct competition with other firms. (2) *Proactiveness* refers to addressing the future needs of customers and introducing changes to influence the marketplace (Blocker, Flint, Myers, & Slater, 2011). (3) The *customer intensity* dimension involves focusing strongly on customers and interacting with individual customers to establish profitable customer relationships (Ramani & Kumar, 2008). (4) *Innovativeness* refers to seeking innovative approaches to marketing that differ from conventional practices to deliver competitive advantage (Hallböck & Gabrielsson, 2013). (5) *Risk management* involves ensuring marketing efforts strive to reduce a firm’s vulnerability to, and dependence on, the external environment, and enhance the firm’s flexibility; for instance, through collaboration with other firms (Morris et al., 2002). (6) The *value creation* dimension refers to exploring new methods and searching for unique combinations of resources to create more value for customers (Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Ranjan & Read, 2016). (7) *Resource leveraging* involves achieving more with fewer resources through the skillful deployment of marketing functions (Morris et al., 2002).

The above dimensions were empirically examined in rapidly internationalizing firms by Yang and Gabrielsson (2017), and the authors found that the entrepreneurial marketing employed by international new ventures consists of market creation, value co-creation, and the remaining five dimensions identified by Morris et al. (2002). Moreover, two international entrepreneurial marketing strategies are suggested by Hallböck and Gabrielsson (2013) in international new ventures: first,

the innovativeness of marketing strategy—consisting of value innovation, marketing co-creation, and low-cost marketing—and second, the adaptation of marketing strategy to countries and customers in international markets. As research adopting the international entrepreneurial marketing concept is still at the nascent stage with a focus on born globals (e.g., Kocak & Abimbola, 2009; Mort et al., 2012), there is a great need for further investigation into firms other than rapidly internationalizing entrepreneurial firms. Hence, studying international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in MNCs can provide valuable evidence to advance our knowledge in the field of international marketing.

## 2.2. Marketing managers' roles in strategy development

Although a significant amount of research has been conducted on international marketing strategy (e.g., Schmid & Kotulla, 2011; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003), research on those marketing managers responsible for developing the marketing strategy is rather limited (Griffith & Hoppner, 2013). Marketing managers play an essential role in marketing strategy development, as they are the middle managers responsible for a unit in the marketing function. They need to make strategic marketing decisions in an integrated manner across foreign markets, and those decisions determine the extent to which the international marketing strategy will be effective for the firm and align with the changes in the business environment (Griffith, 2010; Moeller & Harvey, 2011).

The previous literature on organization studies emphasizes the critical role middle managers play in MNCs' strategy development (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Ling et al., 2005). They recognize and support autonomous strategic initiatives ratified by top management, resulting in an incremental and adaptive strategy-making process (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000). Consequently, middle managers become critical intermediaries between levels and units (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). They influence the strategy development process by mediating vertically between the conceptual knowledge at the top and the knowledge of operations at the bottom, as well as by interacting horizontally to combine and recombine knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Shi, Markoczy, & Dess, 2009; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008).

In this research, the marketing managers considered are middle managers who are involved in the development and subsequent implementation of international marketing strategy for an MNC. Thus, the international entrepreneurial marketing strategies identified in this study are realized strategies that are developed and implemented by the marketing managers (Kotha & Nair, 1995; Mintzberg, 1978; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Research suggests that middle managers (i.e., marketing managers) executing entrepreneurial initiatives must engage in entrepreneurial behavior that involves exploring beyond conventional boundaries and taking on additional risks that others would not consider (Antoncic, 2003; Halme, Linderman, & Linna, 2012). Middle managers bridge internal and external activities, thus acting as boundary-spanners across the organization to foster innovation (Perrone, Zaheer, & McEvily, 2003). They required “endorse, refine, and shepherd” entrepreneurial opportunities and “identify, acquire, and deploy” the resources to pursue them (Kuratko, Ireland, Covin, & Hornsby, 2005, p. 705). Hence, to develop international entrepreneurial marketing strategies, marketing managers within a large organization need a spirit of entrepreneurship to pursue opportunities that are not of the customary type (Antoncic, 2003; Antoncic & Hisrich, 2001).

## 2.3. Bricolage

The original concept of bricolage was introduced by French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1967, p. 17), referring to the process of “making do with what is at hand.” He used the metaphor of bricolage

to distinguish two different types of actions: the engineer gathers tools and materials for an intended design; whereas the bricoleur makes do with whatever material is at hand rather than seeking specific resources for a particular project (Duyumedjian & Rüling, 2010; Freeman, 2007). The bricoleur obtains, compiles, and stores resources for future use, without being aware of the eventual applications in the early stage of resource acquisition (Fisher, 2012; Stinchfield, Nelson, & Wood, 2014). Hence, bricolage is opportunistic, creative, and original, and involves constantly redefining the task at hand in light of the available resources (Gabriel, 2002). This creates flexibility in the subsequent deployment because the purpose is shaped by the available resources (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010). The concept of bricolage has been used in literature to understand organizational phenomena such as sense making (e.g., Weick, 1993), innovation (e.g., Garud & Karnøe, 2003), and entrepreneurship (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 2005; Desa, 2012). The current study adopts an integrative definition of bricolage by Baker and Nelson (2005, p. 333): “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities.” There are three central elements in bricolage: first, *utilizing resources at hand* rather than seeking new resources when facing new problems; second, *recombining resources for new purposes*, which could potentially offer innovative solutions to problems that have not been adequately addressed to date; and third, *making do*, referring to creating actions with accessible resources rather than pondering over possibilities without taking any action. Acting in such a way is likely to offer a wide range of outcomes, some of which will spur innovative solutions or new opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Welter, Mauer, & Wuebker, 2016). Hence, the bricolage approach is a novel one compared to traditional management approaches because it emphasizes recombining existing resources with a mindset of prompting action and experimentation (Sunduramurthy, Zheng, Musteen, Francis, & Rhyne, 2016).

