

Entrepreneurial Marketing and Digital Commerce Integration: A Conceptual Perspective from the Chinese Context

Han Keke ^{*a}, Wei Ming ^b

^a City University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1690307406@qq.com

^b City University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia cheewei@city.edu.my

* Han Keke

ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of entrepreneurial marketing (EM), especially in highly digitized economies like China. This conceptual paper explores the integration of EM principles with digital commerce practices within the Chinese context, aiming to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how entrepreneurial firms leverage digital tools to enhance competitiveness and value creation. Drawing upon the Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and established EM constructs, the paper synthesizes relevant literature to propose a conceptual model that connects opportunity-driven marketing strategies with platform-based commerce ecosystems. The study highlights the unique characteristics of China's digital infrastructure and consumer behavior, offering insights into how entrepreneurial agility and digital adaptability intersect. The paper concludes by proposing a research agenda to empirically validate the model and encourages future studies on context-specific digital entrepreneurship strategies.

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial Marketing; Digital Commerce; Conceptual Framework

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China has emerged as a global leader in digital commerce, driven by rapid technological innovation, mobile internet penetration, and the proliferation of platform-based ecosystems. The Chinese digital economy accounted for 41.5% of its GDP in 2022, demonstrating the deep integration of digital commerce into daily economic activities (China Academy of Information and Communications Technology [CAICT], 2023). Platforms like Alibaba, JD.com, Pinduoduo, and Douyin have revolutionized how consumers interact with brands, creating a dynamic marketplace where speed, personalization, and agility are critical success factors.

Simultaneously, entrepreneurial marketing (EM) has gained traction as an adaptive marketing approach suitable for resource-constrained and innovation-driven firms. EM emphasizes opportunity-driven strategies, customer intimacy, risk-taking, and leveraging innovation to create value (Morris et al., 2002; Eggers, 2020). In

the Chinese context, where startups and micro-enterprises must navigate a fast-evolving and highly competitive digital environment, EM provides a strategic advantage.

The intersection of digital commerce and EM is increasingly relevant, particularly in China's ecosystem where entrepreneurial ventures use digital tools like social media marketing, live-stream commerce, influencer collaboration, and data analytics to acquire and retain customers (Zhu & Liu, 2020). This fusion signifies not just a shift in marketing practice but a transformation in how value is co-created between entrepreneurs and digital consumers.

The primary purpose of this study is to conceptually explore the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and digital commerce practices within the rapidly evolving Chinese business environment. Entrepreneurial marketing, which blends traditional marketing principles with the opportunity-seeking and resource-leveraging nature of entrepreneurship, has become increasingly relevant in the digital age (Kraus et al., 2022). Simultaneously, China's digital commerce landscape—characterized by advanced platform ecosystems, social commerce, and widespread mobile integration—offers a unique context to study how digital tools can amplify entrepreneurial marketing strategies (Zhu & Liu, 2020). The integration of these two domains remains theoretically underdeveloped, especially considering the role of digital capabilities in enabling agile, customer-centric, and innovation-driven marketing practices (Kraus et al., 2021).

This study seeks to contribute to the academic discourse by constructing a conceptual framework that synthesizes EM principles with digital commerce mechanisms in China. It aims to answer how entrepreneurs in digitally intensive markets deploy EM practices using tools like live-streaming, AI-driven personalization, and platform-based selling to create competitive advantage. By focusing on the Chinese context, which is often seen as a global leader in digital transformation and entrepreneurial dynamism, the study offers contextual insights that may be transferable to other emerging digital economies. Furthermore, the research addresses recent scholarly calls to investigate how digitalization transforms entrepreneurial behavior and marketing logic (Nambisan et al., 2019; Reuber et al., 2021).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM)

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) has emerged as a vital strategic approach at the intersection of marketing and entrepreneurship. It addresses the limitations of traditional marketing models when applied to dynamic, resource-constrained environments, such as startups and small to medium enterprises (SMEs), especially within the evolving digital economy. This section reviews the development of EM, its core dimensions, and its relevance in emerging markets, with particular emphasis on the Chinese context.

The concept of Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) originated as a response to the inadequacy of conventional marketing frameworks to capture the dynamic and uncertain realities of entrepreneurial ventures. Unlike

traditional marketing, which emphasizes structured planning, segmentation, and long-term strategy, EM is characterized by adaptability, innovation, and a strong opportunity-seeking orientation (Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2002). Hills, Hultman, and Miles (2008) 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.”

Over time, EM has evolved to encompass both behavioral and strategic aspects, making it a multidimensional construct. It is particularly relevant in highly volatile environments, where firms must adapt quickly and innovate continuously to sustain competitive advantage. Kraus, Harms, and Fink (2012) highlight that EM has shifted from being a niche concept applied primarily to small firms to a broader paradigm applicable to entrepreneurial activity across all firm sizes. The rise of digital technologies and online platforms has further expanded the relevance of EM, enabling firms to implement entrepreneurial strategies at a lower cost and on a larger scale (Kraus et al., 2021; Yin & Zhang, 2022).

