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Exploring customer orientation as a marketing strategy of Mexican-American entrepreneurs☆

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ABSTRACT

Customer orientation is a major tenet of the entrepreneurial marketing concept, especially as the concept applies to small- and medium-sized minority businesses. The present exploratory research focuses on the customer orientation of Mexican-American entrepreneurs in the context of enclave theory, firm performance, and immigrant generation. A discernible percentage of the firms of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed followed a co-ethnic enclave customer orientation marketing strategy. However, the most common entrepreneurial marketing strategy observed was oriented toward a mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers. First generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs differed from second-and later-generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs in terms of the extent to which they employed co-ethnic customer and employee strategies as well as their self-assessed business skills. Even so, perceived business performance did not differ across customer orientation strategies and was relatively similar across immigrant generation and other personal and firm characteristics.

1. Introduction

Together, entrepreneurship and marketing offer ways of pursuing and responding to marketplace opportunities (Kraus, Filser, Eggers, Hills, & Hultman, 2012). As such, according to Morris, Schindehutte, and LaForge (2002, p. 5), entrepreneurial marketing is "the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation." They proposed that entrepreneurial marketing is more than "marketing in entrepreneurship" or "entrepreneurship in marketing". Rather, they considered entrepreneurial marketing to be a comprehensive concept that integrates the disciplines of entrepreneurship and marketing.

As such, entrepreneurial marketing differs from conventional, traditional, or administrative marketing in that it consists of a distinctive style characterized by informality, simplicity, and a haphazard approach (e.g., Carson, Cromie, McGowan, & Hill, 1995). Even so, the need for fundamental business skills and the importance of performance assessment are indisputable for successful entrepreneurial marketing (Murphy & Callaway, 2004). There is acknowledgement that characteristics of small firms influence marketing practice and that entrepreneurial marketing is particularly relevant in the context of small- and medium-sized firms (e.g., Coviello, Brodie, & Munro, 2000; Jones & Rowley, 2011).

Research on the entrepreneurial marketing concept has taken several forms. (See Hills, Hultman, and Miles (2008) for an historical perspective on the foundation and evolution of entrepreneurial marketing.) For example, research on entrepreneurial marketing has focused on issues such as (1) lack of economies of scale, (2) resource constraints, (3) limited geographic presence, (4) limited market image, (5) little brand loyalty or market share, (6) little specialized management expertise, (7) decision-making under imperfect information conditions, (8) scarcity of time, (9) scarcity of professional management expertise, and (10) mixture of business and personal goals (e.g., Coviello et al., 2000; Hills et al., 2008; Iyer & Shapiro, 1999; Smart & Conant, 1994). Jones and Rowley (2011) proffered a conceptual model of entrepreneurial marketing that consisted of four interrelated orientations—innovation orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation, and customer orientation.

This article addresses the fourth component of the Jones and Rowley (2011) model, customer orientation, in the context of one ethnic minority, Mexican-American entrepreneurs. With respect to

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customer orientation, ethnic minority entrepreneurs face a relatively unique product/market strategic choice. Ethnic minority entrepreneurs can focus initially or solely on an ethnic niche, i.e., they can follow an "ethnic enclave" marketing strategy (Ndofor & Priem, 2011). Or, they can focus on a mainstream or dominant market, i.e., they can follow a "break out" and/or a "breakthrough" marketing strategy (Basu, 2011; Ndofor & Priem, 2011). Regardless of the chosen strategy, factors inherent in entrepreneurial marketing drive the decision as to which approach to follow (e.g., Morris et al., 2002).

Two decades ago, Shim and Eastlick (1998) noted the paucity of scholarly research on Hispanic entrepreneurs. While researchers have included Hispanic entrepreneurs within larger studies of minority entrepreneurs (e.g., Dadzie & Cho, 1989; Feldman, Koberg, & Dean, 1991), few studies have focused specifically on Hispanic entrepreneurs, and fewer yet on Mexican-American entrepreneurs. Researchers such as Mendoza (2008), Sullivan (2010), Kidwell, Hoy, and Ibarreche (2012), and Canedo, Stone, Black, and Lukaszewski (2014) have expressed concerns over the limited knowledge that exists about Hispanic entrepreneurs in the United States. To address some of these concerns, the present research was carried out as an exploratory study of a large sample of Mexican-American entrepreneurs to respectively discern relationships between customer orientation and employee ethnicity, perceived business performance, and firm and entrepreneur characteristics in the context of immigrant generation.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, an overview of Hispanic entrepreneurs is presented that includes brief discussions of research addressing Hispanic entrepreneurship and immigrant generation, and ethnic enclave versus mainstream marketing strategies. This is followed by three research questions and the research methodology. Research results and conclusions are then presented and discussed.

2. Hispanic entrepreneurs

Hispanics constitute the largest ethnic minority in the United States (Suárez, 2016). Moreover, according to recent reports (e.g., Arora, 2016; Geoscape, 2015; Morris, 2015), businesses founded by Hispanic entrepreneurs are the fastest-growing businesses in the United States. Currently there are more than three million Hispanic-owned firms in the United States and, with a growth rate of 40% over the last decade, the number of Hispanic-owned firms has reportedly increased 15 times greater than that of other firms in the United States (Arora, 2016).

Although Hispanics are the largest and fastest-growing ethnic minority in the United States (Bishop & Surfield, 2013), they do not constitute a single homogenous group. The diversity of Hispanics is illustrated by people and cultures emigrating from countries in the Western Hemisphere that were originally controlled by Spain (Kidwell et al., 2012). This Spanish heritage is reflected in immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and many other Central and South American countries. Researchers such as Aguilera (2009) have empirically demonstrated differences between Cuban-Hispanics and Mexican-Hispanics. As a consequence, Alvarez, Dickson, and Hunter (2014) and Bishop and Surfield (2013), among others, have suggested that greater attention be paid to the cultural, social, political, and economic heterogeneity of Hispanics.

