

# THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN THE EFFECTS OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION AND RELIGIOSITY ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE AMONG WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of the countries described as closed, extremely patriarchal, traditional and religious. It was described as a factor-driven country. It has been traditionally structured with social and cultural restrictions on women's right. As a result, women involvement and participation in entrepreneurial activities is affected by the socio-cultural and religious structure of the country. Therefore, this research study examined the influence of culture on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, religiosity and business performance among women entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It adopted a critical review of relevant studies and past literature on the subject matter. It was found that culture of a nation can influence the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, religiosity and business performance of entrepreneurs. In order to improve the performance of small scale and medium scale businesses, the culture of the nation or society must be put into consideration before planning business activities.*

**Keywords:** Culture, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Religiosity, Business Performance, Entrepreneurs, Saudi Arabia

## INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is among the countries said to be closed, extremely traditional, religious and patriarchal (Danish & Smith, 2012). World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report described it as "a factor-driven stage country" which implies a country that competes based on its factors and natural endowments but largely unskilled labour (Danish & Smith, 2012). Women's role has been traditionally reserved to the home and child rearing whereas their counterpart men have dominated everything from education to power structures finance and travel (Ahmad, 2011; Danish & Smith, 2012; Hamdan, 2005). In Saudi Arabia, there have been traditional, structural and socio-cultural restrictions on women's rights. Job opportunities have always been limited to few predetermined professions where it is deemed fit for women to work according to the cultural and social provisions (Koyame-Marsh, 2017). However, considering government investments in female education, their massive underemployment and unemployment points to a grand waste of resources (Al-Asfour, Tlaiss, Khan & Rajasekar, 2017). However, in time the government of Saudi Arabia realised that perhaps the way out to this conundrum was for the female folk to contribute to the country's economy by establishing their own businesses (Basaffar, Niehm & Bosselman, 2018; Cole, 2011; Sabri, 2001). Since this realisation, the government had made it one of its priority policies to increase the number of Saudi women entrepreneurs (Basaffar, Niehm & Bosselman, 2018; Fallatah, 2012).

After the government had realized the need to empower women, series of steps were taken to ensure sustainable women development in the country. One of the most recent government initiatives to unleash women into entrepreneurship is the Saudi Arabia National

Transformation Program 2030 which is supposed to fuel the kingdom's vision 2030. The aim of this initiative is to transform the country's economy and prepare it for a swift transition to the post-oil era (Basaffar, Niehm & Bosselman, 2018). This program aims at supporting small businesses and transforms them into larger contributors to the kingdom's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Basaffar, Niehm & Bosselman, 2018).

Business women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are been confronted with numerous challenges, including inadequate market studies, insufficient governmental support, lack of coordination among government departments, inadequate support from the community, and some forms of restrictions and oligopolistic attitude from the investors. Quite a number of studies have been carried out on entrepreneurship in the context of Saudi Arabia. Danish & Smith (2012) explored the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia. The study used survey on 33 Saudi women entrepreneurs and drew on secondary data to aid in the analysis of the survey. The 33 women involved in the study were already in businesses or in the process of establishing one. It was acknowledged by the study that despite a number of significant societal and institutional challenges, women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia were establishing and managing more small and medium scale ventures than any time in the past and the trend seems to be growing. Similarly, Iqbal, Melhem & Kokash (2012) investigated entrepreneurship perception and entrepreneurship intention of Saudi university students and examined whether they were ready for the market challenges and risk taking which were considered critical components of entrepreneurship. Using a survey questionnaire, it was found that the satisfying level of students and that the students had intentions of entrepreneurship as well as willingness to put some efforts in entrepreneurial activities. The study suggested that entrepreneurship education should focus on the development of competencies with regard to entrepreneurship and cultural awareness. The present study aims at examining the impact of culture on the effects of entrepreneurial orientation and religiosity on business performance among women entrepreneurs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Lumpkin & Dess (2001) the concept of entrepreneurial orientation refers to the processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry. Pearce, Fritz & Davis (2010) conceptualized entrepreneurial orientation as a set of distinct but related behaviours that have the qualities of innovativeness, proactiveness, competitive aggressiveness, risk taking, and autonomy. Zahra & Neubaum (1998) conceived entrepreneurial orientation as the sum total of a firm's radical innovation, proactive strategic action, and risk-taking activities that are manifested in support of projects with uncertain outcomes. According to Merz & Sauber (1995) the term entrepreneurial orientation is defined as the firm's degree of proactiveness (aggressiveness) in its chosen Product-Market Unit (PMU) and its willingness to innovate and create new offerings.

Al Mamun, Kumar, Ibrahim & Bin Yusoff (2017) argued that there are four factors for measuring entrepreneurial orientation namely: creativity and innovativeness, risk taking, proactiveness and autonomy. They also found that, among these four factors, autonomy was the highest contributor to entrepreneurial orientation among the lower income earners in Kelantan, Malaysia.