One of the most widely accepted frameworks for understanding EM is provided by Morris et al. (2002), who identify seven core dimensions: proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking, opportunity focus, resource leveraging, customer intensity, and value creation. These dimensions collectively capture the essence of how entrepreneurial firms interact with the market and create value under conditions of uncertainty.

Proactiveness involves anticipating future customer needs and market trends before competitors, while innovativeness refers to the application of creative marketing strategies and novel product or service offerings. Risk-taking is reflected in a firm’s willingness to make bold decisions with uncertain outcomes, a trait often necessary for entering new markets or adopting disruptive technologies. Opportunity focus highlights the entrepreneurial firm's capacity to identify and exploit emerging market gaps. Resource leveraging emphasizes doing more with less, often through partnerships, digital tools, or creative resource utilization. Customer intensity reflects the firm’s deep engagement with customers to co-create and sustain value. Finally, value creation is the ultimate goal, achieved by offering differentiated and meaningful products or services to the target market.

Recent empirical studies have validated the continued relevance of these dimensions in modern contexts. For example, Eggers et al. (2020) found that EM practices significantly improved SMEs’ responsiveness to the COVID-19 crisis, allowing them to pivot more effectively using digital platforms and customer data analytics. Similarly, Komera, Shah, and Kalwani (2023) demonstrated that the integration of digital marketing capabilities enhances the performance outcomes of EM by improving opportunity recognition and customer engagement.

The utility of EM is particularly pronounced in emerging markets, where institutional voids, resource constraints, and rapid technological change require firms to be highly adaptive. In such settings, EM serves as a flexible and innovative approach that enables firms to navigate uncertainty while leveraging limited resources for market advantage (Hassan et al., 2021).

In the context of China, EM has become increasingly prominent due to the rapid expansion of digital commerce and the growing entrepreneurial ecosystem. Chinese entrepreneurs are leveraging digital platforms

such as WeChat, Douyin (TikTok), and Alibaba to bypass traditional marketing channels and directly engage with consumers. This platform-based entrepreneurship fosters new forms of customer interaction and brand building, allowing firms to implement EM strategies effectively even with minimal capital investment (Zhu & Liu, 2020; Ren & Tang, 2022).

Furthermore, EM in China often incorporates culturally embedded practices such as *guanxi* (personal networks), which act as informal mechanisms for resource mobilization and trust-building (Yang, 2021). These relational dimensions enhance the effectiveness of EM by facilitating market entry and customer loyalty in a culturally congruent manner. As such, EM in China is not merely a replication of Western models but a hybrid strategy adapted to local social, economic, and technological contexts.

The entrepreneurial use of digital tools has also accelerated the impact of EM in China's rural and underserved regions, allowing micro-entrepreneurs and informal businesses to reach new customer segments. These developments underscore the increasing importance of EM as a driver of inclusive economic participation and innovation-led growth in emerging economies.

Entrepreneurial Marketing has evolved into a robust framework that captures the strategic and operational realities of marketing in entrepreneurial settings. Its core dimensions—rooted in innovation, opportunity exploitation, and resourcefulness—are especially relevant in emerging markets like China, where digital transformation, cultural dynamics, and entrepreneurial energy converge. As the digital economy continues to reshape the business landscape, EM offers a valuable conceptual lens through which to understand how firms create and sustain value in uncertain and competitive environments.

B. The Chinese Context: Digital Ecosystem, Platform Economy, and Marketing Influences

China's digital ecosystem presents a unique and dynamic environment that significantly influences the practices of entrepreneurial marketing. The country's rapid digitalization, platform-driven economy, cultural intricacies, and evolving regulatory landscape combine to create a distinctive context, setting it apart from Western digital markets. Understanding these contextual variables is essential for constructing a meaningful conceptual framework that explores the integration of entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce in China.

China's digital economy has grown at an unprecedented scale, accounting for over 40% of global e-commerce transactions as of 2023 (Statista, 2023). Unlike in many Western economies, digital commerce in China evolved within an ecosystem where platforms do not just facilitate transactions but embed social media, payment systems, logistics, and artificial intelligence-based marketing analytics into a seamless digital experience (Zhu & Liu, 2020). The phenomenon of "super-apps"—particularly exemplified by WeChat—allows users to browse, chat, pay, shop, and even schedule medical appointments within a single platform environment (Chen & Qian, 2021). Such integration encourages continuous user engagement and provides entrepreneurial marketers with unprecedented opportunities to engage consumers throughout the entire digital journey.