Huggins, Holloway, and White (2013) discovered differences among Hispanics and suggested segmenting Hispanics by country of origin. Previously, Bates, Jackson, and Johnson (2007) had argued that aggregating Hispanics inappropriately masked intra-group differences in Latino/Hispanic small business startups. Robles and Cordero-Guzman (2007) stated that researchers could not simply extrapolate and predict similar entrepreneurial patterns across Hispanics without taking into account country of origin, transnational ties to the home country, and the location of the firm.

2.1. Immigrant business owners and entrepreneurs

Much of the research on Hispanic business owners or entrepreneurs has attempted to assess internal organizational aspects of small Hispanic businesses. For example, Vincent (1996) and Shinnar and Young (2008) found that Mexican-American entrepreneurs were less likely than Anglo-American entrepreneurs to engage in strategic planning processes (e.g., they were not as likely to have a business plan, consistent with certain tenets of entrepreneurial marketing). Athanassiou, Crittenden, Kelly, and Marquez (2002) examined the founder's influence on key strategic behaviors in Mexican family businesses. They found that financial, social, and family goal performance was influenced directly by the founder's role in the communication and decision-making processes of the firm's management group.

Fairlie and Woodruff (2007, 2008) examined rates of self-employment among Mexican immigrants and found that low levels of education, limited English language ability, legal status, and financial capital deficiencies explained the success gap between Mexican immigrants and non-Latino whites in the United States. These findings were consistent with findings from a review of 25 years of interdisciplinary research on Latino entrepreneurship conducted by Robles and Cordero-Guzman (2007) in which low education led to more entrepreneurial endeavors than high education, and a lack of financial resources hindered growth of the business. This review also found that Latino entrepreneurship tended to concentrate in the service sector, which was corroborated by research reported by Lofstrom and Wang (2006, 2007) that found Mexican-Americans were more likely to start a business in a low-barrier industry than in a high-barrier one. More recent research by Bishop and Surfield (2013), Canedo et al. (2014), Rivers and Porras (2015), and Suárez (2016) suggested that Hispanic entrepreneurs continued to face the same education, financial, and barrier issues identified nearly a decade earlier.

2.2. Entrepreneurial marketing and immigrant generation

There are intergenerational differences in entrepreneurial spirit and culture with regard to immigrants' entrepreneurial marketing concerns and activities. Chaudhry and Crick (2004) suggested a generational shift whereby second and subsequent immigrant generations become integrated closely with the indigenous population of a region, thus resulting in an erosion of ethnic-specific behavior. McPherson (2007) highlighted similarities and differences between first and second generation ethnic minority entrepreneurs in terms of entrepreneurial marketing activities that led to growth, and Arcand (2012) suggested that second generation immigrants should focus on new products, new opportunities, and new markets rather than perpetuating the traditional niche markets of first generation immigrant entrepreneurs.

Assimilation into a local culture has long been a topic of research as sociologists and economists have explored Hispanic immigration in the United States, and there is historical evidence that immigrants in the United States traditionally assimilate within one or two generations (e.g., Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009). Alonso-Villar, Gradin, and del Rio (2012) suggested that differences in education and English language fluency among Hispanics depend on the number of years of residence in the United States but that, initially, spatial disparities could be the result of such differences. Kaplan (1998) hypothesized a correlation between ethnic residential patterns and the clustering of ethnic businesses. Such spatial disparities are grounded in enclave theory (Edin, Fredriksson, & Åslund, 2003).

2.3. Ethnic enclaves and customer orientation

Portes (1981, p. 291) formally defined ethnic enclaves as: "…immigrant groups which concentrate in a distinct spatial location and organize a variety of enterprises serving their own ethnic market and/or the general population. The basic characteristic of an ethnic enclave

is that a significant proportion of the immigrant workforce works in enterprises owned by other minorities." Bates et al. (2007) wrote that minority entrepreneurs cater largely to customers who are members of the same ethnic group. From a workforce perspective, Schüller (2016) suggested that it is the quality of the enclave, and not the size of the enclave, that is critical for the economic success of an ethnic minority firm. From an entrepreneurial marketing perspective, enclave quality captures elements of customer equity, visceral relationships, and the emotional dimension of a firm's marketing efforts (Morris et al., 2002).

Evolving from enclave research is the notion of an ethnic network, the notion that ethnic enclaves create social networks among minorities of common ethnicity living in close geographical proximity (Damm, 2006) and that ethnic goods are consumed by co-ethnic customers (Ibrahim & Galt, 2011). As an illustration, Raijman (2001) suggested that the residential concentration of Mexican immigrants in Chicago generated the critical mass for Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs to serve, almost exclusively, other Mexican immigrants in the city. However, Wang and Li (2007) reported that since many Hispanics self-employ in the service sector, the economic structure of an area can be as critical as an ethnic enclave because the customers for service providers are not limited to Hispanics (e.g., Hispanic construction workers do work for non-Hispanic customers).

In general, research into customer co-ethnics (customer enclaves) has produced mixed results (Portes & Manning, 2005). Research conducted within specific Hispanic communities has been equally mixed with respect to the ethnic enclave hypothesis and customer co-ethnics (Bradford, 2013). In his description of the wholesale produce industry in Los Angeles, Alvarez (1990) suggested that the market hierarchy exhibited the primary characteristics of a Hispanic immigrant enclave. Geographically clustered in central Los Angeles, Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans relied on co-ethnicity for both economic exchange and access to incoming immigrants for labor. At the same time, Shinnar and Young (2008) found that the Las Vegas Hispanic enclave was an incentive to start a Hispanic-owned business. While these characteristics of ethnic minority firms are indicative of attempts at entrepreneurial marketing, Ram and Hillin (1994) and Altinay and Altinay (2008), among others, contended that a heavy reliance on co-ethnic customers inhibits an entrepreneurial firm's efforts to attract new customers for business growth.