When firms operate in resource-starved environments where new challenges must be met without drawing on new resources, bricolage can be employed in five domains: the material, labor, skills, customer/market, and institutional and regulatory environment domains (Baker & Nelson, 2005). The first three domains are relevant to the distinct resource environment of entrepreneurial ventures (Shane, 2003; Wernerfelt, 1984). In the material domain, bricolage is used to imbue forgotten, discarded, worn, or single-application materials with new use value; in the labor domain, bricolage involves persuading customers, suppliers, and partners to provide free work; in the skills domain, bricolage is used to encourage the use of self-taught skills to progress a task (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Desa & Basu, 2013). In the customer/market domain, bricolage is utilized to provide market offerings that would be unavailable otherwise; finally, in the institutional and regulatory environment domain, employing bricolage might involve refusing to accept limitations imposed by regulations and standards (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012). *Parallel bricolage* occurs when a firm employs bricolage in all five domains; whereas *selective bricolage* takes place when a firm employs bricolage in just some domains (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

The extant knowledge on the application of bricolage in MNCs is rather limited; however, there are a few empirical studies on the topic. For instance, middle managers' bricolage activity was found to play a central role in promoting innovation for inclusive business (i.e., sustainable business that benefits low-income communities) in MNCs (Halme et al., 2012). Researchers have examined three types of bricolage—the material, the network, and the organizational types—and find they can be relevant to MNCs seeking to achieve integration with their cross-sectors (Ritvala, Salmi & Andersson, 2014). This study relies on the notion of entrepreneurial bricolage proposed by Baker and Nelson (2005) to investigate bricolage as it is practiced by MNC marketing managers who develop and implement strategy. The study therefore presents a holistic view of the application of bricolage in the international entrepreneurial marketing of MNCs.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case selection

The researcher conducted an exploratory case study, focusing on the *how* type of research question (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). An MNC would usually have a more extensive marketing function than an SME, with marketing managers working in different units of the organization. Examining such an operation demands a close investigation of the empirical setting to collect rich data from marketing managers throughout the organization, so as to acquire a thorough understanding of the context (McGrath, Martin, & Kulka, 1982). The purpose is to theorize on the studied topic instead of testing the theory, with a view to generalizing findings (Weick, 1995). Hence, the study seeks an in-depth understanding of the behavior of marketing managers in the specific context of a Finnish MNC. Consequently, the explanations built into this study are context-specific (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2011).

Accordingly, a single empirical setting (Ghauri, 2004; Siggelkow, 2007) is selected to fully understand how the marketing managers of an MNC develop international entrepreneurial marketing strategies. This choice allowed the researcher to engage intensively with the marketing managers of the focal firm to gather insights, thus ensuring a rich understanding of the context for theory development (McGrath et al., 1982; Welch et al., 2011). This design is inspired by previous research using an in-depth single case study to reinforce the authenticity of data interpretation. Examples include the study of Ritvala et al. (2014) on how both the integration between MNCs' local partnerships and the success of those local partnerships may be increased through bricolage, and research on managerial and entrepreneurial learning modes in MNC subsidiary learning (Dimitratos, Plakoyiannaki, Thanos, & Förbom, 2014).

The case study MNC was selected based on theoretical sampling to exemplify the phenomena relevant to this research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method required the researcher to choose a case likely to extend the emergent theory on entrepreneurial marketing and bricolage, and one that could provide strong explanations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2009). Moreover, it was important to choose a case with informants willing to share their experiences openly to maximize the researcher's learning from the case (Stake, 1995). Accordingly, the researcher sourced Finnish MNCs from the Orbis database, before scrutinizing their annual reports and press releases and reviewing the media coverage they had attracted. During

Table 1  
Tieto markets (Tieto, 2015).

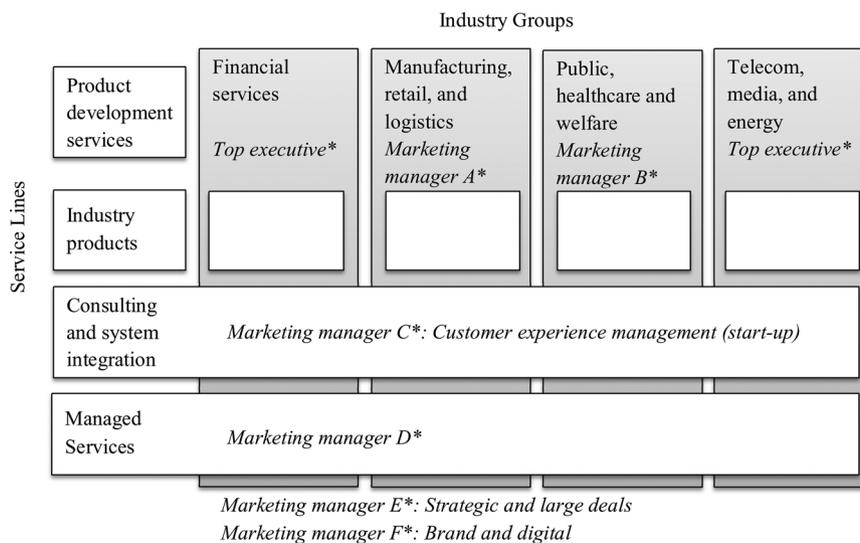
Main markets	Finland, Norway, Sweden
Other markets	Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Malaysia, Netherlands, the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Russia, USA
Major delivery centers	China, Czech Republic, India, Poland