Moreover, the early growth of China's e-commerce was enabled by an informal regulatory vacuum that allowed private platforms to assume quasi-governmental functions—such as dispute mediation and contract enforcement—before more formalized digital commerce laws were implemented (Huang, 2022). The decentralized structure and early-stage informality provided entrepreneurial businesses with flexibility, albeit within an increasingly platform-dominated environment. The current landscape, however, is transitioning towards a more regulated framework, reshaping how digital entrepreneurship unfolds.

Major Chinese platforms play a pivotal role in enabling and shaping entrepreneurial marketing strategies. Alibaba Group, through platforms like Taobao and Tmall, has developed a robust ecosystem that supports product sourcing, consumer targeting, social commerce via live streaming, and financial integration through Alipay (Liu & Zhang, 2023). JD.com, while slightly less focused on third-party sellers, is renowned for its high-quality logistics infrastructure, which ensures same-day delivery in many urban regions—an advantage that supports trust-building in entrepreneurial ventures (Wang & Li, 2024).

WeChat, developed by Tencent, exemplifies the super-app model, combining messaging, social networking, payments (WeChat Pay), and embedded e-commerce through "Mini Programs." These features provide entrepreneurial firms with tools for community building, product promotion, and seamless transactions within a single app (Sun & Yu, 2022). Meanwhile, Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) and Kuaishou dominate the short-video sector, where influencer-driven, live-stream-based shopping has become a cornerstone of digital commerce. The combination of entertainment and commerce—termed "shoppertainment"—has created new opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs to build brand narratives and drive impulse purchases (Zhou, 2023).

Additionally, platforms like Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) blend e-commerce with user-generated content, offering a community-centered shopping experience where consumers rely heavily on product reviews, lifestyle content, and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to make purchasing decisions (Liao & Chen, 2024). This reliance on peer influence aligns closely with the cultural emphasis on relational trust and communal validation in Chinese society.

China's collectivist culture and social values significantly influence consumer behavior and marketing effectiveness. Concepts such as *guanxi* (personal networks and relationships) are not only relevant in traditional business contexts but also in digital interactions, particularly through influencer-based marketing and social referrals (Yang & Ma, 2022). Consumers often rely on the experiences and endorsements of KOLs or friends, demonstrating a preference for trust-based digital interactions over impersonal advertising.

From a regulatory standpoint, China's digital commerce environment has undergone rapid formalization in recent years. The 2018 E-Commerce Law was a milestone that introduced legal obligations for platform operators, sellers, and service providers concerning consumer rights, data protection, and fair competition (Huang, 2022). More recently, in 2020–2023, further tightening of regulations focused on livestream e-commerce compliance, data privacy, and platform monopolistic behaviors—including antitrust probes against major platforms like

Alibaba and Meituan (Li, 2023). These changes have compelled entrepreneurial marketers to become more compliant, adaptive, and risk-aware in how they deploy digital strategies.

Nonetheless, the Chinese government has recently shown signs of recalibrating regulation to balance oversight with innovation. For instance, regulatory pauses in 2023 on new tech crackdowns reflect a renewed emphasis on restoring business confidence and encouraging digital entrepreneurship, particularly among SMEs (Fang, 2023).

The intersection of digital infrastructure, powerful platform economies, culturally embedded trust systems, and evolving regulatory environments defines the Chinese digital commerce landscape as an ecosystem of high potential and complexity. For entrepreneurial marketers, success hinges on their ability to harness integrated digital tools, navigate dynamic regulatory frameworks, and tailor messaging to culturally resonant narratives.

These unique characteristics call for a contextually grounded conceptual model that reflects not only the technological integration of marketing and commerce but also the cultural and institutional environments that shape entrepreneurial behavior. Such a model must consider how platform dependency, influencer trust, and regulatory compliance mediate or moderate the effectiveness of entrepreneurial marketing strategies in China.

C. Underpinning Theory

To build a rigorous and multi-dimensional conceptual model for understanding the integration of entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce practices in China, this study draws on four interrelated theoretical foundations: Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) Theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) Framework. These theories collectively enable a nuanced examination of how entrepreneurial firms strategically navigate, adapt, and thrive in China's fast-paced digital ecosystem.

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) theory represents a convergence of marketing and entrepreneurship, focusing on how small firms and entrepreneurs engage in innovative, risk-taking, and proactive marketing behaviors under conditions of uncertainty. Originally conceptualized by Morris et al. (2002), EM challenges traditional marketing frameworks by highlighting the unique behaviors of entrepreneurial firms that often lack formalized marketing departments or standardized approaches. Instead, they rely on creativity, customer intimacy, flexibility, and opportunity-driven strategies to create value.