According to McPherson (2007), there are four market segment profiles available to ethnic entrepreneurs: (1) local ethnic, (2) ethnic non-local, (3) local non-ethnic, and (4) non-ethnic, non-local. However, by inspection, most research on Hispanic businesses has been limited to (local) ethnic and (non-ethnic) mainstream/dominant market segments. For example, in a study of Hispanic business enterprises in Indianapolis, Curci and Mackoy (2010) reported that, regardless of the product or service type (Hispanic or non-Hispanic products/services), over half of the enterprises they studied targeted primarily Hispanic customers. Corroborating this finding in a study of urban Latino entrepreneurs in Arkansas, Moon, Farmer, Miller, and Abreo (2014) found a significantly higher percentage of Latino-only customers than non-Latino customers or a mixture of Latino-only or non-Latino customers.

In a study utilizing a nationwide sample of minority business owners, Shinnar, Aguilera, and Lyons (2011) reported the following percentages of co-ethnic customers for the Mexican-American businesses in their sample: 34% of the responding Mexican-American firms reported having < 25% co-ethnic customers, 17% reported having 25–49% co-ethnic customers, 12% reported having 50–74% co-ethnic customers, and 37% reported having 75% or more co-ethnic customers. More recently, Rivers and Porras (2015) found that 20% of Latino-owned businesses reported a mostly Latino customer base, whereas about 80% reported a predominantly non-Latino or a mixture of Latino and non-Latino customers. Thus, it appears that whereas some minority businesses adhere to the customer co-ethnic notion, others follow a multi-ethnic or mainstream market approach directed toward the needs and desires of a variety of customer groups (Jamal, 2005).

Moreover, in their study of Mexican-American entrepreneurs, Shinnar, Cardon, Eisenman, Zuiker, and Lee (2009) found differences within the Hispanic community with respect to Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs and U.S.-born Mexican entrepreneurs. Mexican immigrant entrepreneurs were more motivated by serving their co-ethnic community than were U.S.-born Mexican entrepreneurs, who were relatively more motivated by financial benefits regardless of their customers' ethnicity. As an aside, in their survey of Mexican immigrant merchants and Korean immigrant business owners, Raijman and Tienda (2003) discovered that the largely Hispanic neighborhood of Little Village in Chicago provided an attractive niche for Korean entrepreneurs because Mexicans were less able to harness the benefits of a co-ethnic network of suppliers and credit providers.

2.4. Perceived business performance and skills

Miles and Darroch (2006) claimed that a firm engaging in entrepreneurial marketing will exhibit a capability of reassigning and leveraging resources to exploit external opportunities. Yet, Lussier (1995) argued that minority entrepreneurs had a greater chance of failure than non-minority entrepreneurs and called for more assistance, training, and advice for these would-be entrepreneurs. Chaudhry and Crick (2004) referred to the ethnic enterprise as a training system for new entrepreneurs.

Utilizing data from the U.S. Census of Population, Current Population Survey, and Legalized Population Survey, Fairlie and Woodruff (2008) focused on business exit rates and net business income as performance measures in their study of Mexican-American business ownership. Their results showed that Mexican-Americans of all immigrant generations had substantially higher exit rates than non-Latino whites, and that the average net income of Mexican immigrant business owners was substantially less than the national average. In their study of ethnic enclave versus dominant market strategies, Ndofor and Priem (2011) operationalized venture performance of immigrants by means of two self-report measures: (1) returns to the entrepreneur by way of money taken from the venture in salaries and dividends, and (2) net profit of the venture. No differences between the two strategic choices were found based on these objective performance measures.

However, obtaining an accurate measure of business performance is particularly difficult since small (privately held) firms have no incentive to disclose their performance. Asking for specific objective measures of business performance can be met with trepidation and resistance, and objective measures (e.g., profit) need to be adjusted to be meaningful across a variety of business conditions and industrial sectors. Thus, Dess and Robinson (1984) argued for subjective measures of business performance that generally consist of comparing a firm's performance relative to that of immediate competitors. (Brush and Vanderwerf (1992) noted the perceptual nature of this subjectivity.) In an assessment of objective (e.g., growth, business volume) and subjective/perceptual business performance (e.g., relative to competitors) measures, Chandler and Hanks (1993) found subjective/perceptual measures to be relevant metrics of business performance. Athanassiou et al. (2002) collected perceptual data (i.e., financial performance relative to the industry and financial/social/family-oriented performance relative to articulated/implied goals) in their study of founder centrality effects in Mexican family firms. Each measure of performance was directly and positively influenced by founder centrality in the top management group.

In addition to investigating firm performance, research on minority entrepreneurship has studied motivations for starting a business from both pull (e.g., positive aspects of self-employment) and push (e.g., entry into self-employment as a last resort) perspectives (Shinnar & Young, 2008). As well, engagement in traditional business planning practices (e.g., writing a business plan, opportunity recognition) and personal entrepreneurial competencies and behaviors (e.g., persistence, self-confidence) have also been studied (e.g., Mendoza, 2008; Saladin-Subero, 2012; Vincent, 1996). In a review of research on Hispanic

entrepreneurs, Canedo et al. (2014) suggested that educational and skill levels influence Hispanic entrepreneurs' motivations, opportunity recognition, and resource acquisition. This was consistent with findings by Basu (2011), who found that higher levels of educational attainment and business training led to faster growth among immigrant entrepreneurs in general.

2.5. Study purpose and research questions

The primary purpose of the present study was to explore whether Mexican-American entrepreneurs tend to follow an ethnic enclave entrepreneurial marketing strategy by means of their customer orientation. A secondary purpose was to determine whether selected characteristics of Mexican-American entrepreneurs, including their perceptions of their firm's business performance, relate to their firm's customer orientation. Finally, because of the implications of immigrant generation regarding entrepreneurial marketing, an analysis of relationships involving the Mexican-American entrepreneurs' immigrant generation was undertaken.