the selection process, two main criteria were applied. First, the MNC had to be actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities so that the main construct, entrepreneurial marketing, would be extremely relevant. Second, the MNC had to have marketing managers responsible for different business units. This would provide more opportunities to investigate whether and to what extent marketing managers pursue bricolage activities when spanning organizational boundaries between different business units. The Finnish MNC, Tieto, was selected as the case firm because it is particularly active in corporate venturing and entrepreneurial activities; for example, organizing hackathons (i.e., design events for collaborative computer programming) to spur innovation, and participating in start-up events such as Slush. Slush is a non-profit start-up event organized by a community of entrepreneurs, investors, students, and festival organizers (Slush, 2016).

Tieto was founded as a computer center in 1968 in Finland to develop and maintain IT systems for the Union Bank of Finland and a few firms in the forestry industry. The firm gradually broadened its customer base and operations until by the 1980s it was involved in multiple industries. During the IT boom of the 1990s, Tieto grew rapidly through strategic alliances, mergers, and acquisitions. The firm has expanded rapidly into international markets since the 2000s and now operates in close to 20 countries (see Table 1), employing around 13,000 staff. In 2015, Tieto reported net sales of 1.46 billion euros: 46% from Finland, 38% from Sweden, 10% from Norway, and 7% from other markets (Tieto, 2015). The main markets of Tieto are clearly in the Nordic region, but the firm has a global presence to support the globalized customers from those Nordic countries.

3.2. Data collection

Tieto has a global marketing organization to make the most important marketing decisions and handle marketing processes, based on four industry groups and three service lines (see Fig. 1). The researcher



\* Interviewed person in italics.

Fig. 1. Tieto operating model and relevant informants in the marketing function (Tieto, 2015).

**Table 2**  
Background of interviewees.

Interviewee	Location	Position	Level of management	No. of interviews
Top executive	Finland	Vice President, Head of Global Communications (Previous positions: Head of Marketing Operations; Chief Marketing Officer; Head of Marketing, Financial Services)	Top	2
Marketing manager A	Finland	Head of Marketing at Industry Group Manufacturing, Retail and Logistics	Middle	2
Marketing manager B	Finland	Head of Marketing, Industry Group Public, Healthcare and Welfare	Middle	2
Marketing manager C	Finland	Marketing Manager, Customer Experience Management (start-up)	Middle	3
Marketing manager D	Sweden	Head of Marketing, Managed Services	Middle	2
Marketing manager E	Finland	Head of Marketing, Strategic and Large Deals	Middle	2
Marketing manager F	Sweden	Head of Brand and Market Insight	Middle	2

identified key marketing managers after interviewing a top-level executive in the marketing organization and viewing the firm's organization chart. The key marketing managers are located in Finland and Sweden. Fig. 1 lists the marketing managers interviewed from every industry group and each service line. The industry group *telecoms, media, and energy*, and the service line *product development services* do not have their own marketing function. The position of the marketing manager for the industry group *financial services* was open at the time of the interviews. Therefore, the top executive was interviewed to provide input. In addition, *strategic and large deals*, and *brand and digital* are two marketing areas that cover all industry groups and service lines.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysis of documentation. Company documentation such as press releases, annual reports, and brochures was used as a secondary source for data triangulation (Patton, 1990). The face-to-face interviews took place during the period February to May 2016. The researcher interviewed each informant twice, in an initial and a follow-up interview. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was recorded and transcribed. An additional follow-up interview was made in 2017 with the Marketing Manager of *Customer Experience Management*—the start-up company within Tieto—to clarify some issues that arose during the research process. Table 2 presents detailed information on the interviewees.

### 3.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was based on an iteration approach with systematic combining. This means that theory and the empirical data were repeatedly compared during the data collection and analysis process, and emerging issues were noted (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The transcriptions and archival secondary data (comprising approximately 91,000 words) were imported into NVivo 10 research software to support content analysis (Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008). During that content analysis, the interview transcripts and company documentation were organized thematically. The researcher analyzed the data carefully to construct the coding scheme. In line with the results of the literature review, the main themes were entrepreneurial marketing and bricolage. Each main theme was further classified into several sub-themes, based on the seven dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing, the definition of bricolage, and its five domains. Data were first coded under the themes deductively, and then inductively to create new themes that emerged from the data. Data from each informant were analyzed and summarized. Then the researcher systematically combined data from all the informants to build explanations and develop propositions (Yin, 2009).