In the context of China's digital economy—where rapid technological advancement, consumer sophistication, and platform-centric business models dominate—entrepreneurs increasingly deploy EM practices that leverage digital tools and content to build competitive advantage. Platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, and Taobao Live have become central to entrepreneurial marketing strategies, allowing businesses to reach large, segmented audiences with minimal cost. Recent studies affirm the continued relevance of EM theory in digital transformation contexts, noting its capacity to explain how entrepreneurial firms generate competitive advantage through innovative digital engagement (Fiore, Silvestri, & Contò, 2022).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a strategic lens to understand how firms achieve sustained competitive advantage by deploying internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Barney, 1991). In entrepreneurial settings, especially within the digital economy, such resources may include proprietary knowledge, digital marketing expertise, technological infrastructure, or data-driven customer insights. RBV is particularly relevant for explaining how entrepreneurial firms differentiate themselves in competitive digital markets through strategic resource deployment.

In China's highly dynamic entrepreneurial landscape, firms that succeed in integrating digital commerce effectively often rely on intangible resources such as platform-specific knowledge, content creation skills, and network-based reputations. These capabilities, once embedded in routines and culture, can become difficult for competitors to replicate. Research by Zhang, Song, and Li (2022) demonstrates how digital innovation and internal capabilities contribute significantly to competitive advantage among Chinese SMEs, reinforcing the utility of RBV in examining entrepreneurial marketing within a digital framework.

While RBV focuses on the possession of resources, Dynamic Capabilities Theory emphasizes a firm's ability to transform, reconfigure, and renew its resource base to respond to rapidly changing environments (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). In the age of digital disruption, entrepreneurial firms must continually adapt their marketing and operational strategies to meet shifting consumer preferences, emerging technologies, and evolving platform algorithms. This is especially relevant in China, where digital commerce platforms frequently introduce new features, monetization models, and compliance requirements.

Dynamic capabilities include the ability to sense market opportunities, seize them through innovative strategies, and transform existing routines to ensure long-term adaptability. These capabilities underpin entrepreneurial marketing activities such as pivoting content strategies, launching influencer-based campaigns, or integrating artificial intelligence into customer relationship management. A recent study by Wang, Wu, and Zhou (2023) illustrates how dynamic capabilities significantly influence digital marketing performance among Chinese SMEs, particularly when firms balance exploration and exploitation of digital tools.

The Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) framework, developed by Tornatzky and Fleischer (1990), offers a comprehensive view of the factors influencing the adoption and integration of technological innovations. It posits that an organization's technological context (e.g., availability and characteristics of digital tools), organizational context (e.g., firm size, resources, leadership orientation), and environmental context (e.g., competition, regulatory climate, consumer behavior) collectively determine the likelihood and success of technology adoption.

In the Chinese context, the TOE framework is especially useful for understanding the broader ecosystem in which entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce integration occur. The technological environment is shaped by the dominance of integrated super-app platforms like WeChat and Alibaba; the organizational environment is defined by the agility and risk orientation of entrepreneurial firms; and the external environment includes stringent data regulations, rapid market changes, and intense platform competition. Li, Yang, and Chen

(2023) confirm the applicability of TOE in analyzing digital transformation within Chinese SMEs, highlighting how contextual factors moderate technological integration outcomes.

The integration of EM theory, RBV, Dynamic Capabilities, and the TOE framework provides a robust theoretical foundation for this conceptual paper. Each theory addresses different facets of the phenomenon under study: Entrepreneurial Marketing Theory explains how entrepreneurial behavior manifests in marketing activities; RBV clarifies what internal resources enable competitive advantage; Dynamic Capabilities Theory elaborates how firms adapt and evolve in response to digital transformation; and TOE contextualizes these internal strategies within the broader technological and institutional environment.

Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive conceptualization of how entrepreneurial firms in China strategically integrate digital commerce practices to enhance market responsiveness, customer engagement, and long-term sustainability. This theoretical synthesis not only aligns with the unique characteristics of China's digital ecosystem but also provides a valuable foundation for future empirical validation and model testing.

III. METHODOLOGY

D. Conceptual Development

This study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and digital commerce capabilities, situated within the dynamic context of China's digital economy. The model is designed to explore how entrepreneurial firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), can effectively leverage marketing innovation through digital platforms. Drawing from extant literature and theoretical perspectives, this essay defines the key constructs and introduces relevant mediating and moderating variables that shape the proposed relationships.

Entrepreneurial marketing (EM) represents the intersection of marketing and entrepreneurship and is particularly applicable to firms operating under uncertainty and resource constraints. EM emphasizes innovativeness, calculated risk-taking, and a strong customer orientation, often in environments that lack traditional strategic planning. Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge (2002) define EM as a proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging, and value creation. In emerging economies such as China, EM practices are especially vital for startups and digital entrepreneurs navigating rapid technological change. The core dimensions of EM commonly include proactiveness, innovativeness, risk-taking, opportunity focus, customer intensity, and resource leveraging. These dimensions provide a strategic framework for understanding how firms act entrepreneurially in deploying their marketing strategies within digital commerce ecosystems (Eggers, Kraus, & Vallaster, 2021; Hills et al., 2020).