Based on the extant ethnic minority entrepreneurial marketing literature and the Hispanic entrepreneurial marketing literature in particular, three general research questions motivated the present research. These three questions reflect the exploratory nature of this research:

- Do Mexican-American entrepreneurs tend to follow a form of co-ethnic enclave marketing strategy (that is, having co-ethnic employees and focusing on co-ethnic customers), a dominant/breakout marketing strategy (that is, not relying on co-ethnic employees and focusing on a mainstream or dominant market regardless of ethnicity), or a mixture of co-ethnic enclave and dominant/breakout marketing strategies?
- Are there demographic differences among Mexican-American entrepreneurs that relate to their firms' customer orientation and perceived business performance?
- Are there differences in perceived business performance and business skills among Mexican-American entrepreneurs as a function of immigrant generation, and, if so, what personal or firm characteristics, if any, are associated with these generational differences?

3. Research methodology

With the second-largest population of Hispanics in the United States (Sullivan, 2010) and the highest per capita of Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States (Bernardo, 2017; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009), Texas was a logical geographical location in which to study Mexican-American entrepreneurs. The methodology employed in the study consisted of standard, accepted research procedures, methods, and techniques often used in family firm (e.g., Eddleston, Kellermans, Floyd, Crittenden, & Crittenden, 2013) and Hispanic firm studies (e.g., Scott, Curci, & Mackoy, 2012), with the most cost-effective approach to data collection being a mail survey. Specifically, questionnaires were mailed to the owners and chief executives of a sample of Texas businesses designated as being minority and/or Hispanic-owned.

3.1. Sampling frame and sample

Since the ethnic enclave theory is both customer- and employee-focused, the sample included only Mexican-American entrepreneurs[1] in Texas who started their own business and who had one or more paid employees. The sample was drawn from a sampling frame that consisted of eight distinct databases that collectively contained 23,805 (non-duplicated) businesses. The databases were respectively provided by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (i.e., Texas statewide historically underutilized businesses), NERA Economic Consulting (i.e., directory of minority-owned businesses in Texas), five Texas-based Hispanic chambers of commerce, and The List Company (a composite list of minority businesses drawn from Dun & Bradstreet, InfoUSA, CAS, Equifax, and Axiom sources). Questionnaires were initially mailed to a systematic random sample of 13,809 allegedly Hispanic-owned businesses in Texas; 1503 unopened questionnaires were returned because of incorrect or nonexistent addresses. Thus, 12,306 (net) questionnaires were mailed to existing businesses in the sampling frame.

Questionnaire packets consisted of a cover letter that identified the sender of the survey (The University of Texas at Austin) to avoid concerns that the survey was prompted by immigration officials, a questionnaire, and a pre-paid (addressed) business reply envelope that further ensured that questionnaire responses were not being used by immigration officials. Subsequent to the initial mailing, a follow-up reminder postcard was sent to all sampled businesses approximately one week later. Two weeks after the postcard was mailed, a second questionnaire packet was mailed that consisted of a reminder cover letter, a questionnaire, and a pre-paid business return envelope. Thus, each sampled business received three communications.

A total of 3592 questionnaires were returned. Based on responses to the questionnaires, 3261 questionnaires were from Hispanic-owned businesses, 233 were from non-Hispanic-owned businesses, and 98 were non-identifiable (and were discarded). This means the response rate for Hispanic-owned businesses was approximately 27.2% (3261/11,975). Of the 3261 Hispanic owners or chief executives responding, 2215 were self-reported Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano entrepreneurs (i.e., individuals who started their business) whose firm had one or more paid employees. Thus, the 2215 Mexican-American entrepreneurs in Texas constituted the final study sample. A total of 1046 individuals returning questionnaires (1) were either not Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano, (2) did not start their business (i.e., they purchased or inherited their business rather than starting the business themselves), and/or (3) managed a business that did not have paid employees (i.e., since the ethnic enclave was a construct in the research, employees were necessary for an analysis of enclave theory).

3.2. Questionnaire development and focus groups

A draft questionnaire was first constructed using questions similar to those contained in the Census Bureau's Survey of Business Owners and prior research (e.g., Scott et al., 2012) as well as those addressing the present research issues of interest. In addition to standard classification questions such as business characteristics and personal demographic characteristics including immigrant generation, education, gender, age, and business experience, the questionnaire inquired about perceived firm performance and self-perceived business skills. This questionnaire was reviewed by a Mexican-American advisory panel. Changes were made to the questionnaire and a revised version evaluated with a group of MBA students at The University of Texas at Austin. A second revision was then assessed by means of focus group interviews.

Focus group interviews were conducted in three Texas cities (El Paso, Dallas, and San Antonio) with participants who were representative of Mexican-American business owners. The primary purpose of the focus group interviews was to assess the viability of the questionnaire (i.e., Could the focus group participants understand the questions? Could they answer the questions? Would they answer the questions?). In addition, the focus group interviews were designed to evaluate the questionnaire packet to be utilized. Minor changes to the questionnaire and cover letter were made as a consequence of the focus

[1] Although Hispanic survey participants were defined in the questionnaire as being “Mexican, Mexican-American, or Chicano,” they are, for ease of exposition, referred to as Mexican-Americans here to be clear that Hispanics of other nationalities/origins were not included in the final sample.

group interviews.

Both closed-end and open-end questions were contained in the questionnaire. All questions were in English. To operationalize the focal concepts in the study—customer orientation, employee ethnicity, immigrant generation, perceived business performance, and self-perceived business skills—the following questions were asked, in addition to standard classification and demographic questions.

3.2.1. Ethnicity

Given the need to disaggregate Mexican-American entrepreneurs from the broader population of Hispanics, a closed-end question was used to determine sample eligibility:

Q: Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

_No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
_Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano.
_Yes, Puerto Rican.
_Yes, Cuban.
_Yes, Spaniard (from Spain).
_Yes, another Hispanic or Latino origin—please write your origin: _____

Only those survey participants who indicated they were Mexican, Mexican American, or Chicano were retained for the sample.