Iddagoda & Opatha (2017) defined religiosity as "the extent to which the particular person believes in, and venerates the founder, gods or goddesses of the relevant religion, practices the relevant teaching and participates in the relevant activities. The term religiosity has been defined as a practice engaged by an individual who identified himself or herself to a faith or beliefs based on something, he or she accepts as truth (Hage, 2013). Furthermore, Elias, Yaacob & Othman (2018) identified two dimensions of religiosity, namely intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. They defined intrinsic religiosity as an individual who "achieves the ultimate orientation of religious and more meaningful relationship with God". Extrinsic religiosity, on the other hand, relates to "the application of religious lessons into practices like

self-esteem, confident and honesty” (p. 97). The intrinsic and extrinsic religious measures were also theorized and measured by another study conducted by Cohon, Mazza, Johnson, Enders, Warner, Pasek & Cook (2017) which was aimed to be applicable across cultures.

When trying to understand individuals in relation to entrepreneurship, religion is a concept that can be critical in understanding such intricate relationship. In a review article, Dana (2009) made seven findings in the previous literature in terms of how religion as depositories of values influences entrepreneurship.

- 1) Religions value entrepreneurship to varying degrees;
- 2) Some religions lead to different patterns of entrepreneurship;
- 3) Religious specialization shapes entrepreneurship;
- 4) Credit networks, employment networks, information networks, and supply networks of fellow faith adherents influence entrepreneurship;
- 5) Religions provide entrepreneurship opportunities;
- 6) Religious beliefs can also inhibit entrepreneurial spirit; and
- 7) Religions possess some forms of built-in mechanisms to perpetuate values.

In addition, Dodd & Seaman (1998) argued that religion affects its followers’ entrepreneurial activities, influencing their decision to become entrepreneurs, enterprise management, as well as their entrepreneur’s contact network. The study employed quantitative techniques to examine the level of religiosity among a sample of British entrepreneurs

Another important factor of entrepreneur is culture. This refers to people’s way of life. It can be conceived as patterns of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbol constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including how to make the products; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and values associated” (Kluckhohn, 1951). The significance of culture in human existence leads a number of scholars into making attempts to offer theoretical explanations to its nature and role in human social life. Among the contemporary theorisation attempts of National culture are Trompenaars, (1996); Hall & Hall (1990); Hofstede (1980, 1983); and so on. This study employed Hofstede theory of national culture which offers a better framework for the understanding of culture and its relationship with the remaining variables of the research.

One of the famous theories of national culture is Hofstede (1980, 1983). In his theory, Hofstede (1983) posits that the differences in cultures can be attributed to four fundamental aspects, namely values, rituals, symbols, and heroes. On this basis, he develops four basic dimensions of culture that include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism versus individualism, and masculinity versus femininity. Hofstede’s dimensions of culture were first tested in a quantitative experimental study that involved a large number of IBM employees in over 50 countries. This experiment was later supported by Michael Harris Bond 1980 when he retested dimensions in a study involving six countries. Following Bond’s study, a new dimension, long-term orientation, was added to the previous four proposed by Hofstede. The reason for the selection of this theory is because it attracts many empirical studies (Søndergaard, 1994). The theory has been labelled as one of the most influential, the most significant, and one of the most inspiring cultural theories for researchers to carry out empirical studies (Baptista & Oliveira, 2015). The following is the explanation of the five dimensions:

**Power Distance:** this dimension measures the extent to which those members with less power in an organisation accept a situation of unequal power distribution within a particular setting. When measuring this dimension, the highest score implies the highest level of power confirming the social hierarchy, whereas the lowest score implies a skeptic attitude towards the people in power, therefore, looking for more equal distribution of power in the organisation.

**Individualism versus collectivism:** this dimension of Hofstede’s theory of culture measures the degree to which an individual integrates into groups. This is not to mean selfishness rather it is more about adopting individual decisions and choices. Under this culture, it is usually “I” as opposed to “we”. Individualism is the stark opposite of collectivism where individual loyalty is to the collective and community as they support one another, especially, in times of conflicts with other groups.

**Masculinity versus Femininity:** this is related to the degree of society’s tolerance in relation to ambiguity and uncertainty. The dimension is not related with obedience to rules or risk avoidance. Rather, this is about fear, anxiety and distrust of what is not known and there is emphasis on rituals and fixed habits. A high score of this dimension implies lack of social acceptance to the vague and ambiguous. And the society is likely to have strict principles and laws for behaviour. Conversely, a low score in this dimension implies greater acceptance of ideas.