Digital commerce capabilities refer to a firm's ability to effectively utilize digital tools and platforms to conduct business transactions, engage customers, and manage operations in online environments. These

capabilities are not only technological but also strategic, reflecting a firm's agility in responding to digital trends and consumer behaviors. Bharadwaj et al. (2013) describe digital capability as a firm's competence in mobilizing and deploying digital resources to achieve competitive advantage. In China, digital commerce includes the use of e-commerce platforms such as Alibaba and JD.com, social commerce apps like Douyin and WeChat, and supporting technologies including big data analytics, cloud infrastructure, and artificial intelligence. Digital commerce capabilities can be categorized into several functional areas: platform integration, mobile commerce, customer data analytics, digital payment infrastructure, and omnichannel coordination. These capabilities enable firms to personalize marketing efforts, enhance customer experience, and scale operations with flexibility and speed. The synergy between EM and digital commerce capabilities is particularly crucial in the Chinese context, where firms operate in one of the world's most sophisticated and fast-evolving digital marketplaces (Wamba, Queiroz, & Trinchera, 2021).

To enrich the conceptual framework and reflect the complexity of the digital entrepreneurial landscape, this study incorporates several mediating and moderating variables that influence the relationship between entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce outcomes. These include innovation orientation, customer engagement, and regulatory agility, which are theoretically grounded and contextually relevant to the Chinese business ecosystem.

Innovation orientation refers to a firm's predisposition toward creativity, experimentation, and continuous improvement in product, process, and business model innovation. Firms with high innovation orientation are more likely to translate EM strategies into impactful digital practices. Ngo and O'Cass (2013) argue that innovation orientation enhances customer value creation and strengthens the strategic alignment between entrepreneurial intent and operational execution, thereby mediating the relationship between EM and digital commerce performance. In China, where speed-to-market and technological advancement are critical, innovation-oriented firms gain competitive advantage by aligning their entrepreneurial marketing efforts with continuous digital innovation.

Customer engagement in digital platforms reflects the degree of active participation, emotional connection, and co-creation experienced by consumers during their interaction with a firm's online presence. In the context of EM, customer engagement acts as both a mediator and moderator by strengthening the feedback loop between entrepreneurial initiatives and consumer responses. Hollebeek, Srivastava, and Chen (2019) emphasize that digitally engaged customers not only amplify brand reach but also provide real-time data and insights that guide strategic decision-making. In the Chinese digital marketplace, where consumers actively co-create value through livestreaming, online reviews, and interactive shopping experiences, customer engagement becomes a critical mechanism for achieving performance outcomes through entrepreneurial marketing.

Regulatory agility denotes a firm's ability to anticipate, interpret, and adapt to changes in the legal and institutional environment, especially in highly regulated and technologically dynamic markets like China. Given the state-led oversight of China's digital sector—evidenced by increasing scrutiny over data privacy, platform

governance, and online transactions—regulatory agility is a crucial moderating variable. It affects how effectively EM strategies can be translated into compliant and sustainable digital commerce activities. Tsai, Yu, and Zeng (2021) highlight that firms with adaptive regulatory practices can mitigate institutional risk while maintaining innovation momentum. In the context of entrepreneurial marketing, regulatory agility moderates the effectiveness of digital commerce initiatives by determining how quickly and responsibly firms can respond to regulatory shocks or policy shifts.

Together, the constructs of entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce capabilities form the foundation of this study's conceptual model. The inclusion of innovation orientation, customer engagement, and regulatory agility further contextualizes the framework, ensuring its applicability to China's rapidly evolving digital business landscape. This conceptualization not only advances theoretical understanding but also offers practical insights for entrepreneurs and digital strategists seeking competitive advantage through integrated marketing and commerce strategies.

E. Entrepreneurial Marketing and Digital Commerce Integration

Entrepreneurial marketing, characterized by innovation, risk-taking, proactiveness, and resource leveraging, is increasingly recognized as a critical driver for digital transformation, especially in emerging markets. EM enables firms to respond rapidly to technological opportunities and customer trends through non-traditional, opportunity-driven strategies (Morris et al., 2002). In the Chinese context, where digital commerce has evolved rapidly due to infrastructure and mobile penetration, firms exhibiting higher levels of EM are more likely to adopt and integrate digital commerce practices effectively.

This relationship suggests that EM positively influences the extent and sophistication of digital commerce integration within firms. Entrepreneurial firms are more inclined to experiment with technologies such as social media commerce, AI-driven marketing, and e-payment systems. These capabilities allow them to reconfigure their operations and marketing to align with digital consumer behaviors. Hossain and Islam (2022) emphasize that entrepreneurial orientation significantly correlates with the adoption of digital platforms in emerging economies. This notion is further supported by Ndubisi and Nwankwo (2020), who found that EM facilitates the adoption of e-commerce models in resource-constrained environments, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

1) Entrepreneurial Marketing × Digital Tools and Customer Value Creation

While entrepreneurial marketing is essential, its effectiveness in creating customer value is significantly amplified when aligned with digital tools. The interaction between EM and technologies such as big data analytics, live-streaming platforms, and social customer relationship management (CRM) tools can lead to superior customer experiences. Entrepreneurial firms that leverage digital tools creatively are able to co-create personalized and dynamic value propositions, thereby gaining a competitive edge.