3.2.2. Immigrant generation status

Given that previous research reported differences based on immigrant generation, survey participants were asked the closed-end question:

Q: What generation of Hispanic in the U.S. are you?

_First (1st) generation immigrant (born outside the U.S., can be naturalized U.S. citizen, legal immigrant, or undocumented immigrant).
_Second (2nd) generation (born in the U.S. with at least one foreign-born parent).
_Third (3rd) generation (born in the U.S. with both parents also born in the U.S.)
_Fourth (4th) generation or more (born in the U.S. with grandparents, great grandparents, etc. also U.S. born).

3.2.3. Customer orientation/employee ethnicity

As discussed earlier, the literature on ethnic enclaves and customer co-ethnics reported mixed findings with regard to customers and employees. Thus, two closed-end questions about the mixture of customers and employees of the surveyed firms were asked.

The customer co-ethnic question was:

Q: The majority of the customers of your business are:

_Primarily non-Hispanic
_Equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic
_Primarily Hispanic

The employee co-ethnic question was:

Q: The majority of employees of your business are:

_Primarily non-Hispanic
_Equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic
_Primarily Hispanic

3.2.4. Perceived business performance

As discussed previously, objective measures of business performance are difficult, if not impossible, to obtain from small (typically private) firms, with many scholars arguing for subjective, perceptual measures relative to competitors. Thus, consistent with Cardon, Shinnar, Eisenman, and Rogoff (2008), survey participants were asked:

Q: How does your business perform compared with others in your industry?

Responses were captured by means of a five-point rating scale anchored by “much less profitable” and “much more profitable,” with a middle category “about average.”

3.2.5. Self-assessed business skills

Given the skills that are generally taught as necessary for success in business, eight business skills were derived from a review of important employment skills (e.g., Crittenden & Crittenden, 2006). Survey participants were asked to self-assess each of the eight skills using a five-point rating scale of “poor,” “fair,” “good,” “very good,” or “excellent”:

Q: Please rate yourself on the following business skills:

- Oral presentation
- Writing skills
- Problem analysis
- Problem solving
- Team building
- Team management
- Motivating employees
- Developing personal business relationships

3.3. Data analysis

Questionnaire responses were coalesced into a common database and preliminary analyses undertaken to evaluate and ensure the integrity of the underlying data. Because a Harman-based factor analysis did not indicate the existence of a common factor (many questions were “factual descriptors”), there was no concern about the possibility of common method bias. A series of straightforward data analyses were then undertaken to identify variable relationships.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Sample disposition

All survey participants were entrepreneurs of Mexican origin who had personally started their own firm. Moreover, all survey participants had one or more paid employees in their firm. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the survey participants' firms. A diversity of industrial sectors was represented by these firms. More than one third of the sample was comprised of service-related firms, which was consistent with previous Latino studies reviewed by Robles and Cordero-Guzman (2007). Nearly a quarter of the surveyed firms were engaged in construction, with another fifth engaged in some form of professional, scientific, or technical service. An additional 20% were engaged in some aspect of transportation/warehousing or wholesale/retail trade. Manufacturing and financial service firms were both represented in the sample, albeit not to a substantial degree.

This representation of industry sectors in the final sample closely corresponded with national percentages of small firms as per industry data provided by the Office of Advocacy in the United States Small Business Administration (SBA) in 2016. The SBA data included information from firms employing up to 500 employees as well as non-employer firms. Thus, even though comparisons cannot be made on a size-to-size basis with regard to the number of small employer firms, the relative composition of sampled firms across industry sectors was similar to the national composition. Construction, as the industry sector with the highest representation in the final sample, comprised the third-largest sector (behind “other services,” professional/scientific/technical, finance/insurance, and real estate sectors) in terms of small business employment share of total small business and private employment in 2013 (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2016). According to Biery (2016), construction was the fastest growing small-business sector in 2015, generating double-digit growth. Health care/

Table 1
Sample firm characteristics.

Characteristic	Percent of sample	SBA comparison[a]
Sector[b]		
Construction	23%	13%
Professional/scientific/technical	21%	16%
Retail trade	14%	11%
Manufacturing	8%	2%
Transportation/warehousing	6%	5%
Finance, insurance, real estate	6%	15%
Wholesale trade	5%	2%
Health care/social services	7%	11%
Accommodations/food service	5%	4%
Educational services	3%	2%
Information services	3%	1%
Other services	15%	18%
Other sectors[c]	6%	
Form of business		
Corporation[d]	53%	
Sole proprietorship	40%	
Partnership	7%	
Number of employees		
≤5	54%	
6–10	20%	
11–30	17%	
31+	9%	
Number of years since business originally established		
≤5	11%	
6–10	23%	
11–15	17%	
16–20	16%	
21–25	12%	
26+	21%	

[a] SBA Office of Advocacy, United States Small Business Profile, 2016 (percentages adjusted for missing sectors).
[b] Multiple responses were permitted (Total = 122%).
[c] Other sectors according to the SBA include Administrative/Support/Waste Management, Arts/Entertainment/Recreation, Mining/Quarrying/Oil & Gas Extraction, Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Hunting, and Utilities.
[d] Includes S-Corp, LLC, and C-Corp.

social services and accommodations/food service also fared well in sales growth in 2015. Thus, the industry sector percentages represented in the final sample were consistent with industry sector percentages nationwide.

The legal structure of the firms represented in the sample were almost evenly split in terms of complexity and liability, with 53% structured as some form of corporation and the remaining 47% operating as either a sole proprietorship or partnership. Slightly over one-half of the sampled firms had five or fewer employees, with that percentage increasing to 74% for 10 or fewer employees. This sample representation was also consistent with SBA data for 2016 since 90% of all small firms nationally with employees had 1–19 employees. Data were obtained from a wide range of sampled firms with respect to longevity of operation. The firms represented in the sample have survived over time, with 21% of the survey participants reporting their firm had been in existence for > 25 years.