### 3.4. Trustworthiness

In order to reinforce the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher evaluated its credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, based on the criteria set by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The *credibility* of the study is enhanced by data triangulation. The study uses multiple data sources, such as interview transcripts and archival secondary data (Patton, 2001; Yin, 2009). Interviews with different key

informants cover the same issues and events, and together with the review of the firm's annual reports and press releases, ensure the validity of the findings in the case study (Ghauri, 2004). The results support “natural generalization” (Blatter, 2008, p. 69) through a thick description of the case and its context (Holloway, 1997). The *transferability* of the findings is limited to the high-tech business-to-business context. However, future research can apply the findings in different contexts and either confirm or reject them. Interview summaries were sent to the interviewees for review to improve the *dependability* of the findings. The case results were reflected against the literature on bricolage to ensure that the researcher's interpretations drawn from the data were justifiable (Sinkovics et al., 2008). The *confirmability* of the study was established by way of a thorough examination of the case informants and data triangulation to minimize bias attributable to either the researcher or interviewees (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Environment as an antecedent to bricolage

Tieto was viewed as a traditional IT service firm because of its long history with the banking sector in Finland. The automation of traditional IT services, the emergence of new business models, and the widespread digitization of the economy in the current decade caused Tieto to move from being viewed as a traditional Finnish IT firm to become an innovative Nordic partner for customers digitizing their businesses. Accordingly, Tieto faces relatively strong environmental uncertainty owing to rapid changes in the area of digitization, as well as global competition and industry consolidation in the marketplace. When facing an uncertain external environment where new challenges must be met without new resources, an MNC has to be flexible, which increases the need for communication flows between marketing and other functional areas. Environmental uncertainty required Tieto to utilize its current resources in a modern and agile way to pursue new opportunities and accelerate the firm's growth in the global marketplace. The managers explain the situation as follows:

We were seen as a big traditional giant in Finland. It is very hard to change the image and the reputation that the market and the customers have...Therefore, we need to seek, experiment, and combine our resources to pursue opportunities—to be more modern and agile. (Top executive)

We need to reinvent ourselves very quickly. (Marketing manager E)

Tieto realized one area—customer experience management—would be very relevant to the future growth of the MNC. In 2014, Tieto established a start-up unit named after its function, *Customer Experience Management* (CEM). The start-up reflects the corporation's strong commitment to that key growth area. The purpose of the unit is to guide Tieto's customers to create a superior customer experience for their end-customers across digital and traditional channels (Tieto, 2014). Such corporate venturing practices have enhanced the entrepreneurship culture of the firm. A strong culture of entrepreneurship encourages marketing managers to take the initiative to seek new

**Table 3**  
Bricolage domains.

Domain	Interviewee	Y/N <sup>a</sup>	Illustrative quotes
Material: <i>Combining and utilizing existing resources in creating new use value</i>	Marketing manager A	Y	"It is mostly using our current resources from a new angle and link to our business plan and targets."
	Marketing manager B	Y	"We had to adopt a new perspective on using our own resources in the era of digitization."
	Marketing manager C	Y	"We have an 'experience hub' to combine resources from customers and the start-ups to create something new."
	Marketing manager D	N	"Combining and using existing resources with new use value has been quite limited due to different purposes of the business units."
	Marketing manager E	Y	"We utilize what we have internally. I gather the views from many internal sources for holistic information, and then build my own story for the customer."
Labor: <i>Involving internal and external partners in free work</i>	Marketing manager F	Y	"Resources are combined in a different way...we are seeking creativity."
	Top executive	Y	"Our own resources must play a bigger role going forward because new resources are usually limited...we use our current resources to reinvent [our product and service portfolio]."
	Marketing manager A	N	"We haven't involved customers, and this is something we need to think about in the new change."
	Marketing manager B	N	"We have paid an external vendor to build different content topics."
	Marketing manager C	Y	"We have done it in a quite practical way by arranging industrial workshops and hackathons. We do not use agencies because it costs a lot of money and we have to spend the time to brief them and coordinate with our own experts."
Skills: <i>Leveraging self-taught skills</i>	Marketing manager D	N	"I paid agencies and freelancers because sometimes the quality can be much better."
	Marketing manager E	Y	"The internal partnership with sales is important in my role...I get very good input from my sales colleagues from all business units about what the customers want."
	Marketing manager F	N	"Unfortunately, [there is] not too much involvement [with partners to obtain free work]."
	Top executive	Y	"We support our marketers working with the salesforce to develop good content marketing together."
	Marketing manager A	Y	"We encourage a do-it-yourself approach, especially in content creation. This gives us a better understanding of the business to conduct marketing."
Customer/market: <i>Providing unique and customized offerings</i>	Marketing manager B	Y	"Very much. Our current policy is learning by doing [ourselves], so I think the experimental culture is more and more evident in marketing."
	Marketing manager C	Y	"My colleague has good skills she learned by herself in publishing in our web through digital marketing, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, etc."
	Marketing manager D	N	"We lack such [self-taught] competence."
	Marketing manager E	Y	"Social skills are critical to convince people to be involved. Marketing managers need to constantly update our own skills in free time because tactics change fast."
	Marketing manager F	N	"[Self-taught skills are] Not used at the moment."
Regulatory/Institutional: <i>Stretching organizational boundaries for the purposes of resource combination</i>	Top executive	N	"We need to take the initiative to leverage self-taught skills more often."
	Marketing manager A	Y	"We are working with the start-up CEM to offer tailor-made solutions to the retail business."
	Marketing manager B	Y	"We have shifted from providing industry-specific offerings to combining the offerings in a unique way."
	Marketing manager C	Y	"We are offering a personalized platform for our customers where they can interact with other industries and other partners to find new innovative business models."
	Marketing manager D	Y	"We try to provide unique and customized services to our customers."
Customer/market: <i>Providing unique and customized offerings</i>	Marketing manager E	Y	"It is very important to use differentiation in my area because of the strong competition."
	Marketing manager F	Y	"We are providing interesting...and customized offerings through the online digital channels."
	Top executive	Y	"We were the first to provide unique cloud services in the Nordic region."
	Marketing manager A	Y	"Using people across the organizations is definitely helping to realize our strategies."
	Marketing manager B	N	"We are thinking how we can change the structure to encourage more cooperation and resource utilization."
Regulatory/Institutional: <i>Stretching organizational boundaries for the purposes of resource combination</i>	Marketing manager C	Y	"We can't set too many boundaries in order to help the rest of the organization to change."
	Marketing manager D	N	"There has been some collaboration, but it is rather limited. I try to do more on my own."
	Marketing manager E	Y	"When I make a new deal, I build a new team every time. I work with many salespeople throughout the organization and encourage them to do things differently."
	Marketing manager F	N	"I have tried several times, but it doesn't work. Resource combination should be promoted more."
	Top executive	Y	"We have gone beyond the limitations. One concrete example is that we bypassed the sales and industry groups and had a fast track to market in the 'cloud campaigns' last year."