This study proposes that the synergy between EM and digital tools leads to enhanced customer value creation. Kraus et al. (2022) argue that digital entrepreneurship requires not just technological adoption but the

entrepreneurial application of such tools to foster customer-centric innovation. Similarly, Ng and Kee (2022) demonstrate that digital innovation enables firms to align product offerings with consumer needs, especially when driven by entrepreneurial intent. Therefore, entrepreneurial behavior acts as a strategic enabler that transforms digital capabilities into tangible customer outcomes.

2) Contextual Moderators: Firm Size, Sector, and Platform Dependency

The proposed relationships are unlikely to be homogeneous across all firms. Contextual factors such as firm size, industry sector, and dependency on digital platforms are expected to moderate the strength and direction of these relationships.

Firm size can influence the EM–digital integration link. Smaller firms, which are typically more agile and willing to take risks, may embrace digital transformation more rapidly. However, limited resources may constrain the depth of integration. In contrast, larger firms may possess greater capabilities to implement comprehensive digital strategies but may lack the entrepreneurial agility of smaller enterprises (Sheng et al., 2022).

Industry sector also plays a moderating role, as digital commerce strategies may be more applicable and effective in consumer-facing sectors such as fashion, retail, or food and beverage, compared to capital-intensive industries. This sectoral variance shapes how EM and digital tools interact to deliver customer value.

Finally, platform dependency is a unique moderator in the Chinese digital economy. Firms operating within ecosystems such as Taobao, WeChat, and Douyin are subject to platform-specific constraints and affordances. While such platforms provide access to broad markets, they may also limit entrepreneurial autonomy (Wang et al., 2021). Platform dependency can therefore either facilitate or hinder the creative application of EM in digital commerce.

The conceptual framework posits that entrepreneurial marketing has a direct positive impact on digital commerce integration and, in synergy with digital tools, enhances customer value creation. These relationships are conditioned by contextual moderators that vary across firm characteristics and operational environments.

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

F. Theoretical Implications

Entrepreneurial Marketing (EM) theory, traditionally situated at the intersection of entrepreneurship and marketing disciplines, emphasizes innovation, opportunity-driven strategies, resource leveraging, and risk-taking behavior (Morris, Schindehutte, & LaForge, 2002). Historically, EM frameworks have been developed in contexts dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises operating under resource constraints and facing turbulent environments. However, with the rapid digitalization of global commerce, especially in technologically dynamic economies like China, traditional EM constructs require re-examination and theoretical extension.

This study contributes to the theoretical advancement of EM by situating it within the evolving digital commerce ecosystem. Digital tools such as algorithm-driven consumer targeting, live commerce, influencer

engagement, and integrated social-media selling have redefined the boundaries and mechanisms through which entrepreneurial firms reach, engage, and convert customers. EM is no longer confined to guerrilla or informal marketing tactics; instead, it increasingly involves strategic usage of data analytics, customer experience design, and real-time platform-based interactions (Miles, Gilmore, Harrigan, & Sethna, 2015). These developments necessitate a more digitally responsive EM theory that incorporates technological affordances and online consumer behaviors as core variables. By doing so, the study aligns with recent scholarship that calls for EM to be recontextualized for the digital age (Kraus et al., 2022).

Moreover, this paper offers a novel conceptual integration of EM with digital commerce by introducing constructs such as digital platform agility, online consumer engagement, and mobile-first strategy as mediating mechanisms. These additions reflect a dynamic capability view, where entrepreneurial marketing is not merely a set of static traits but a continuously evolving set of practices shaped by digital interactivity and ecosystem participation.

A significant theoretical enrichment also arises from the paper's contextual grounding in China. The Chinese entrepreneurial environment is unique due to its reliance on integrated digital ecosystems—such as Alibaba, Tencent, and JD.com—that blend e-commerce, payments, logistics, and social networking in one platform. Chinese entrepreneurs operate in a hyper-digitized environment where rapid iteration, influencer-led marketing, and mobile commerce are the norm. Thus, EM practices in China are shaped not only by resourcefulness and market uncertainty but also by platform dependency and regulatory nuances. This context enables the development of an indigenous form of “digitally-native entrepreneurial marketing,” characterized by high-speed experimentation, livestream selling, and algorithmic customer profiling (Li, Su, & Liu, 2021).