Table 2 contains a profile of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed. A substantial majority (90%) of the survey participants had completed high school or earned a GED. This is comparable to the general United States adult population according to Census Bureau data for 2015, in which 88% of adults in the United States had at least a high school diploma or GED (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). However, the 90% high school/GED completion rate for the survey participants was somewhat higher than the 67% high school/GED completion rate for Hispanics in general (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). While census data indicate that the survey participants' high school/GED completion rate may be higher than that for Hispanics in general, relatively fewer of the

Table 2
Survey participant characteristics.

Characteristic	Percent of sample
Education	
≤High school	10%
High school grad/GED	15%
Technical/vocational school	8%
Some college, no degree	21%
Associate degree	7%
Bachelor degree	22%
Graduate degree	17%
Gender	
Male	76%
Female	24%
Age	
< 25	1%
25–44	22%
45–54	34%
55+	43%
Immigrant generation	
First	28%
Second	32%
Third	26%
Fourth or more	14%

survey participants possessed a college education than did small business owners nationally. Clifford (2013) reported data from a Manta Study that suggested 69% of small business owners have a college education, compared to only 39% of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed in the current study.

According to a report released by the National Women's Business Council (2017), 35% of all Hispanic firms in the United States are Hispanic women-owned businesses. This compares with 24% of the study sample. Thus, the sample was generally reflective of Hispanic business ownership in the United States, taking into consideration the fact that the present sample consisted of only Mexican-American entrepreneurs in Texas with one or more paid employees. Regarding the remaining demographic characteristics shown in Table 2, the sample exhibited a range of ages and representation across immigrant generations. The numbers of survey participants representing immigrant generations one, two, and three were relatively similar, thus alleviating concerns about over-representation of any particular generation in the sample. As well, since all but first generation survey participants were born in the United States, the relatively balanced number of survey participants representing each immigrant generation suggests that language issues (i.e., an English language survey) did not appear to be overly-prohibitive for first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs in Texas. Additionally, the current study, unlike most studies that assess immigrant generation, captured fourth generation and beyond survey participants in an effort to provide insights into characteristics potentially related to a wide range of generations.

4.2. Customer orientation and ethnic enclaves

The customer orientations of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed differed significantly ($p < .01$). Approximately 28% of the survey participants stated that their firm's customers were primarily non-Hispanic; 47% stated that their firm had an equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers; and 25% stated that their firm's customers were primarily Hispanic. Simultaneously, the ethnicity percentages of the employees of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed varied significantly ($p < .01$). Approximately 7% of the survey participants reported that their firm's employees were primarily non-Hispanic; 25% reported that their firm had an equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic employees; and 68% reported that their firm's employees were primarily Hispanic.

As Table 3 shows, firms with a primarily Hispanic customer

Table 3
Customer orientation and employee ethnicity[a].

Customers	Employees		
	Primarily non-Hispanic	Equal mixture	Primarily Hispanic
Primarily non-Hispanic	15.0%	30.7%	54.3%
Equal mixture	6.0%	28.5%	65.5%
Primarily Hispanic	1.8%	5.9%	92.3%

[a] $\chi^2 = 239.4$ (4), $p < .001$.

Table 4
Customer orientation and entrepreneur's immigrant generation[a].

Customers	Immigrant generation			
	1	2	3	4+
Primarily non-Hispanic	22.8%	31.4%	29.6%	16.2%
Equal mixture	28.8%	31.4%	26.4%	13.4%
Primarily Hispanic	34.5%	32.7%	21.6%	11.2%

Immigrant generation	Customers		
	Primarily non-Hispanic	Equal mixture	Primarily Hispanic
First	22.5%	47.0%	30.5%
Second	27.8%	46.1%	26.1%
Third	31.9%	47.2%	20.9%
Fourth or more	33.3%	46.0%	20.7%

[a] $\chi^2 = 27.1$ (6), $p < .001$.

orientation tended to almost exclusively employee Hispanics. The greater the focus of a firm on Hispanic customers, the greater the likelihood that the firm had Hispanic employees. This relationship can be viewed as offering partial support for the co-ethnicity portion of enclave theory. Furthermore, of those firms that possessed primarily non-Hispanic customers, about 23% of the survey participants were first generation immigrants (see top half of Table 4). This compares with 29% of those firms that had an equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers, and 35% of those firms that primarily had Hispanic customers. From a different perspective, the bottom half of Table 4 reveals that whereas 22% of first generation immigrant entrepreneurs' firms had primarily non-Hispanic customers, 31% of the firms of first generation immigrants surveyed had primarily Hispanic customers.

No significant relationships were observed between customer orientation and the eight self-assessed business skills. Thus, with respect to skills required for successful entrepreneurial marketing, the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed did not differ as a function of their customer orientation. However, the following significant relationships were observed between: (1) customer orientation and number of years since a firm was established (an Hispanic customer orientation was characterized by fewer years in existence than a non-Hispanic customer orientation); (2) customer orientation and number of employees (an Hispanic customer orientation was associated with fewer employees than a non-Hispanic customer orientation); and (3) customer orientation and an entrepreneur's years of experience in the current business (entrepreneurs whose firm had an Hispanic customer orientation had less experience than entrepreneurs whose firm had a non-Hispanic customer orientation).

Collectively, these results provide inferential support for an entrepreneurial marketing strategy incorporating a recognizable customer orientation focus. In other words, a sizable proportion of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed, and even more so for first generation entrepreneurs, tended to follow a co-ethnic enclave entrepreneurial marketing strategy. Simultaneously, though, a plurality of the firms of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed followed a mixed customer orientation. In particular, 47% of the survey participants reported that their customers were an equal mixture of non-Hispanics and Hispanics, and this percentage was consistent across immigrant generations.

Table 5
Perceived Business Performance.