<sup>a</sup> Based on patterns of bricolage from Baker and Nelson (2005), Y = yes, bricolage exists; N = no, bricolage does not exist.

combinations of existing resources. For instance, marketing managers from traditional industry groups used the hackathons organized by the start-up CEM to change their image. An entrepreneurship culture thus enables marketing managers to enact bricolage to deliver new opportunities. The managers commented:

We need to look for hope in this digitization boom—how to really bring the most value to companies? This ‘customer experience’ is everywhere—how can companies better serve their customers...All the different aspects related to customer experience in the corporation are collected into this start-up, allowing a fast way of trying, failing, and succeeding...We are fostering openness and experimentation. We are able to work jointly and combine resource allocations in different areas. I have been asked many times how some other units could copy the way we work. (Marketing manager C)

Entrepreneurship culture was almost nonexistent before we had the start-up...They have brought that cultural change in the corporation to support collaboration and improve the way of working. (Marketing manager A)

The start-up may also greatly contribute to the renewal of Tieto, such as how we work internally, what type of culture we want to create. (Top executive)

The above evidence indicates two environmental factors serve as the antecedents of bricolage; namely external environmental uncertainty, and the internal entrepreneurship culture of the MNC. The results suggest that when the case company faces enhanced environmental uncertainty and adopts a stronger entrepreneurship culture than previously, marketing managers are more likely to use existing resources, and to recombine them to deliver opportunities for growth. Hence the proposition below:

**Proposition 1.** Greater external environmental uncertainty and a stronger internal entrepreneurship culture positively influence MNC marketing managers’ decisions to employ bricolage.

#### 4.2. Bricolage

Marketing managers in Tieto utilize their existing knowledge of business targets, competitor information, digital channels, market research, and analytics. Some managers have considerable and varied experience in industry (marketing managers B and C), some have considerable experience working in marketing and communications, consultancy, or a digital advertising agency (marketing managers D, E, and F), and some benefit from a strong business school education and professional training (marketing manager A). Tieto’s marketing managers also leveraged contacts from the firm’s customer and supplier networks. These existing resources were used to establish routines to pursue opportunities for market growth in the rapidly changing and data-driven world (Tieto, 2016a). Managers explained the bricolage approach as follows:

Our own resources in Tieto will play a bigger role going forward. (Top executive)

Especially given the shift to digital and online marketing, using our own resources makes more sense with new use value. (Marketing manager F)

It is important for us to utilize our knowledge and experience to scan and interpret the new growth opportunities in the market and develop them with partners in our networks. (Marketing manager D)

##### 4.2.1. Parallel bricolage

The results suggest that the marketing managers of the start-up and the marketing manager for strategic and large deals always enact

bricolage by using existing resources, recombining them, and engaging with opportunities. They have used bricolage in parallel in all the five domains: combining and utilizing existing resources in creating new use value (i.e., the material domain), involving internal and external partners to acquire free work (i.e., the labor domain), leveraging self-taught skills (i.e., the skills domain), providing unique and customized offerings (i.e., the customer/market domain), and stretching organizational boundaries for the purposes of resource combination (i.e., the regulatory/institutional domain). Table 3 presents an illustrative quotation from each interviewee.