Furthermore, this conceptual work adds to the theoretical literature by advocating for the de-westernization of EM theory. Most existing EM models are derived from Western market logics and consumer dynamics. By highlighting the Chinese context—where digital infrastructure, government intervention, and consumer behaviors differ significantly—the study emphasizes the need for a more inclusive, globally sensitive EM theory. The emergence of unique digital strategies in China, such as WeChat mini-program commerce or Douyin-based customer acquisition, illustrates practices that are largely absent from traditional EM literature but are critical in emerging economies (Chen, Tsai, & Lee, 2023).

This study contributes to the theoretical development of entrepreneurial marketing in two ways. First, it extends EM theory to incorporate the capabilities, strategies, and challenges of the digital commerce environment. Second, it provides a contextually grounded enrichment of EM by reflecting on how Chinese entrepreneurial ecosystems shape and redefine marketing behaviors. These insights provide a foundation for future empirical exploration and offer a more holistic view of entrepreneurial marketing in the digital era.

G. Practical Implications

The integration of entrepreneurial marketing with digital commerce in China presents several practical implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and digital platform designers. As digital technologies increasingly reshape the landscape of commerce and consumer engagement, it is imperative for entrepreneurs to develop dynamic capabilities that allow them to strategically leverage digital tools for marketing purposes. Concurrently, regulatory institutions and platform providers play a crucial role in enabling and regulating this integration.

For entrepreneurs, particularly those in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the use of digital tools such as social media, mobile commerce, live-streaming platforms, and AI-driven analytics must be aligned with entrepreneurial marketing orientations such as innovativeness, proactiveness, and customer intensity (Miles et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs are encouraged to adopt a customer-centric approach through personalized digital engagement and agile marketing strategies that allow real-time interactions with target markets. For instance, live-streaming commerce on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou enables SMEs to present products interactively and directly respond to consumer queries, thereby increasing trust and purchase intentions (Chen et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the entrepreneurial use of digital analytics can support better market opportunity recognition, segmentation, and campaign performance tracking. In the Chinese context, where mobile payments and social media ecosystems are highly advanced, digital integration offers opportunities for low-cost, high-impact marketing (Zhou et al., 2022). However, entrepreneurs must also address challenges related to digital literacy, data privacy compliance, and platform dependency, which can inhibit long-term competitiveness. Strategic partnerships with influencers, integration of omnichannel experiences, and constant innovation in content delivery are essential practices to sustain entrepreneurial competitiveness in the digital realm.

From a policy perspective, the Chinese government's support for digital entrepreneurship, especially under frameworks such as the "Digital China" initiative and rural e-commerce development programs, provides fertile ground for the growth of entrepreneurial marketing practices (Wang et al., 2023). However, there is a need for further policy refinement to ensure equitable access to digital infrastructure for rural and underserved entrepreneurs. Training programs, tax incentives, and digital innovation grants can empower SMEs to adopt digital marketing tools effectively.

For digital platform designers, there is an increasing responsibility to provide inclusive, transparent, and user-friendly interfaces that support entrepreneurial innovation. For example, platforms can enhance back-end analytics dashboards, offer integrated marketing automation tools, and facilitate compliance with evolving data protection laws. Moreover, algorithm transparency and fair visibility rules are essential to avoid the monopolization of attention by large firms, thereby maintaining a level playing field for micro and small entrepreneurs (Liu & Zhang, 2023).

The integration of entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce demands coordinated efforts. Entrepreneurs must cultivate strategic digital capabilities, while policymakers and platform providers must co-create enabling environments that support innovation, inclusiveness, and ethical marketing practices.

H. Suggestions for Empirical Testing and Future Research Directions

The integration of entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and digital commerce presents a compelling domain for empirical research, especially within the dynamically evolving Chinese economic context. While this paper offers a conceptual model to understand the relationship between EM practices and digital commerce capabilities, further empirical testing is essential to validate the framework, assess the proposed constructs, and uncover context-specific dynamics. This section outlines methodological recommendations and potential research contexts that future scholars should consider to advance this line of inquiry.

To empirically assess the conceptual propositions outlined in this paper, researchers should develop robust instruments to measure key constructs such as innovativeness, proactiveness, value creation, and digital integration capabilities. Measurement scales can be adapted from established entrepreneurial marketing literature (Morris et al., 2002; Eggers et al., 2020) and tailored to account for the unique characteristics of digital commerce in China. Quantitative survey designs employing both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis will be valuable to ensure validity and reliability of the constructs.

Moreover, longitudinal research designs are recommended to capture the dynamic and iterative nature of entrepreneurial marketing practices in a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem. Such designs would provide insights into how EM strategies evolve in response to platform innovations, regulatory changes, and shifts in consumer behavior. For instance, tracing entrepreneurial firms over multiple quarters or platform upgrades can reveal critical insights into strategic adaptation and sustained value creation (Al-Omouh et al., 2022).