Perceived business performance	Percent of sample[a]
Much less profitable	14%
Less than average	11%
About average	53%
More than average	15%
Much more profitable	7%

[a] The total sample average rating was 2.91 (SD = 1.04).

4.3. Business performance, customer orientation, and entrepreneur characteristics

Overall business performance was assessed by means of a five-point rating scale of self-perceived performance relative to industry competitors. Table 5 presents the perceived business performance for the total sample of firms studied; "about average" was the most common response. Approximately 53% of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed reported that their firm performed "about average" compared with other firms in their industry.

What is interesting is that there were no significant differences in perceived business performance as a function of customer orientation or employee ethnicity. This finding is similar to that of Scott et al. (2012), who concluded there were no significant differences with respect to four subjective measures of business success across mainstream, mixed, and co-ethnic customer orientations for a sample of Hispanic business owners in Indiana.

In additional analyses, perceived business performance was investigated relative to study firm and survey participant characteristics (e.g., gender, education, business experience, age, and immigrant generation). Across all analyses, "about average" was the most common response. Although no significant relationship was observed between immigrant generation and perceived business performance, three significant relationships were observed:

- Female survey participants perceived their firm's business performance to be relatively less profitable than their male counterparts;
- The larger the number of employees in a studied firm, the greater was the perceived business performance of the firm; and
- Survey participants with at least a college degree perceived their firm to have greater profitability than did survey participants with less than a college degree.

Thus, it would appear that the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed generally viewed their businesses as performing "on-par" with industry competitors. While some commentary (e.g., NPR, 2011) has suggested that third generation Mexican-Americans may face difficult times, this was not evident in the data with respect to self-perceptions of business performance.

4.4. Immigrant generation

The only consistently significant differences found based on immigrant generation of the survey participants were with regard to first generation immigrants versus other immigrant generations. This finding is similar to findings reported by the Pew Research Center (2004), in which the largest differences between successive Latino generations were found to exist between those who were foreign born

Table 6
Education by immigrant generation status.

Education[a]	1st Generation	Generations 2–4 +
≤High school	20%	6%
High school grad/GED	17%	14%
Technical/vocational school	9%	8%
Some college, no degree	17%	23%
Associate degree	5%	8%
Bachelor degree	15%	24%
Graduate degree	17%	17%

[a] Recent census data for Texas reports 28.1% of persons age 25 + years held a Bachelor's degree or higher as reported for the years 2012–2016, with 82.3% of persons age 25 + years as high school graduates for the years 2012–2016. Source: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TX

and those who were born in the United States, with second and beyond immigrant generations exhibiting more similarities than differences. In the present research, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs were less likely to start firms in the professional/scientific/technical sector than were generations two and beyond. This finding is not surprising when considering the fact that first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs reported less education than later generations.

In particular, a larger percentage of first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs than later Mexican-American generation entrepreneurs reported not finishing high school. While educational differences between the two groups (first generation and all others) were not statistically significant, Table 6 reveals that relatively fewer of the first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed finished high school or attended college than later generations. Thus, the professional/scientific/technical sector might be a more difficult sector in which to start a firm without an educational base of knowledge in the field.

Furthermore, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed were slightly more likely to follow an ethnic enclave strategy than were later generations. To reiterate the information in Table 4, the firms of first generation survey participants were more likely to have a higher percentage of Hispanic customers than were firms of later generations, and the firms of survey participants that primarily had Hispanic customers were more likely to be associated with first generation immigrants than those of later immigrant generations. Also, the firms of first generation survey participants were more likely to have a higher percentage of Hispanic employees (77%) than were those of later generations (66%). Therefore, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs may rely on customer and employee ethnicity to build their businesses, but second generation and beyond Mexican-American entrepreneurs may be more culturally and economically assimilated and be more likely to follow a mainstream or dominant market strategy so as to tap into non-Hispanics to build their businesses.

These findings are intuitively logical and support the conclusions of Shinnar et al. (2009). As previously mentioned, Shinnar et al. (2009) found that U.S.-born Mexican-American entrepreneurs were more motivated by financial gain whereas first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs were more motivated by serving the co-ethnic community. This result is also consistent with the idea that Hispanics born in the United States are more likely assimilated into the local culture as suggested by findings from the Pew Research Center (2013) in which six in 10 seconds-generation minority adults refer to themselves as "typical Americans," whereas 37% of second-generation Hispanics describe themselves simply as "Americans."

Although there were no discernible differences with respect to perceived business performance, there were differences in self-assessed business skills across immigrant generations. Statistically significant differences among the Mexican-American immigrant generations existed with respect to oral presentation skills ($p < .01$), writing skills ($p < .01$), problem analysis skills ($p < .01$), problem-solving skills ($p < .01$), team-building skills ($p < .05$), and developing personal business relationship skills ($p < .01$). The only two perceived business skills that were not significantly different at $p < .05$ were team management skills and motivating employee skills.

Table 7
Self-rated business skills by immigrant generation.

Perceived business skill	Immigrant generation[1]			
	1	2	3	4 +
Oral presentation	3.44[a]	3.62[d,f]	3.78	3.80
Writing skills	3.19[a]	3.50	3.53	3.57
Problem analysis	3.82[b]	3.98	4.07	4.00
Problem solving	4.00[c]	4.08[e]	4.19	4.08
Team building	3.70[d]	3.74	3.85	3.82
Team management	3.75	3.78	3.87	3.81
Motivating employees	3.68[d]	3.73	3.83	3.80
Dev personal bus relationships	3.79[c]	3.86[e]	4.00	3.92

Key:
a = significant at $p < .01$ from later generations.
b = significant at $p < .02$ from later generations.
c = significant at $p < .01$ from third generation.
d = significant at $p < .05$ from third generation.
e = significant at $p < .10$ from third generation.
f = significant at $p < .10$ from fourth + generations.
[1] Scale scores ranged from "1" (poor) to "5" (excellent).