The marketing manager of CEM combined the means available to her to organize an experience hub and hackathons. The experience hub brings customers together to nurture design talent and create new business concepts (Tieto, 2016b). Hackathons unite start-ups, technology experts, and the design community to find new digital solutions; for example, Fazer’s food service feedback solution was developed in just 48 h at a joint hackathon (Tieto, 2016c). Improvisation is a tactic used to initiate activities such as workshops and hackathons, and responds to potential opportunities by combining resources from stakeholders. Manager C gave the following example of parallel bricolage:

We try to stretch our activities and utilize resources from the industry groups and their customers. We particularly make them think of the value of the end-customer experience...When a team member brings some ideas to me, we immediately think ‘can we try this’ instead of ‘now we will plan and after two weeks we will see if we can do it.’...We are also teaching this approach to our customers because they have a quite traditional way of working to a definite plan. During the experience hub workshop, we had five start-ups with us through which we spread our messages because they are very active and creative on Twitter. The focus was on boosting our customer’s image as an innovative company...that can offer more unique and customized services to its end-customers by using our digital tools. (Marketing manager C)

Bricolage across all domains is also evident in key account marketing for strategic and large deals (see Table 3), a context where Tieto has a dedicated team. The team’s marketing manager is responsible for building the relationship and the influence in such deals, and uses all available means to engage with new marketing opportunities. Consequently, the stakeholders of the marketing manager include customer executives and sales staff from all industry groups. The manager actively applies persuasion as a tactic to realize bricolage. The tactic involves persuading stakeholders of the potential usefulness of her marketing approach, and combining resources and commitment from the sales functions of all industry groups. The following explanation of parallel bricolage was offered:

Going beyond constraints and limitations is a new initiative and marketing approach I have been working on for account-based marketing. I am educating people on the potential. For instance, I work with many salespeople who fall back on traditional marketing expectations. When I start working with them, I try to encourage them and get them to do things differently with the current resources we have... I am very interested in music [as a self-taught skill]. It is a very good balance which widens your view on everything. My motto is *just keep changing all the time*—it helps me to be creative in marketing with every strategic and large deal. (Marketing manager E)

##### 4.2.2. Selective bricolage

The other marketing managers, as well as the top executive, have utilized bricolage in one or a few selective domains (see Table 3). When bricolage is not used, managers have to acquire new resources at a cost, instead of utilizing the available means. Bricolage enables marketing managers to integrate their knowledge and experiences, to incorporate network contacts, and mobilize resources to resist organizational constraints such as silo-based thinking. Nevertheless, the use of bricolage varies among MNC marketing managers. Marketing managers in some

of Tieto's business units use a more limited form of bricolage. For instance, one marketing manager explained:

There has been some collaboration in the matrix to some extent, but that was also limited due to having different goals. For example, the cooperation between different industry groups is very silo-based. (Marketing manager D)

#### 4.3. International entrepreneurial marketing strategies

##### 4.3.1. Co-innovation

Co-innovation refers to co-innovating with customers and partners by accessing open talent networks and continuously developing skills and capabilities (Tieto, 2016d). By deploying parallel bricolage, the start-up CEM hosted co-creation workshops to mobilize resources from different stakeholders, including the relevant industry group at Tieto, its customers, and the external design community. The aim was to proactively create an innovative digital platform to improve the end-customer experience. Moreover, account-based marketing at Tieto also emphasizes offering innovative and unique services to customers in a proactive manner. Thus, co-innovation reflects three dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing: proactiveness, innovativeness, and value co-creation. The managers described it as follows:

We are very proactive and try new things in CEM. We put customers and start-ups together to create something new and innovative...In order to be innovative, we need to work with different industries and partners to create value together. (Marketing manager C)

Marketing is very proactive, especially in my area. I guide customers to identify their needs, not just wait for their expectations [to be met] ...We co-create new things and are open to offering innovative services to customers rather than a pre-defined package as many IT providers do. (Marketing manager E)

##### 4.3.2. Accelerating customer value

Accelerating customer value refers to building solutions and capabilities to accelerate customers' business performance and renewal (Tieto, 2016d). CEM is very important to Tieto's survival and growth in the challenging business environment. The start-up needs to be proactive and regularly stimulate innovation, and that need dictates that CEM does not follow a standard way of doing things. For instance, CEM has hosted a hackathon called the *Design Jam* and invented a customer experience and feedback system customized for people with special needs and disabilities (Tieto, 2017). However, there are business areas in the MNC that are more traditional and reactive, such as public, health, and welfare. Marketing managers engaged with the opportunities provided by the start-up to invoke changes throughout the organization. Seizing the growth opportunity provided by CEM, the MNC began to emphasize and improve the end-customer experience on digital platforms for its customers. This enabled all the industry groups and service lines to renew their solutions and services to prioritize customer values. Moreover, leveraging resources from CEM has helped conservative industry groups, such as healthcare, to renew their business portfolio to counter global competition. Accordingly, accelerating customer value reflects the customer intensity and resource leveraging dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing. Marketing managers commented:

We utilized the resources brought by CEM and worked together to accelerate our customers' business renewal through digital platforms...We try to leverage resources across the groups, and then people open their eyes and get good ideas from colleagues. (Marketing manager A)

CEM has been a very good social inspiration. We have worked with the start-up in the healthcare industry, which opened lots of new

opportunities...The perspectives are widened, which affects everything such as our messaging and what we offer to our customers... that allows us to build stronger customer relationships and help them perform better. (Marketing manager B)

It is critical for customers to realize the benefits they can achieve through digitization. Those who invest in the customer experience are growing faster. (Marketing manager C)

##### 4.3.3. Regional market leadership-based international expansion

Regional market leadership-based international expansion refers to international expansion based on enhancing the strong market position in the Nordic area (Tieto, 2016d). Based on market research and the development routines established by marketing managers, the MNC is consolidating its strong market position in the Nordic area and expanding industry solutions internationally. Tieto discovered new international markets through client followership, through which the MNC manages the risk of new market entry, and strengthened the relationship with its customers' global operations. Hence, the results suggest that regional market leadership-based international expansion reflects two dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing: market discovery and risk management. The managers explain the situation as follows:

We have global operations, but our core market where we target getting new customers is the Nordic countries...We have global customers who are headquartered in the Nordics. We serve them globally either through our own offices or through partner networks. So, we have Nordic clients, but global operations. (Top executive)

The forestry industry is global. A customer such as Metso works in 26 countries. So, we support the firm around the world. (Marketing manager A)

The results suggest that bricolage enhances the development of international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in MNCs. Marketing managers in the start-up CEM and key account marketing use parallel bricolage to develop co-innovation as a realized strategy, which reflects proactiveness, innovativeness, and value co-creation; whereas selective bricolage by marketing managers in industry groups has contributed to accelerating customer value and utilizing regional market leadership for international expansion, which reflects customer intensity, resource leveraging, market discovery, and risk management. The following proposition derives from the results and the above discussion:

**Proposition 2a.** MNC marketing managers' parallel bricolage positively influences the proactiveness, innovativeness, and value co-creation dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing.

**Proposition 2b.** MNC marketing managers' selective bricolage positively influences the customer intensity, resource leveraging, market discovery, and risk management dimensions of entrepreneurial marketing.

To summarize, Fig. 2 illustrates a model of international entrepreneurial marketing strategy development derived from the findings. Those research findings suggest that enhanced environmental uncertainty and a stronger entrepreneurship culture positively influence the deployment of bricolage by MNC marketing managers, and that marketing managers in Tieto combine and utilize available resources to pursue opportunities. However, the precise way in which bricolage is used varies among marketing managers with regard to the bricolage domains. Marketing managers use bricolage in the material, labor, skill, customer/market, or regulatory/institutional domains to develop and implement international entrepreneurial marketing strategies. However, Tieto's marketing managers in most business units use selective bricolage in limited domains, whereas those involved with start-up and account-based marketing utilize parallel bricolage in all the domains. Parallel bricolage leads to co-innovation, whereas

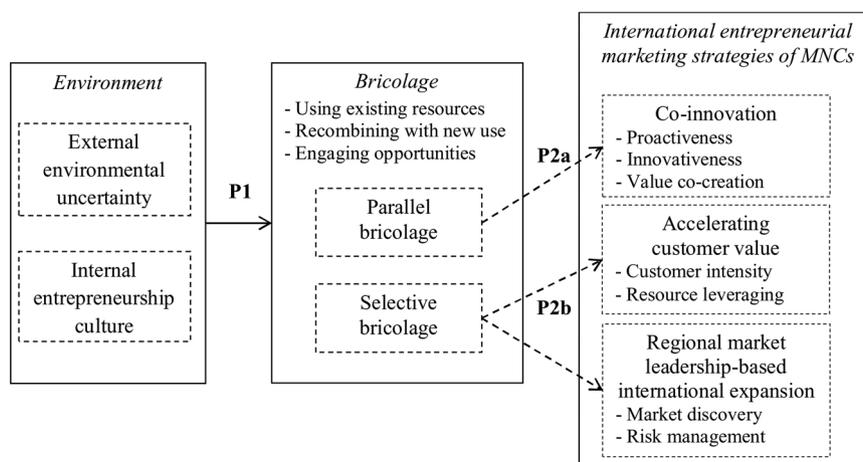


Fig. 2. A model of international entrepreneurial marketing strategy development in MNCs.

selective bricolage can be applied to enhance customer value and foster international expansion based on regional market leadership.

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Contributions to the literature

This research makes theoretical contributions to various research streams (see Table 4). To begin with, the study advances entrepreneurship theory and practice in international marketing. Earlier studies suggest that entrepreneurial marketing can assist firms to identify, evaluate, and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities and to obtain and renew competitive advantage (Morris et al., 2002; Miles & Darroch, 2006). This research has integrated the knowledge available from the entrepreneurial marketing literature and conducted research specific to the MNC context to address whether and how MNCs can be more entrepreneurial in international marketing. This paper offers a contextualized exploration of the international entrepreneurial marketing strategies that MNC marketing managers have developed and implemented in the changing digitized business environment. In doing so, the paper responds to calls to present new marketing concepts and improve the conceptual foundations of international marketing research (Douglas & Craig, 2006; Katsikeas, 2014).

Despite extant IB research providing valuable knowledge on international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in rapidly internationalizing entrepreneurial firms (Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2013; Kocak & Abimbola, 2009; Mort et al., 2012), it may not contribute significantly to developing a good understanding of how international entrepreneurial marketing strategies can be utilized in MNCs. Hence, this study contributes to IB research by exploring the form and content of international marketing strategies in MNCs. The strategies identified in the MNC case include co-innovation, accelerating customer value, and international expansion based on regional market leadership.

Moreover, the research suggests that international entrepreneurial marketing strategies are not identical in MNCs and rapidly internationalizing entrepreneurial firms. Although innovativeness is identified as an entrepreneurial marketing strategy in international new ventures (Hallbäck & Gabrielsson, 2013), it is applied in the form of value innovation, marketing co-creation, and low-cost marketing. In comparison, both MNCs and international new ventures emphasize innovation and co-creation; however, low-cost marketing plays a less important role in an MNC, presumably because MNCs possess more resources than smaller and younger entrepreneurial firms. Moreover, while market creation is more evident in international new ventures (Yang & Gabrielsson, 2017), this study reveals that entrepreneurial marketing in the case MNC focuses strongly on market discovery. Nevertheless, regardless of size, age, and resource profile, firms can develop and implement international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in different forms to achieve stronger market positions.