**Long versus Short-Term Orientation:** this dimension indicates the closeness of a society or organisation to the past or the future. A high score of this dimension implies long-term trend and the realisation of the fact that the world is always changing. Thus, this implies the necessity to deal with change and always being ready for the future by adapting to ever-changing circumstances. On the other hand, a low score on this dimension indicates short-term characterised by the preservation of traditions.

**Indulgence versus Restraint:** this dimension measures happiness, particularly, in the form of indulgence which refers to freedom which individuals enjoy by doing what they want to satisfy their fundamental and natural human desires. A society described by restraint culture controls its needs and satisfies its desires in accordance with some strict societal governing rules. By contrast, a society in the opposite spectrum, indulgence, has the recognition of its self-control over its emotions and the lives of its members

Business performance is also a vital index of business orientation. This refers to the operational ability to satisfy the desires of the company’s major shareholders (Smith & Reece, 1999). However, to fully define the concept of business performance, some regular indicators are used which include profit, return on investment, and turnover or number of customers (Wood, 2006). It has also been subjected to manifold scholarly works. Also, some studies investigated the impact of entrepreneurial orientation and business performance (Fairoz, Hirobumi & Tanaka, 2010; Zulkifili & Perera, 2011; Garg, Joubert & Pellessier, 2014). However, some studies have studied the concept and how its measurement especially in the context of SMEs. Zulkifili & Perera (2011) found two different forms of measures with regard to the concept of business performance which are either subjective or objective. The subjective measures are used often due to the difficulties in obtaining objective measures. Managers usually refuse to avail accurate and objective performance data to researchers. The reason for doing is usually to avoid personal or corporate taxes.

<b>Table 1 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE MEASURES OF BUSINESS PERFORMANCE</b>		
<b>Differentiation Aspect</b>	<b>Subjective Measures</b>	<b>Objective Measures</b>
Indicators	Focus on overall performance	Focus on actual financial indicators
Measurement standard	Key informants are asked to rate performance relative to their competitors (and/or industry)	Scales are not used

Adapted from Dawes (1999); Wall, et al., (2004); Kim (2006) in Zulkifli & Perera (2011)

**Effects of Entrepreneurial Orientation and Religiosity on Business Performance of Women Entrepreneur**

Entrepreneurial orientation has effect on business performance. According to the study of Venter (2014), it was found that entrepreneurial orientation accounts for success of small and

medium-scale business enterprises in South Africa. According to Lumpkin & Dess (2001) the concept of entrepreneurial orientation implies the processes, practices, and decision-making activities that lead to new entry. Frank, Kessler & Fink (2010) also examined the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance. They found that a positive relationship exists between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance. In addition, Bhuian & Habib (2008) study found that there were positive performance effects of entrepreneurship and market orientation and that the interaction between the two concepts positively influenced performance. This implies that firms that are high on market orientation and entrepreneurship tend to be the best performers.

### **Impact of Culture on the Effects of Entrepreneurial Orientation and Religiosity on Business Performance of Women Entrepreneur**

Kluckhohn (1951) defined culture as patterns of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbol constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including how to make the products; the essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and values. In Hofstede's (2011) view, culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others. This explains why Hofstede proposed the following dimensions of culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long term versus short term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint.

Furthermore, entrepreneurial orientation and national culture are two constructs that have been growing in literature on the relationship between the two in recent years particularly with regard to how culture influences nation's level of economic and entrepreneurial development (House, Javidan, Hanges & Dorfman, 2002; Porter, 1990). This is due to the fact that societies are different in their abilities to create and sustain entrepreneurial ventures (Carter & Wilton, 2006; Chrisman, Chua & Steir, 2002). Hofstede (1980) has argued that national culture has impact on the level of entrepreneurship either through the cultural values of the society, or through institutions that represent the culture, as argued by Dickson (2004). In the same vein, Kreiser, et al., (2010) found that uncertainty avoidance and power distance have a significant negative impact on risk-taking levels, whereas uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and power distance have a significant negative influence on proactive firm behaviours.

Culture and entrepreneurship have also been investigated in relation to gender and other factors. Mungai & Ogot (2012) studied various cultural factors that affect gender involvement in entrepreneurship in the context of Kenya as a multi-ethnic country. They compared four Kenyan ethnic groups that include Luo, Kikuyu, Kalenjin & Kamba on differential rate of gender involvement in entrepreneurship. The study found no significant gender differences on community perception of entrepreneurship. It also found that cultural influences played a great role in women's propensities towards entrepreneurship. In a much broader sense, Eroğlu & Piçak (2011) studied how national culture influences entrepreneurship in Turkey. Based on the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the study found that Turkey's culture which was deemed high on collectivism, high on uncertainty avoidance and high on power distance, had negative relationship with entrepreneurship.