The mean responses for each of the eight business skills on the five-point rating scale are presented in Table 7. Noticeably, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs consistently held the lowest self-opinions for all eight business skills, and second generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs assessed themselves lower than did third generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs. Across the business skills, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs self-reported themselves as possessing the lowest business skill levels for oral presentation, writing, and problem analysis relative to all later generations. Additionally, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs were significantly different from third generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs on problem solving, team building, motivating employees, and developing personal business relationship skills.

Second generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs reported possessing business skills that were significantly lower than those of third generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs with respect to problem solving and developing personal business relationships. Interestingly, although not statistically significant, fourth generation and beyond immigrant Mexican-American entrepreneurs rated themselves lower than the third generation on all business skills except oral presentation and writing. This result may be indicative of the concerns noted in the NPR (2011) report in which later generations of Mexican-Americans were not faring as well as earlier ones.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Consistent with several prior research studies (e.g., Jamal, 2005; Rivers & Porras, 2015; Shinnar et al., 2011), the firms of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed tended to employ a "mixed customer orientation" as an entrepreneurial marketing strategy. Although an enclave entrepreneurial marketing strategy was observed for a substantial percentage of the study firms—especially those associated with first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs—a plurality of the firms studied, nearly half, reported an equal mixture of Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers. Thus, the answer to the first research question regarding the customer orientation of the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed is "it depends." The Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed reported co-ethnic enclave marketing strategies as well as dominant/break-out marketing strategies, but the most common customer orientation focused on a mixture of both Hispanic and non-

Hispanic customers.

Interestingly, even though there were discernible differences in customer orientation among the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed, these differences were not reflected in the perceptions of their firms' business performance. With regard to perceived business performance, the Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed generally tended to perceive their firm as being “about average” (or slightly less) relative to its competitors, regardless of the firm's customer orientation, the ethnicity of its employees, or the entrepreneur's immigrant generation. In general, differences in perceptions of business performance with respect to entrepreneur or firm characteristics were minimal or only marginally significant. Thus, substantively, the answer to research question two is that there are “very few” differences.

With respect to research question three, while there were differences in self-assessed personal business skills across the entrepreneurs' immigrant generation, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs were more likely than later generations to view themselves as being less facile with regard to the business skills studied. However, these differences were not reflected in the entrepreneurs' perceived business performance of their firm relative to industry competition.

Further, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs surveyed were more likely to hire Hispanic employees and cater to Hispanic customers than were later generations of Mexican-American entrepreneurs. This may be due, at least in part, to the first generation's personal characteristics, resources, and/or opportunities (e.g., Aldrich & Waldinger, 1990). In general, first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs appeared to be less likely to operate in the professional/scientific/technical sector and to possess a lower opinion of their business skills than later generations. Later generation (second and beyond) Mexican-American entrepreneurs tended not to pursue a co-ethnic marketing strategy. At the same time, while these later generations of Mexican-American entrepreneurs did hire non-Hispanic employees, the hiring of Hispanic employees was not as pervasive as a focus on non-Hispanic customers. Thus, an ethnic enclave strategy may be a default strategy for first generation Mexican-American entrepreneurs, with later generations of Mexican-American entrepreneurs following an evolutionary process of cultural and economic assimilation.

The research reported here contributes to nascent research toward a better understanding of the entrepreneurial marketing strategies of Mexican-American entrepreneurs. While much of the prior ethnic enclave research has explored the impact of an enclave mentality from spatial (i.e., community living) and employment (i.e., working for co-ethnics) perspectives within a broad range of minority entrepreneurs, including Hispanics, the present research focused solely on Mexican-American entrepreneurs. In addition to analyzing the interaction between customer orientation and employee ethnicity strategies, a perceived business performance metric was analyzed in an attempt to discern firm performance differences relative to the two strategies. The result of doing so counters some of the classic notions of ethnic minority enclaves and demonstrates that perceived business performance may be similar regardless of customer orientation or employee composition. It may be that the traditional (geographically-based) notion of an enclave is antiquated in a boundary-less world in which employment, customers, and communications are not confined either geographically or ethnically.

This study is unique in several regards. First, the study employed a relatively large and diverse sample, one that was not drawn from a particular city or ethnic neighborhood in a city. Rather, the sample was drawn from a broad geographical area, one of two states that is a predominant location for Mexican-American-owned firms. Second, the sample consisted of both product and service firms from several different industrial sectors. Third, the sample was “pure” in that it only consisted of Mexican-American entrepreneurs—not simply Hispanics or Mexican-American business owners—thus acknowledging and accounting for the heterogeneity of the Hispanic (business) population in the United States. Fourth, the sample consisted of only those firms having one or more paid employees. As such, the study did not include sole practitioners, Mexican-American entrepreneurs whose firms had no paid employees or who were merely self-employed. These characteristics should increase the validity and reliability of the results and conclusions, especially with respect to Mexican-American entrepreneurial marketing activities such as customer orientation.

At the same time, however, the study was not without possible limitations, one of which was that the questionnaire was only administered in the English language. While the use of an English-language survey was not viewed as a potentially serious issue because of the ages of the survey participants, their average immigrant generation, and the typical time they had been in business, it could have influenced the response rate, the nature of the resulting sample, and certain question responses. Future studies of Mexican-American entrepreneurs should consider incorporating Spanish-language versions of questionnaires to address such possibilities.

Moreover, the present research begs questions as to whether Mexican-American entrepreneurs differ from other Hispanic entrepreneurs. Such comparisons are imperative for a comprehensive understanding of all Hispanic entrepreneurs. Finally, because the present research was exploratory and limited to an investigation of only one tenet of entrepreneurial marketing, customer orientation, there is a need to explore and examine other tenets, such as innovation orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and market orientation, to determine whether the entrepreneurial marketing concept is structurally viable as an alternative to the traditional concept of marketing in the context of minority-owned firms.

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