Furthermore, this research contributes to marketing strategy development literature by providing qualitative insights and focusing on marketing managers as the unit of analysis. It applies the notion of bricolage developed by Baker and Nelson (2005). This research finds that MNC marketing managers use existing resources, recombine them in new uses, and engage with opportunities for growth in international markets. Bricolage enables marketing managers to discover global market growth opportunities based on a strong position in the regional markets; and meanwhile, they can manage the risk of new market entry by serving their customers' global operations. By pursuing growth opportunities through corporate venturing (i.e., Tieto's start-up within the MNC), marketing managers leverage the resources available throughout the organization to accelerate the delivery of customer value in their offerings (i.e., customer experience management) and enhance customer intensity. Moreover, those same managers carry out the transformation in the MNC to boost proactive, innovative, and co-creative marketing practices. Hence, the contribution of the paper lies in its

Table 4 Contributions of the study to different research streams.

Research stream	Main contribution
International marketing	- Advancing the entrepreneurship theory and practice in international marketing
International business	- Exploring the structure of international entrepreneurial marketing strategies in MNCs
Marketing strategy development	- Suggesting differences between MNCs and international new ventures in international entrepreneurial marketing strategies
	- Providing qualitative insights
Entrepreneurship	- Focusing on marketing managers as the unit of analysis
	- Illustrating how bricolage fosters entrepreneurship in MNC marketing functions
	- Suggesting environmental uncertainty and entrepreneurship culture as antecedents of bricolage

illustration of bricolage as practiced by MNC marketing managers in the course of international marketing strategy development (see Fig. 2).

In addition, the study contributes to entrepreneurship literature by illustrating how bricolage fosters entrepreneurship in MNC marketing functions. The research findings suggest that environmental uncertainty caused by a rapidly changing business environment and a strong entrepreneurship culture positively influences bricolage practices. To the current entrepreneurship literature on bricolage undertaken in resource-constrained new firms (e.g., [Desa & Basu, 2013](#); [Senyard et al., 2014](#)), the current article adds information on bricolage practiced by middle-level managers in established firms with more abundant resources. The research findings indicate that bricolage is not only triggered by a resource-constrained environment ([Baker & Nelson, 2005](#); [Fisher, 2012](#)), but is also facilitated by environmental uncertainty, where the magnitude of complexity and ongoing changes make it near impossible to accurately forecast the business environment ([Knight, 1921](#); [Teece, 2016](#)). Moreover, this study has explained the extent to which marketing managers adopt bricolage in its various domains. Marketing managers can adopt parallel bricolage in all domains by utilizing corporate venturing and key account management. However, owing to differences in goal-setting, some can only selectively use one or two bricolage domains while simultaneously acquiring additional resources in business units. The findings suggest that enhancing a culture of entrepreneurship through corporate venturing helps MNC marketing managers to enact bricolage. Start-ups within MNCs can inspire other units of the organization to revitalize their business, which can lead to innovation in key business areas that bring growth.

### 5.2. Managerial implications

The study provides important managerial implications on utilizing entrepreneurial marketing in large international firms. When facing new business challenges, rather than immediately seeking new resources, MNC management could consider using existing resources and recombining them for new use value to engage with new opportunities. The management might also consider promoting a favorable environment for corporate entrepreneurship; doing so would require the provision of managerial support, autonomy, and rewards, and also making time available for entrepreneurial activity, alongside the dismantling of certain organizational boundaries. For business areas with high growth potential, corporate venturing can foster innovation and inspire change management in the rest of the organization. Furthermore, the research suggests that bricolage can be supported by management efforts to facilitate the mobilization of internal and external resources. This could enhance networking, cross-functional collaboration, and cooperation between different business units, as well as partnerships with external stakeholders. Marketing managers are encouraged to mobilize and combine available resources to develop realized international entrepreneurial marketing strategies that fit the internal organizational context and the external environmental conditions of the MNC.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research directions

The single case setting of this study has exploratory and illustrative power, but means the generalizability of the findings is limited to its context ([Piekkari, Welch & Paavilainen, 2009](#)). The model of international entrepreneurial marketing strategy development devised from this research can be pattern-matched to other research contexts ([Welch et al., 2011](#)). However, the purpose of the case study is to encourage future research to further examine entrepreneurial marketing in international marketing research as a promising future research avenue. The case MNC is a business-to-business firm with a global marketing function originating and based in a small and open economy. Future studies could investigate how entrepreneurial marketing is employed in MNCs in other research settings, such as business-to-consumer MNCs, emerging market MNCs, and MNCs with country-specific marketing

functions. It would be interesting to study the interaction between different subsidiaries during the development of the entrepreneurial marketing process. Moreover, future research in the form of longitudinal studies, and also cross-country and cross-cultural studies, is encouraged. Large-scale quantitative studies are needed to develop and validate measurements of entrepreneurial marketing. Furthermore, although this study has shed some light on bricolage as practiced by marketing managers and its domains, future research might advance the conceptualization of bricolage in the context of MNCs. For instance, the relationship between environmental uncertainty, entrepreneurship culture, and bricolage might be examined in other qualitative contexts, or tested in quantitative research.

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