

# Country-Specific Sociocultural Institutional Factors as Determinants of Female Entrepreneurs' Successful Sustainable Business Strategies within the Context of Turkey and the UK

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## 1. Introduction

As a result of global challenges, taking action on economic development consistent with the principles of sustainable development is an important task for governments, academia, and industry around the world (Urbaniec, 2018). Since the 2005 world summit on social development, societies have been expected to design their growth strategies according to the three main sustainable development goals: economic development, social inclusion, and environmental protection which reflect the three pillars of the triple bottom line approach characterising sustainable business development (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019, p. 3).

Producing innovative products or services in an ecological manner requires a sustainable innovation (SI) approach. Innovation and sustainability in the economic environment, have to be interconnected and in order to ensure long-term success and as well as a healthy economy that takes into account both environmental performance and social responsibility (Cornescu and Adam, 2013). It is widely accepted that, the most fundamental element of SI is a social dialogue (Boons and Lüdeke-Freund, 2013) through collaboration and cooperation with stakeholders and customer integration as an indispensable factor (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018). The key stakeholders' involvement facilitates the identification of the nature of sustainable outcomes and feed this information back into the organisational systems through new strategy development around business processes although there is always a significant level of uncertainty remains (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019).

Innovating towards sustainability is a strategic decision that occurs through modifying several blocks of the business model, such as the value proposition (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018) and supply chain. In smaller businesses, the closeness to the customer and to the supplier facilitates knowledge transfer and internalisation of knowledge which leads to faster decision making and creating SI (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019). Consequently, SMEs are more dependent on their stakeholders than larger businesses where SMEs wish to maintain good relations within their network and the markets in which they operate. And yet, although the small size of female founded/owned businesses is discussed as a "weakness" (Akehusrt *et al.* 2012; Bowen and Hisrich 1986; Hayrapetyan 2016) due to the difficulties related with the access to finance, the lack of specific knowledge and training and the fear of taking risk (Akehusrt *et al.* 2012), from the SI perspective the small size creates a robust foundation for

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the involvement of suppliers and the active inclusion of customers as a part of SI (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018, p. 8).

Institutional theory has been a popular theoretical foundation for exploring a wide variety of topics in different domains, ranging from institutional economics and political science to organisation theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). The institutional context draws on the concept of formal and informal institutions as “rules of the game,” introduced by Douglass C. North (1990). Formal institutions are political and economy-related rules which create or restrict opportunity fields for entrepreneurship. Informal institutions, which include the norms and attitudes of a society. Creating a new venture involves a high risk under any conditions (Alrich and Fiol, 1994) and the institutional context, helps to determine the process of gaining legitimacy. This is critical for entrepreneurs to overcome the liabilities of newness and to increase survival prospects (Ahlstrom and Bruton, 2002). Although research on the relationship between institutional context and female entrepreneurship has developed strong insights, to date limited studies have examined the country-specific factors which may account for variance in women entrepreneurs’ successful business sustainability strategies and subsequent outcomes (Kaciak and Welsh, 2018, p.631). The present research attempts to close this gap through taking a closer look at the country-specific sociocultural factors creating differences in female entrepreneurs’ business sustainability strategies (BSS) towards SI within the context of Turkey and the UK. This paper examines whether networking strategies, growth orientation, work pattern, industry preference and business partnership structures (as a part of their BSS) of well-established female entrepreneurs vary between two different cultural environments, namely the UK and Turkey. Understanding networking strategies of the participants will enable us to examine the extent of social dialogue and collaboration and cooperation between the entrepreneur and her network contacts which is a fundamental element of SI in the generation of the value proposition. The business partnership structure; networking behaviour and pattern as well as industry preference will improve insights into business modelling whilst growth orientation and work pattern will help us to understand the strategic aspect of the business model. All together the findings will help us to evaluate the suitability and sustainability aspects of the business model towards SI.

This paper is organised as follows. The next chapter provides an overview of sustainable innovation and institutional theory to create the theoretical foundation of this paper. The following chapter discusses women’s status and women entrepreneurship in both countries within the context of sociocultural environment. This directly precedes the methodology which is in turn followed by the presentation of survey findings and a discussion of the key themes observed. Some concluding remarks are then drawn.

## **2. Sustainable Innovation**

Innovation is defined as the act of creating significant change or novelty through the “development and implementation of new ideas by people who over time engage in transactions with others” (Brown, et al., 2019, p. 1). Rogers defines innovation as: “An innovation is an idea, practice, or project that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers, 2003, p. 12). Innovation is a search process characterized by less regularity in its outcome and is represented by incremental or radical changes in product,

process, and value activities. Innovation generally refers to higher firm performance (Shin, et al., 2019), openness to new ideas, improved administrative efficiencies and adoption of new process technologies, leading to supply chain performance improvement (Panayides and Lun, 2009).

Cornescu and Adam (2013) argue that SI is distinguished from a traditional innovation by bounding it to the constraints of society, technology, environment and economy to facilitate sustainable societies by producing and consuming in a sustainable way. Therefore, SI involves multiple actors of the entrepreneurial process such as government, educational institutions, consumers and suppliers. Brown *et al.* (2019) posit that SI requires businesses become key actors within sustainable transitions through strategically changing their operations to create beneficial impacts from their economic activities that seek sustainable growth through innovation. This is achieved through combinations of innovations in process, product, organisation, business model and market (Brown, et al., 2019).

SI starts with complying with regulations and avoiding waste; followed by improving the supply chain and designing new products or services and finally finishes with the conversion of the business model leads to a radical change within the surrounding institutional context (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018). Uhlaner *et al.* (2012) argue that SMEs Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) transform their business models faster than large corporations because: they are more flexible; the organisation is flat and that; this facilitates dynamic decision making. The authors assert that start up and small businesses can quickly change their business model towards sustainability and pioneer large companies to follow them although SMEs and large businesses innovate differently and face different challenges (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018).