Several methodological approaches can be employed to empirically test the proposed conceptual model. First, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)—particularly Partial Least Squares SEM (PLS-SEM)—is a suitable technique due to its ability to test complex relationships between latent variables and its tolerance for non-normal data and smaller sample sizes (Hair et al., 2021). PLS-SEM is especially appropriate in emerging fields where theoretical grounding is still evolving, as is the case with entrepreneurial marketing in digital commerce.

Second, case study methodology offers a qualitative alternative to understand firm-specific contexts and strategic choices. A multiple-case design (Yin, 2018) focusing on different digital platforms such as Alibaba, JD.com, and WeChat could provide valuable comparative insights into how EM practices are shaped by platform features and user demographics.

Third, multi-level modeling (MLM) provides an advanced quantitative approach to analyze nested data structures, such as firm-level EM practices within regional digital environments. MLM is particularly relevant in the Chinese context where regional policies, infrastructure, and consumer sophistication vary significantly across provinces (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This methodology allows researchers to account for how higher-level contextual factors (e.g., platform governance, regional innovation ecosystems) influence firm-level marketing behavior.

Finally, mixed methods research is strongly encouraged. A sequential exploratory design that begins with qualitative interviews to identify context-specific EM practices, followed by a large-scale survey to test generalizability, would be well-suited for studying entrepreneurial behavior in China's diverse and complex digital landscape (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Future research should consider the heterogeneity of sectors and regions in China to better understand how the integration of EM and digital commerce manifests across different entrepreneurial ecosystems. In terms of sectors, retail and consumer goods present an immediate area of interest due to the widespread use of social commerce, influencer marketing, and livestream shopping. These practices represent a convergence of digital tools and entrepreneurial creativity that is emblematic of modern EM. Technology startups and SMEs are also ideal research targets, as these firms often rely heavily on digital innovation and agile marketing to compete in saturated markets.

The rural e-commerce sector, particularly in the so-called "Taobao villages," provides a valuable opportunity to study digital entrepreneurial marketing in less developed settings. Here, entrepreneurs leverage platforms to reach urban consumers despite infrastructural and logistical challenges, showcasing localized adaptations of EM principles.

Regionally, researchers should differentiate between advanced coastal regions—such as Shanghai, Zhejiang, and Guangdong, which are characterized by high digital adoption and mature entrepreneurial ecosystems—and interior provinces such as Sichuan, Hunan, and Shaanxi, where digital commerce is still emerging. Furthermore, cross-border innovation hubs like Shenzhen-Hong Kong represent a unique intersection of global and local entrepreneurial practices and can enrich our understanding of EM in transnational digital spaces.

The conceptual framework presented in this paper offers a solid foundation for future empirical research. By employing diverse methodologies and focusing on context-specific phenomena across sectors and regions, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial marketing and digital commerce are integrated in practice. Such research not only extends theoretical boundaries but also offers actionable insights for entrepreneurs, digital platform designers, and policymakers in China and beyond.

V. CONCLUSION

This conceptual paper has sought to explore the intersection between entrepreneurial marketing (EM) and integrated digital commerce practices within the unique context of China. Drawing from established theoretical perspectives—including the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities Theory, and the Entrepreneurial Marketing construct—this study provides a synthesized understanding of how entrepreneurial firms in China can strategically leverage digital technologies to drive market responsiveness, customer engagement, and sustained competitive advantage.

The review underscored the relevance of EM dimensions such as innovativeness, opportunity focus, customer intensity, and risk management (Morris et al., 2002) in navigating the complexities of the digital marketplace.

Simultaneously, the paper highlighted the rapid evolution of China's digital commerce infrastructure, notably characterized by platform-centric ecosystems (e.g., Alibaba, JD.com, Douyin) and data-driven consumer engagement models (Li et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2022). These platforms not only provide unprecedented opportunities for entrepreneurial firms to scale but also demand an agile, experimental, and customer-focused marketing orientation consistent with EM principles.

The importance of conceptually integrating EM with digital commerce is twofold. First, it addresses a critical gap in literature by proposing a theoretical alignment between entrepreneurial behaviors and the operational realities of digitally transformed marketplaces (Reuber & Fischer, 2011). Second, it offers a framework for understanding how entrepreneurial firms in China can convert digital affordances into strategic advantages, especially within highly dynamic, consumer-driven environments. By conceptualizing this integration, the paper enables scholars to formulate empirically testable propositions while offering practitioners actionable insights into digital marketing practices rooted in entrepreneurial logic.

Finally, reflecting on the broader implications, the fusion of EM and digital transformation represents not just a convergence of strategy and technology but also a redefinition of value creation in modern entrepreneurship. In China, where technological adoption often outpaces regulatory frameworks and global counterparts, entrepreneurial marketing becomes both an adaptive mechanism and a catalyst for innovation. Future research should empirically validate the conceptual propositions proposed here, explore sectoral nuances, and examine how institutional factors shape the interplay between EM and digital commerce.

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