Culture is a concept that has been continually associated with entrepreneurship. The culture of a certain group of people, a place or a country is likely to influence entrepreneurial perceptions and activities of the people of that culture. Studies on culture and entrepreneurship could be divided into those with narrow approach and those with broader approach. For instance, a study conducted by Bogan & Darity (2008) on the evolution of African American entrepreneurship examined how economic social and political forces have negative influence on the development of black entrepreneurship particularly when compared to other immigrant groups. Through the analysis of 90 years of consensus data, the study found empirical support that many immigrants could count on resources which were unavailable to native non-whites

that facilitated entrepreneurship. Likewise, Davidsson (1995) carried out a study on culture (values and beliefs), structure and regional levels of entrepreneurship within the context of Sweden. The findings of the study indicated that national culture has significant effect on entrepreneurship.

## METHODOLOGY

This research study adopted a critical review of relevant literature on the effects of culture on the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation, religiosity and business performance among women entrepreneur in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, it is a review of past research studies on the subject matter.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the underlined significance of culture in entrepreneurship, Urban (2007) developed a framework that will help in understanding the role of culture in entrepreneurship particularly in the context of South Africa. The study found that, in spite of the South Africa's obvious regulatory environment, low entrepreneurial activities still persisted. This obliges the understanding of the interplay between culture, self, context, and entrepreneurship. The model developed by the study shows that cultural values affect the perception of an individual which leads to important entrepreneurial outcomes. Thus, the study used culture as a moderator in the relationship between contextual factors and entrepreneurial outcomes.

Similarly, the influence of culture on entrepreneurship was studied by Sajjad, Shafi & Dad (2012) in the context of Pakistan. They found that culture has a significant impact on entrepreneur intention and that different cultures have different ways of influencing entrepreneurial intention as well as different ways to impact on intention towards perceived feasibility and perceived desirability. Also, another model was also developed by Abzari & Safari (2006) in which they identified different cultural factors that influence entrepreneurship development in Iran.

Religion and culture are two sides of the same coin. It has been argued that one of the ways that people benefit from religion is through its promotion of secondary control (George, Ellison & Larson, 2002; Spilka, Hood, Hunsberger & Gorsuch, 2003). What secondary control implies is one's attempt to adjust part of self in order to accept a situation (Morling, Kitayama & Miyamoto, 2003). Furthermore, religiosity promotes socially relevant advantages through its encouragement of fellowship with others as well as formal involvement in social activities with fellow religious people (Chen & Contrada, 2007).

In terms of the relationship between religiosity and culture, it is often argued that religion is a form of culture for being a unified system of beliefs and practices that differ from one religion to another. However, according to Sasaki & Kim (2011), religiosity/religion can be distinguished from culture as the former is considered overarching system of beliefs and practices that have to do with the supernatural. A few studies have tried to study the relationship between the two concepts (see Sasaki & Kim, 2011; Cohen, Wu & Miller, 2016; Kaasa, 2016). Evidences that national culture influences entrepreneurial activities and societies tend to vary in their entrepreneurial abilities and entrepreneurial activities (Steir, 2002). It has also been argued that national culture is among the major determinants of a nation's level of economic and entrepreneurial development (Porter, 1990; House et al., 2002). Hofstede (1980) also argued that national culture influences levels of entrepreneurship and by extension the business performance of the firms within the country. National culture has also been associated with the performance of new products in the market, as studied by Eisend, Evanschitzky & Gilliland (2016). However, there have not been sufficient scholarly efforts on the impact of national culture on business performance.

National culture has been considered by the previous research as a mediator variable in relation to entrepreneurial orientation. For example, Petrović, et al., (2015) found that national

culture was a significant moderator in the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance. Other studies such as Marino, et al., (2002) also examined the mediating role of culture on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and strategic alliance portfolio extensiveness. While Petrović, et al., (2015) supported the mediating effect of culture on the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and business performance; no support could be found on the mediating effect of culture on the relationship between religiosity and business performance despite their likely plausible relationship.

As noted above, there are evidences that national culture influences entrepreneurial activities and societies tend to vary in their entrepreneurial abilities and entrepreneurial activities (Steir, 2002). It has also been argued that national culture is among the major determinants of a nation's level of economic and entrepreneurial development (Porter, 1990; House et al., 2002). Hofstede (1980) argued that national culture influences levels of entrepreneurship and, by extension, the business performance of the firms within the country. National culture has also been associated with the performance of new products in the market, as studied by Eisend, Evanschitzky & Gilliland (2016).

## CONCLUSION

Base on the review and analysis made above, it is evident that culture can influence the interaction between entrepreneurial orientation, religiosity and business performance of women entrepreneur. Therefore, prospective entrepreneur must consider the culture of a particular nation in ensuring success of their small scale and medium enterprises. The way of life of a society is crucial in determining the success or failure of a business enterprise.

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