Since the innovative process is accepted to be sustainable only when entrepreneurs achieve innovation by the integration of economic, environmental and social concerns and the essence of SI is shaped by a process perspective on sustainability (Jorna and Faber, 2006), any step of the entrepreneurial process, such as product or process, is sustainable when a balance has been achieved between planet, profit and people (Jorna and Faber, 2006). From the internationalisation perspective, any enterprise targeting expansion into foreign markets should strategically target efficiency and local responsiveness at the same time (Mense-Petermann, et al., 2010). Innovation gives entrepreneurs a competitive advantage and can change the well-established business models or modify the structure of an industry and the economy of a country (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018). SI enables businesses to improve their performance gradually in social, environmental and financial context and considers globalisation and localisation processes, new stakeholders, temporal impact, and use of indicators and combines all these elements to create truly sustainable value (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018, p. 2).

Geissdoerfer *et al.* (2018) distinguish four types of innovation in relation to business models: start up, transformation, diversification, and merger or acquisition. Innovation through diversification, as well as the merger and acquisition of new business models, are more typical of large companies because they have more resources to implement these changes. An alternative to the lack of resources in SMEs to innovate through the diffusion of the business

model by replicability and mimicry in different markets (Schaltegger, et al., 2016). Innovating the business model towards sustainability is a strategic decision that occurs through modifying several of its business model building blocks, such as the value proposition (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018).

The value proposition reflects a business and society dialog concerning the balance of economic, ecological and social needs as such values are temporally and spatially determined (Boons and Lüdeke-Freund, 2013, p. 13). The authors introduce the fundamental element of SI is a social dialogue in balance between the actors in the generation of the value proposition. For businesses, collaboration and coopetition are fundamental mechanisms towards SI where customer integration is an indispensable factor (Shin, et al., 2019, p. 3). In SMEs, the closeness of entrepreneurs to the customer and to the supplier facilitates knowledge transfer and internalisation of knowledge which leads to faster decision making and launching SI. SMEs are much more dependent on their partners and wish to maintain good relations within their network and the markets in which they operate, which are usually closer (Aguilar-Fernández and Otegi-Olaso, 2018, p. 8). To create value through sustainable innovation, identification of business models and clear understanding of an innovation network are required. An innovation network is composed of various innovation actors who are either direct or indirect participant of the business model. A sustainable innovation market is dependent on the interaction among these participants, and scholars emphasized the need of collaboration-based partnership activities for a successful marketing of sustainable innovation (Shin, et al., 2019). Consequently, it can be concluded that SI is viewed as a social process that determines a business' innovativeness depending on the type of channel relationship between partners involved. De Medeiros, *et al.* (2014) advocate that in SI, the development and maintenance of an innovation-oriented learning culture is critical to success. This is described as an organisation's ability to adapt its own vision, develop competencies, and allow critical reflective analysis through innovation. Such learning is required to overcome barriers, especially cultural barriers to exploring sustainable opportunities. Thus, the pursuit of innovation through network externalities or critical mass is encouraged. Panayides and Lun (2009) concluded that diverse forms of social capital contribute more than any other explanatory variable to SI. SI holds normative values, going beyond traditional innovation, through a focus on why innovation is sought to overcome societal and environmental problems, and to propose solutions. Potential collaborating partners in SI therefore need to be aligned more closely. This also acts as a signal to potential partners on the suitability to collaborate (Brown, et al., 2019).

### **3. Institutional Context**

The application of institutional theory has proven itself to play a major role in helping to explain the forces that shape entrepreneurial success (Bruton and Ahlstrom, 2003) through analysing, for example, the direct action of governments in constructing and maintaining a supportive environment for entrepreneurship, in addition to the societal norms that exist toward entrepreneurship (Bruton *et al.*, 2010). The institutional environment helps to determine the process of gaining legitimacy, which is critical for entrepreneurs to overcome the liabilities of newness (Stinchcombe, 2000) and increase survival prospects (Ahlstrom and Bruton, 2002).

The term legitimacy commonly refers to the right to exist and perform an activity in a certain way (Suchman, 1995), with ventures in turn having to prove their value by demonstrating that they engage in legitimate activities. Therefore, entrepreneurs need to behave in a desirable or appropriate manner within a socially constructed system or face sanctions for deviating from accepted norms (Suchman, 1995). These norms and values that constrain the range of strategic options (Ahlstrom and Bruton, 2002) are produced by the culture that the entrepreneur is embedded within. This culture leads to social legitimation (Davidsson, 1995), making the entrepreneurial career more valued and socially recognised while creating a favourable institutional environment for entrepreneurial activities (Etzioni, 1987). Therefore, the cultural environment legitimises and promotes new venture formation, influences individuals' opportunity recognition and their willingness to take risks in starting new ventures (Terjesen and Lloyd, 2015). This environment therefore creates a foundation for nascent entrepreneurs to develop unique business survival and growth strategies (Terjesen and Lloyd, 2015), whilst social institutions provide potential entrepreneurs with access to the necessary resources (Abzari and Safari, 2014) for entrepreneurship to emerge within a culture. Bitektine and Haack (2017) encapsulate three different perspectives of legitimacy as property, perception and process. The *property* perspective draws attention to what is legitimate and underlines the relationship between an entity and its institutional environment, the *perception* perspective focuses on for whom something is legitimate and discusses how these individuals, or groups, form their judgements within a particular context. The *process* perspective highlights the formulation and production of legitimacy and the changes that take place within a particular group (Salmivaara, 2017).

Institutions do not merely control entrepreneurs; entrepreneurs also control them, through business activity (Henrekson and Sanandaji, 2010, p. 1) and actors who initiate changes that contribute to transforming existing, or creating new, institutions (DiMaggio, 1988). Entrepreneurs are actors who leverage resources to create new or transform existing institutions (Maguire, Hardy, and Lawrence, 2004) towards SI through initiating divergent changes that break with the institutionalised template of business models within a given institutional context and mobilising resources to implement change (Battilana, et al., 2009).

Institutional theory is widely accepted as a suitable frame of reference for addressing the external context that shapes women's entrepreneurial activity, especially when cultural conditions create additional barriers for women. This is particularly true when considering that women are still defined primarily through their domestic roles and family obligations within many societies (Achtenhagen and Welter 2007; Marlow 2002). A number of studies have attempted to explain variation in the level of entrepreneurship among women through analysing the cultural factors influencing entrepreneurial activities (such as Srivastava 2017; Itani *et al.* 2011 and Li *et al.* 2016 for Chinese context for entrepreneurship). Consequently, scholars have posited that countries with similar cultural characteristics demonstrate similar entrepreneurial profiles (Ute and Uhlaner 2010; Thurik and Dejardin 2012), with some facilitating and promoting entrepreneurship while others discourage such activities by making them difficult to pursue (Baumol *et al.*, 2007; Mueller and Thomas 2001).

#### **4. Women's Status in Turkey and the UK**

Women's status in society is a controversial topic in Turkey. The gap between women's status and rights that the law provides and protects and their reality in practice is substantial, and the government has not addressed this gap through policy development (Nazliaka, 2017). Although gender equality is protected by the Constitution, the Turkish President and government representatives have challenged this provision through their statements, including with remarks such as: "Women cannot be treated as equal to men as it is against nature" (BBC, 2014); "Motherhood is the best career" (Hurriyet News, 2015); "Unemployment rates are rising because women have started to look for jobs" (Cumhuriyet News, 2009); "The economic crisis is over, men can find jobs, and women can go back to housework" (NTV MSNBC News, 2003). The President has also accused feminists of rejecting motherhood on several occasions and he advised his "dear sisters" to have at least three, or preferably five, children (Spiegel, 2012). The current average household size in Turkey is 3.5 people (Turkstat, 2016).

On the UK side, Esping-Andersen (2010) claims that the so-called 'gender role revolution' is at the doorstep arguing that families in the UK have already been more individualised and have gradually departed from the family norm based around a married heterosexual couple raising their children, with a traditional gendered division of labour. There has been a rise in women's participation in the labour market over the past few decades and, in today's couple families, the tendency is for both partners to work. With this rise in labour market participation, policy-makers have taken steps to reduce family-work conflicts, including through childcare provision, improvement in part-time working conditions and parental leave (Williams, 2005). However, women, especially those with young children, still disproportionately work part-time and continue to perform the bulk of unpaid care (Scott and Clery, 2013).

In general Turkish men, in contrast, take no childcare responsibilities and instead leave it to the rest of the household, with further differences in paternity leave conditions between the two countries reinforcing this (Dad, 2019). Against this backdrop, motherhood is the main career of women with young children in 86% of cases (Turkstat, 2016). Women also generally undertake all household chores. British women undertake 60% of housework and 70% of caring for family members. In total, a British woman spends an average of 36 hours on domestic responsibilities as compared to the 18 hours recorded by men (Scott and Clery, 2013).

The female labour force participation rates are 72% and 36% in the UK and Turkey respectively. Prominently, 58% of employed women in Turkey work in the service industry and 26% in agriculture (Turkstat, 2018). The most common sector of employment for women in the UK is health and social work (The World Bank, 2018), with 78% of jobs in this sector and 70% of jobs in education being held by women. Similarly to Turkey, sectors where only a small proportion of jobs are held by women include construction (14%), transportation and storage (22%) and manufacturing (24%) (McGuinness, 2018).

Around 11% of women are self-employed compared to 19% of men in the UK (McGuinness, 2018). The self-employment rates of males and females in Turkey are 36.6% and 31% respectively. However, these figures do not provide an accurate picture of the gender-based employment pattern in Turkey. Income generation through commercial activities is forbidden by law for full-time employers in the country. Therefore, males employed full-time tend to

setup a business under their wives' names without the wife's consent and knowledge (Kizilkoyun, 2012).

Literacy rates are 99% and 92.65% in the UK and Turkey respectively (Country Economy, 2018). Compulsory primary education (12 years) is the biggest factor in reducing illiteracy in Turkey. However, the rate of illiterate women remains five times more than that of males (Turkstat, 2017). This gap partly closes in the higher education category where 13.1% of females compared to 17.9% of males participate. Turkish women often cannot complete their education, mostly because the family will not allow it (38.1%), including for economic reasons (32.3%), or due to getting married or becoming a mother (9.5%) (Turkstat, 2016). The higher education participation rates are 56% and 44% for females and males in the UK respectively (GOV, 2018).

Violence against women in Turkey is another fundamental problem. In 2017, 409 women were killed by their relatives for various reasons, including requests for more freedom in life (The Guardian, 2017). Domestic violence against women in the UK also remains a serious problem. For instance, a British Crime Survey demonstrated that 45% of women had experienced at least one incident of domestic violence or sexual assault since the age of 16 (BL, 2013).

Turkish female entrepreneurs, especially those living in rural areas, are deprived from any kind of structured and accessible support from women entrepreneurship support organisations. Women Entrepreneurs Association of Turkey (KAGIDER) is the most influential and powerful women entrepreneur organisation in the country, boasting three branches situated only in two big cities in Turkey and Brussels. In contrast, there are countless accessible regional and national women entrepreneur support organisations in the UK, with female entrepreneurship further supported by the Chamber of Commerce, even in smaller towns.

## **5. Female Entrepreneurship in Turkey and the UK**

Women entrepreneurs around the world face both social and structural challenges (Welsh *et al.*, 2016). The social challenges include a lack of self-confidence, facing dominant patriarchal mindsets and institutionalised sexism, bearing the responsibility for the household and childcare, and receiving only one chance at being in business due to the lack of familial and societal support (Moghadam, 2003).

Structurally, the first challenge is a lack of education and knowledge in the areas of skill development, basic business and women's rights. Second, there exists legal discrimination and a lack of economic and political power for women. As such, when women attempt to launch a business they confront a number of barriers, including around access to finance, unequal opportunity in the application process, securing locations to rent or buy, access to reasonable and high-quality trade goods or raw materials, lack of customer confidence and respect, sexual harassment, lack of community respect and wage differentials (Hisrich and Brush 1988; Lee-Gosselin and Grise 1990; Hatun and Ozgen 2001). There can additionally be limited governmental support for women entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries (Welsh *et al.*, 2016).

In light of the above discussion about women's general status in Turkey and the UK, this paper will examine women specifically as entrepreneurs. To begin, Turkish female entrepreneurs

have been characterised as being commonly involved in the service sector, more willing to take risks and often found to be in a disadvantageous position regarding financial network ties when compared to their British counterparts (Terjesen and Lloyd, 2015).

The major problems that Turkish female entrepreneurs encounter are identified as including finance, the balancing of family and work life, discrimination (Simsek and Uzay, 2009), personnel problems, lack of business mentorship or networking opportunities, limited business experience (Nazliaka, 2017) and similarly low hiring experience (Hisrich and Ozturk, 1999). The government has also been discussed as a major obstacle to their success due to policies regarding production and financial issues, extending from complicated tax laws to gaps in social policy concerning the work-family balance that are not being addressed; the latter relating to childcare and elder care (Welsh *et al.*, 2016). While being an entrepreneur affects Turkish female's roles in family life negatively due to a "clash of commitments" (Welsh *et al.*, 2016), it can have a positive effect on their roles socially, economically and individually (Hatun and Ozgen, 2001).

Beyond suffering from stress associated with insufficient demand for their products or services, Turkish female entrepreneurs further believe that entrepreneurship is stereotyped as a masculine profession and therefore will not be immune to gender-based bias (Carter and Williams 2003; Welsh *et al.*, 2016). Kutanis and Bayraktaroglu (2003) discovered that one third of Turkish women entrepreneurs are dependent entrepreneurs who maintain a business that was already established by either a father, brother(s), or husband. Those male members of the business were in turn found to become business mentors for the female members.

Family and their moral support play an important role in Turkish women's personal and professional lives. Family moral support empowers family members to influence work and can help the female entrepreneur recognise and address her weaknesses through open communication. In this context, Powell and Eddleston (2013) show that female entrepreneurs experience benefits from both instrumental and affective family enrichment and support (Welsh *et al.* 2016; Kaciak and Welsh 2018). Contrarily, the same support can create conflict and exacerbate women entrepreneurs' problems due to family members' authority, legitimacy and power to interfere with the business (Welsh *et al.*, 2016). Shelton (2006) therefore suggests that work-family conflict may impact venture performance negatively due to the spill over of negative emotions, attitudes and behaviours from family to business relations (Jennings and McDougald, 2007).

Turning to the other case, Terjesen and Lloyd (2015) assert that female entrepreneurs in the UK are largely involved in technology sector businesses, are well-educated and enjoy a wide range of accessible support and training programmes across the country. On the other hand, they lack opportunity recognition and perception skills, as well as role models. The social challenges that the British female entrepreneur encounters prominently includes a lack of self-belief and the fear of failure. The structural challenges are, first, a self-perceived lack of key business skills, especially in the areas of financial management and market development. Second, limited access to role models, business mentors and related networks (Deloitte, 2016). Fernandes (2018) concludes that the major problems that British female entrepreneurs encounter are identified as limited access to funding, social expectations to act as a male, the

threat of not being taken seriously, difficulties in building a robust network with professionals, establishing a healthy family-work balance and the fear of failure. Related to these factors, it should also be noted that the literature further observes how female business networks are generally smaller in Turkey as compared to those in the UK (Welsh *et al.*, 2016), that both British and Turkish female entrepreneurs suffer from invisibility in business (Mueller and Thomas, 2001) and, similarly to their Turkish counterparts, female entrepreneurs in the UK think that an entrepreneurial career holds a high status in society (GEM, 2017).

## **6. Methodology**

The data were collected through a survey study. A survey was deemed to be the most appropriate method for the purpose of this study for three reasons: first, survey research is used to quantitatively describe specific aspects of a given population; second, the data required for survey research are collected from people and are, therefore, subjective; and, finally, survey research uses a selected portion of the population, with findings able to be generalised back to this population as a whole. The survey design process was completed in two steps: developing the sampling plan and creating the survey questions (Glasow, 2005). The data were transferred onto Excel and SPSS for further analysis.

This study uses national culture to identify the established authoritative guidelines for social behaviour and applies Hofstede's Culture Model to describe the sociocultural institutional context. The Hofstede Model of National Culture has six dimensions, which are: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; long-term versus short-term orientation; and indulgence (Hofstede, 2018). The long-term orientation and indulgence dimensions were not applied to the case countries due to the fact that Turkey's intermediate scores were in the middle of the scale, indicating that no dominant cultural preference could be inferred for these particular dimensions. Turkey and the UK were selected according to how both demonstrate different cultural patterns, thereby creating fertile ground for comparison within the context of this paper.

This paper aims to present the findings from quantitative survey-based research conducted with 240 established female entrepreneurs from the UK and Turkey (120 from each). The respondents were selected on the basis of business survival and success. The business success criteria were: age of business (>5 years); stability or growth recorded on profitability; sales volume; and number of employees within the last financial year.

### *6.1. Sampling*

The target sample group was comprised of successful female businesses within northwest England and western Turkey. These regions were selected due to their convenience and accessibility. On the UK side, the sample group was accessed through women business support organisations (such as the Liverpool Ladies Network), the University of Liverpool's Lead Innovative Leadership Programme, Manchester University's Innospace Programme and Chamber of Commerce organisations. On the Turkish side, women were accessed through Chamber of Commerce organisations, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University business network and local women business support groups. The survey was also applied through face-to-face interviews at various business events.

After collecting the responses, the final sample selection was made on the basis of business success. Only successful businesses or, in other words, established entrepreneurs were accepted to this study.

## 6.2. *Question Wording*

The Federation of Small Business (FSB) survey, Lifting Barriers to Growth in UK Small Businesses by University of Glamorgan Business School (Carter et al., 2006) and The New Entrepreneur Scholarships (NES) Follow-Up Survey (Jayawarna et al., 2006) were used which had been used and tested by the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Limited and Manchester University respectively. The survey was translated into Turkish for the Turkish participants and was initially tested with 30 respondents (15 from each country) to eliminate any misinterpretation or potentially offensive statements. The final survey was transferred onto a proprietary online survey collection tool and distributed with great help from the aforementioned organisations across the case regions.

## 6.3. *Reliability Analysis*

Cronbach's alpha is the most common measure of the internal consistency (reliability) of a questionnaire. The reliability test results for this study are shown in Table 3 and indicate a high level of internal consistency for the questionnaire.

<Table 1 is here>

## **7. Findings**

Each set of responses (Turkey and the UK) were transferred from into SPSS and Excel separately as two data sets. In what follows, this data will be considered in relation to the key variables identified as potentially influencing the success of female entrepreneurs' business strategies in different cultural contexts. It shall therefore consider, inter alia, participants' demographic information, the obstacles they perceive in starting or growing their businesses and their networking preferences. A more detailed discussion of these themes will then be presented.

### 7.1. *National Culture*

As noted above, to describe the cultural environment within Turkey and the UK, Hofstede's Model of National Culture was used (Hofstede, 2018). Turkey and the UK demonstrate fundamentally different cultural patterns and therefore it is expected that there will be a variation in BSS between cultural environments. Turkey is a country characterised by high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, femininity and collectivism. The UK, on the other hand, is a country of individualism, masculinity, low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance. These two countries are, therefore, appropriate choices for comparing the successful business strategies of established female entrepreneurs in line with the above state interests of this study. Based on the model, the culture profiles of the UK and Turkey are given in Table 2 and 3 below.

<Table 2 is here>

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## 7.2. *Demographics*

At the time of this survey, the British participants were within the ages of 31 to 40 as compared to the ages of 41-50 of the Turkish participants. Both groups included women who were married with children. The British participants predominantly held a postgraduate degree and studied art followed by business studies. The Turkish participants held an undergraduate degree as their highest academic achievement, having studied business or economics.

The British participants had decided upon a more specific, industry-dependent subject of study, namely art, whilst their Turkish counterparts had studied an industry-independent subject, namely business. Half of the female British businesses were linked to the arts in some way, therefore speaking directly to their latest subject of study. On this point, a study reports that 28% of British women have turned their hobby into a business (Ferguson, 2017) with the aim of achieving a greater job satisfaction (The Guardian, 2017). 33% of the Turkish participants in the study at hand stated that their businesses were not linked to their subjects of study at university. Table 4 shows relevant demographics and entrepreneurial characteristics of the participants.

<Table 4 is here>

Within the context of the demographic data, the most remarkable difference is observed between the two groups besides their education level, subject of study and business setup age. On the former, it is notable that the British participants had a higher level of academic achievement than their Turkish counterparts which, it will be argued, can be related to cultural differences.

Both groups of participants had engaged in further professional training to improve entrepreneurial capabilities. As before, the subject preferences vary between the two groups. The British participants were observed to have undertaken training on leadership, management and operational issues, whilst the Turkish respondents largely undertook training around sectoral information, English language skills and leadership.

## 7.3. *Previous Employment and Entrepreneurial Experience*

The first successful and the oldest surviving businesses had been established within the ages of 20 to 29 and 30 to 39 for the British and Turkish participants respectively. The British female entrepreneurs were 10 years younger than their Turkish counterparts when they setup the first succeeding business.

The majority of participants were in non-managerial employment in the same or a different industry than their existing business with a minority in self-employment prior to setting up their current businesses, thereby demonstrating that participants did not hold any previous entrepreneurial experience. However, the second business ownership rate among the Turkish cohort is two-fold of the British one. The rates of business closure and handover among the Turkish group outnumbered the rates of the British sample by 3:1 and 11:1 respectively. Only the sold-out rate is higher among the British participants.

Both groups had started their current businesses from scratch with only 5% and 1% of the Turkish and British participants respectively had inherited the business. The British females

held sole ownership over the business as opposed to the Turkish females who often held joint ownership with close relatives and/or husbands. Further relating to familial ties, the majority of Turkish respondents (63%) had an entrepreneur family member as opposed to the British participants who commonly had none (76%).

#### 7.4. *Growth Orientation*

The British participants exhibited strong growth orientation but they reported existence of uncertainty; increasing competition in the market; lack of suitable and accessible external funding, skilled staff and affordable physical resources - such as building premises – as the major impediments towards business growth. In order to test the significance of the relationship between growth orientation and the perceived impediments towards growth, the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was conducted. The results showed that growth-oriented participants perceived the obstacles of the lack of required capital, skilled staff and affordable physical resources, as well as uncertain market conditions and increased competition to work against business growth. In other words, all the stated obstacles were significantly linked to growth orientation. A small proportion of the participants were not interested in growing the business because they wanted to maintain a healthy balance between work and life and they wanted to keep their business at a manageable size so that they could retain full control over it. The  $\chi^2$  test results showed that there was a significant relationship between the intention not to grow the business and considerations regarding work-life balance and the overall manageability of the business.

The Turkish participants were also growth-oriented. The major impediments against business growth in this context were reported as uncertainty and intense competition in the market, followed by the limited availability of suitable external funding, as well as a lack of skilled staff, heavy legal requirements and absence of affordable physical resources. The  $\chi^2$  test results showed that the obstacles of uncertainty and intense competition in the market, lack of suitable funding and lack of skilled staff were significantly related to growth orientation among this sample's growth-oriented females. Similar to the UK results, a small proportion did not intend to grow the business predominantly because they wanted to keep the business at a manageable size and they cared about having a healthy work-life balance and due to unfavourable market conditions. Among the reasons not to grow, unfavourable market conditions is the sole variable that held a significant relationship with the lack of growth orientation. Keeping a healthy work-life balance and keeping the business within a manageable size were the main priorities and were subsequently more important than entrepreneurial growth for the British and Turkish participants respectively.

#### 7.5. *Networking*

Networking pattern analysis was conducted based on four elements of the networks: type of contact; networking motivation; frequency of contact; and helpfulness of contact.

The British participants' main networking motivation was obtaining moral support followed by obtaining business advice and business referral. At the startup stage, the majority had contacted with professional services followed by family members and friends and finally government agencies. The sources of moral support were specified as family and friends, other women entrepreneurs, previous work colleagues and women related organisations and

networks. Evidently other women entrepreneurs and previous work colleagues were consulted often and found to be very helpful by the participants. The participants were further engaging with trade associations to gather industry related information, in addition to professional services and the Government to access business advisory services. They identified “Universities” as a source of skills development opportunities with whom they had contacted fairly often with a limited help received. Customers and suppliers were contacted to get business referral occasionally which was found somehow helpful. Aside from their closest contacts, these other network interactions were also found, at least in some limited capacity, to be helpful by the participants. On frequency, only previous work colleagues and women related organizations and networks were contacted very often, universities were contacted fairly often and other business contacts (Stated as indirect competitors, internet, private training companies and individual mentors), customers or/and suppliers, trade associations and family or/and friends were contacted occasionally. Professional services and women related organisations were contacted rarely.

As for the Turkish entrepreneurs, their networking pattern demonstrated numerous similarities and differences. Similar to their British counterparts, the main networking motivation was obtaining moral support followed by – different than the British cohort - obtaining industry information and financial support. Same as their British counterparts, the Turkish participants contacted family or/and friends, previous work colleagues, other women entrepreneurs and women related organizations and networks to obtain moral support. However, it was striking that they were too taking part in government projects to obtain moral support as well given these projects are an unusual means by which to obtain such support. At the startup stage, they contacted government agencies, professional services and family and friends. The most frequently engaged network contact was family and friends contacted very often and perceived very helpful. Customers and suppliers, professional services, trade associations’ other women entrepreneurs and women related organisations and networks were contacted fairly often. Only Customers and suppliers; and professional services were found very helpful as opposed to trade associations, other women entrepreneurs, women related organizations and networks, government agencies, universities and previous work colleagues were found somehow helpful. Government agencies, universities and previous work colleagues were contacted occasionally.

#### *7.6. Business Partnership*

The vast majority of the British participants were solo entrepreneurs. A small proportion of them were in a business partnership with either the husband or non-relative females and males. On the Turkish side, the vast majority were in business partnership with the husband and male relatives. A small proportion of them were either solo entrepreneurs or in a business partnership with relative/non-relative females.

#### *7.7. Business Industry and Business Survival*

Both groups had preferred to establish a business in the service sector, which is generally characterised more as a female industry (Sweida and Alan, 2015).

To identify the variables which had an impact on business survival, the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was conducted between them. These results are shown in Tables 5 and considered in greater depth within the following discussion. Table 6 shows a representative result of the  $\chi^2$  test.

<Table 5 is here>

<Table 6 is here>

## 8. Outcomes and Discussion

As noted above, Turkey and the UK were selected as case countries due to significant differences in their national cultural dimension values, as based on the Culture Model developed by Hofstede. Within the context of this study, the established entrepreneur was defined as someone who had found success in her business that was at least five years old at the time this study was conducted.

The high power distance culture in Turkey manifests itself in the lower educational achievement of the Turkish participants as compared to those of the British ones. In a high power distance culture, women's access to education is restricted, due to the patriarchal culture pattern. To elaborate briefly, the majority of Turkish women do not pursue their education further mostly because the family will not allow it or due to changes in familial circumstances such as getting married or become a mother. The average (mean) age at first marriage for women in Turkey is 23.3 years, which coincides with the end of university education, and subsequently adopts the priorities of settling into the marriage, having children and raising them to a less dependent age before starting an entrepreneurial career (Turkstat, 2012). The average age at first marriage for a woman in the UK is 35.1 years (BBC, 2018).

The Turkish woman demonstrates a high-risk aversion behaviour in choosing a subject to study at university and studies business (by far) - regardless her interests or passions - which is an industry-independent subject. Gültekin (2017) states that the majority of Turkish youngsters let their family members, predominantly the father, to pick their subject of study at University in order to please the family members and to avoid conflicts within the family. This behavioural pattern can be associated with the high power distance culture in where parents teach children obedience (Hofstede, 2018) and the father is the decision maker who is also responsible for protecting and caring for those lower down such as children or females (Meyer, 2014). Yet, conversely, the British woman follows her passion and studies a highly specific and industry-dependent subject, namely art. As Ferguson (2017) stated earlier, the British woman has a strong desire to turn her hobby into a business to improve her job satisfaction and happiness at work. From this perspective, the subject preferences of two countries' women seem linked to the power distance, individualism and uncertainty avoidance dimensions of their cultures.

Regardless of her higher educational achievement, a PhD, the British woman still feels insufficient to pursue an entrepreneurial career and participates in further entrepreneurial training on leadership, managing an organisation and operational issues. When considering the majority studied art, this effort seems highly logical. And yet, the Turkish female also seeks opportunities to improve leadership skills, sector related know how and English language ability. The propensity of improving entrepreneurial capabilities through engaging in further education can be explained through the perceived obstacles at business startup stage. The

majority of the British participants reported lack of managerial skills and lack of self-confidence as impediments towards business setup. As for the Turkish participants, although they reported more social capital related obstacles rather than individual at the business startup stage, they had participated further training on leadership, sectoral know-how and English language. The reason behind their propensity towards improving their English abilities might be related to their desire to grow into foreign markets in the future although they specified various obstacles towards business growth which is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The collectivism and power distance cultural dimensions stand out as the major determinants of business partnership status, with this status showing a meaningful difference between the two groups. The Turkish female has relatives as business partners whilst the British female is a sole trader. From the power distance perspective, the Turkish female entrepreneur is almost obliged to involve the husband in the business especially when the business proves its sustainability and growth potential. In her research with Turkish informal female entrepreneurs, Cullen (2019) found out that once a female-founded informal business is settled and sustainable, the husband and other male members of the family abandon their current jobs to take part in the business throughout the formalisation process of the business and keep the female entrepreneur/founder within the realm of the internal business functions, such as production, and the male members manage the rest such as marketing, dealing with the government agencies. From the western perspective, collective action in business might be perceived as an impediment towards independence, autonomy and scope of control (Huffingtonpost, 2014). Furthermore, collective action in the form of business partnerships might be perceived as a foundation from which conflicts can emerge. However, the way in which collectivism was reflected in Turkish females' businesses indicated that this cultural dimension can be utilised as an enabler instead. *First*, collective action through business partnerships with their closest relatives enables female entrepreneurs to spend less time on work than those who do it alone. This enables women to become more flexible in splitting their time between work and any domestic responsibilities they may have. Also, being surrounded by relatives enables those females to get help with domestic work and receive moral support immediately when needed. It does still seem that collective action in business carries a serious risk of conflicts emerging between the partner relatives, as might quickly affect the relationships negatively and potentially create a butterfly effect with regards to extended family. However, in this study, none of the Turkish participants reported conflicts with their partners as an impediment. Contrarily, having close relatives within the business itself and in the business network in general seemed to be a necessity rather than something to avoid. *Second*, collective action in business enables female entrepreneurship to be legitimised and accepted by wider society. Based on the networking related findings, it is observed that Turkish participants primarily look after internal business functions and leave external functions to the male relatives as business partners. This reduces their stress since they do not need to deal with, for instance, the bureaucratic processes involved in using external funding or managing relationships with government agencies. Consequently, although she is an established entrepreneur, the Turkish female still stays within her domestic environment which consists of her family members and friends. *Third*, women can take part in entrepreneurial activities and get a certain level of satisfaction without committing themselves to the business fully. The

Turkish female entrepreneur is enabled to contribute to the business on a casual basis while raising children and fulfilling other domestic responsibilities. The relatives, as business partners, help and support her on the both sides, such as in business and domestic life. Therefore, the Turkish female entrepreneur has a unique opportunity to learn and prepare herself for a greater commitment to the business. *Finally*, having relatives as business partners facilitates the maintenance of trust relatively easier than can be the case with strangers. Having known each other for longer enables the female entrepreneur to evaluate the credibility and reliability of the relative as a (potential) business partner. Therefore, relatives' involvement in business reduces the risk and uncertainty around human relationships and trust. Although there is not a set of well-established assessment criteria for choosing relatives as business partners, they are selected on the basis of their closeness to the family and the business contacts they can utilise for the purpose of growth.

Although growth-orientation was evident in the number of females intending to grow their businesses, they were not determined and fully driven towards growth due to a range of perceived barriers. Both groups specified the strongest impediments towards business growth as uncertainty and competition in the market, as well as the lack of qualified staff available. When it comes to their priorities, work-life balance was more important than business growth for the British participants. The Turkish participants also demonstrated a desire to maintain a work-life balance, but keeping the business at a manageable size was more important than business growth and work-life balance overall. This might be rationalised against the lack of qualified relatives suitable for the business and the reluctance to recruit professionals in their place. As a result, a significant difference in growth orientation between the participant groups was not observed. The participants' motivation to grow the business whilst keeping it at either micro or small size seems like a discrepancy which does not help to create a solid foundation for strategy development for business growth. On the other hand, from the SI perspective, the small size enables the entrepreneur to get closer to the customer and to the supplier which might facilitate knowledge transfer and internalisation of knowledge results in faster decision making and creating SI (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019). Muñoz-Pascual *et al.* (2019) advocate that, this closeness, though, might increase the dependency on the stakeholders gradually (Muñoz-Pascual, *et al.*, 2019).

To examine participants' networking patterns, an analysis was conducted based on four elements, namely: type of contact; networking motivation; frequency of contact; and helpfulness of contact. The British participants demonstrated a more focused approach to networking and more evenly distributed time across her network contacts. The most frequently engaged contacts were relatives and key stakeholders. The British female entrepreneur expects to get moral support predominantly from the other females in her immediate environment. The government and women-related organisations are the two contacts with whom she rarely engages. Similar to her British counterpart, the Turkish female entrepreneur also keeps her relatives closest to her and seeks moral support from family and/or friends, previous work colleagues, other women entrepreneurs and women-related organisations. However, she participates in women entrepreneurship-related government projects to get moral support too, this not being an overly common way of obtaining such support. Seemingly, she devotes more and unevenly distributed time for her network contacts than her British counterpart. The two

main networking motivations reported are obtaining moral support and industry information. Differing from the British respondents, the Turkish female entrepreneur engages with more network contacts to obtain moral support, maintains an active engagement with all contacts including universities on an occasional basis to improve skills and commercial awareness. Furthermore she spends more time with networking predominantly due to the support provided by the family members to manage the business.

When it comes to networking intensity of the British participants, 10%, 20%, 40%, 10% and 20% of their network contacts were contacted never, rarely, occasionally, fairly often, very often respectively. As for the Turkish group, 0%, 10%, 30%, 50% and 10% of their network contacts were contacted never, rarely, occasionally, fairly often, very often respectively. From the networking intensity patterns, it can be concluded that the British female entrepreneur adopts a balanced networking behaviour through devoting a more normally distributed time allocated across her network. On the Turkish part, she engages with the half of her network contacts on fairly often basis and has a regular contact with all the network contacts as opposed to the fact that the British female entrepreneur ignores 10% of her network contacts. Table 7 shows the networking density patterns.

<Table 7 is here>

To develop a better understanding of the facilitators of business survival, the Chi Square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was run (Table 5 and Table 6). Business survival was found to be strongly and significantly linked to sole ownership; business startup age band of 20 to 29 and holding a post graduate degree among the British participants. On the Turkish side, business survival was found to be strongly and significantly linked to business partnership with relatives; business startup age band of 30 to 39 and holding an undergraduate degree. Therefore, the  $\chi^2$  test results support the observations that collective action in Turkey and individual action in the UK are of paramount importance for business success within the context of business partnership pattern.

The Turkish female entrepreneur's first business startup experience is around 10 years later than her British female counterpart. The age band of 30 to 39 correlates to when the Turkish woman's children are older and less dependent, and resultantly her domestic responsibilities are reduced. This serves as a primary condition to get her entrepreneurial attempts legitimised and accepted by the society. Yet, the British female entrepreneur founds her first successful business before she gets married at the average age of 35, with or without children. The entrepreneur's age factor, as explained above, is strongly linked to the power distance culture dimension. There are strict norms surrounding Turkish women's roles in society and appropriate ages to study, marry and have children throughout their life-cycle.

This paper has examined the BSS employed by established British and Turkish female entrepreneurs in order to assess whether any difference in these strategies may potentially be attributed to cultural characteristics. The findings show that the cultural characteristics of a society do have an impact on the successful BSS of female entrepreneurs evident in the variation of the dimensions of partnership status, business setup age and educational achievement status. The most remarkable impact on female businesses is observed within the power distance and collectivism-related cultural dimensions evident in business partnership status, business setup age, work pattern and networking behaviour. The lower educational

achievement of the Turkish participants is explained through the high power distance culture where the average age at first marriage for women is 23.3 years, their education subsequently coming to a halt. Power distance is also linked to business startup age and the networking behaviour of the established female entrepreneur. Evidently, as compared to her British counterpart, Turkish female entrepreneurs are older at startup and exhibit a more intense and interactive networking behaviour. This intensity partly stems from the institutional voids and lack of structures and support for female entrepreneurs which are filled by informal arrangements, such as close social ties with relatives and friends. Evidently, the British female entrepreneur prefers to act solo in business as opposed to her Turkish counterpart, who prefers partnership with relatives. Individual autonomy is more important than being a member of social groups and small organisations are favoured in individualistic cultures (OECD, 2016), while larger organisations are more desirable in the collectivist orientation (Abzari and Safari, 2014). That said, the British female entrepreneur does not want to grow her business for the sake of maintaining her work-life balance, but spends more time at work than her Turkish counterpart. The Turkish female entrepreneur does not want to grow so as to maintain control over the business.

One of the most fundamental elements of SI is a social dialogue (Boons and Lüdeke-Freund, 2013) through collaboration and co-competition with the key stakeholders and businesses are dependent on their stakeholders within this context. And yet, our participants' networking pattern and intensity appear to be creating a solid foundation for the involvement of suppliers and the active inclusion of customers which is a facilitator towards SI. On that basis, the Turkish female entrepreneur seems spending more time with networking and her network is more inclusive than her British counterpart which can create a better foundation towards the development of strategies around SI. From the internationalisation perspective, this translates into the fact that the British entrepreneur should be prepared to spend more time for networking within the Turkey market which does not seem feasible referring to her desire to maintain a healthy work – life balance. Within the context of SI, the British entrepreneur should strategically target efficiency and local responsiveness at the same time (Mense-Petermann, et al., 2010) in the Turkey market which requires her to understand the cultural pattern in the target market, especially the well-established patriarchal norms and behavioural pattern of the society, to achieve local responsiveness and collaboration with the stakeholders. And yet, our study shows that the norm for female businesses is to start as a solo female entrepreneur but grow with the addition of the male members of the family. The British female entrepreneur's desire to act solo in business might be an obstacle for her to survive in the Turkey market where she needs to adopt more collaborative and diverse business partnership patterns in the absence of institutional support for female entrepreneurship within the country. And yet, diversity and inclusivity in business partnership pattern might facilitate informal legitimisation and social dialogue, as a fundamental element of SI, in balance between the stakeholders in the generation of the value proposition. Another advantageous situation towards SI seems related to the size of the participants' businesses where the size of the participants' businesses were either micro or small. In this case, the closeness to the customer and to the supplier can be taken as a facilitator towards knowledge transfer and internalisation of knowledge which leads to faster decision making and creating SI (Muñoz-Pascual, et al., 2019).

Understanding the institutional context and the ways of gaining legitimacy as entrepreneurs within different countries (Turkey and the UK in this case) help females develop feasible market entry and survival strategies towards internationalisation; an almost inevitable step to ensure survival in the realm of the globalised economies and markets of today. Female entrepreneurs should therefore be aware of the cultural differences that exist among countries and their influence in shaping what constitutes a successful business strategy within these varying contexts.

On the Turkish side, Turkish female entrepreneurs turn back to their families to overcome the culture-informed barriers towards entrepreneurial success in the absence of suitable external support mechanisms which might create conflict and exacerbate women entrepreneurs' problems due to family members' authority. This study emphasises the importance of receiving suitable support from accessible women support organisations evident in the female entrepreneurs' networking preferences in this study. On the UK side, women support organisations is of a fundamental importance of empowering female entrepreneurs especially when considering the majority is acting solo in business. Policy makers should take into account the invisible internal family dynamics and the importance of operationalising family and households for women's businesses' survival (Carter and Ram 2003; Aldrich and Cliff 2003) especially within the Turkey context.

From the business sustainability strategies (BSS) perspective, the findings show that the studied elements of well-established female entrepreneurs vary between two different cultural environments, namely the UK and Turkey as elaborated above. And yet, the both group reported a high level of social dialogue and collaboration and cooperation with their network contacts which is a fundamental element of SI in the generation of the value proposition. Another facilitators towards SI is the small size of their businesses which enables them to stay close to their key stakeholders and network contacts in knowledge exchange and strategy development around SI.

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