**Sociocultural Institutions as Determinants of Female Entrepreneurs’ Networking Strategies, Growth Orientation and Lifestyle Choices Within The Context Of Turkey And The UK**

This study examines whether the networking strategies, growth orientation and lifestyle choices of well-established female entrepreneurs vary between two different sociocultural environments, namely the UK and Turkey. And therefore the study is applicable to the conference theme and is relevant to SME growth and performance, gender and enterprise and international entrepreneurship focuses of the conference.

The Institutional Theory draws on the concept of formal and informal institutions as “rules of the game,” as 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, inﬂuence the opportunity recognition of potential entrepreneurs as well as opportunity exploitation and access to resources (Kuratko, 2014). The application of Institutional Theory has proven itself to play a major role in helping to explain the forces that shape entrepreneurial success (Bruton & 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).

This study aims to develop a better insight into the impact of social institutions, and in particular of national culture, on business success, further considering how these institutions influence entrepreneurial decisions around networking strategies, growth orientation and lifestyle choices of established female entrepreneurs. It additionally examines how the female entrepreneur finds her way around these institutions in order to help her business succeed, evaluating whether this success is a culture-independent phenomenon that can be achieved through employing similar, potentially advantageous strategies regardless of national context, or whether adjustments are required before entering a foreign market..

British and Turkish women entrepreneurs are surrounded by fundamentally different social structures and cultures in every area of life and business. Therefore, their entrepreneurial behaviours are shaped differently according to these structures. From the institutional theory perspective it is expected that, the two countries’ female entrepreneurs should exhibit fundamentally different patterns with regards to the factors of networking strategies, growth orientation and lifestyle choices. If not, then we might question whether the cultural environment has a significant impact upon the development of entrepreneurial behavioural patterns.

This study aims to present the findings from quantitative survey-based research conducted with 240 female entrepreneurs from the UK and Turkey (120 from each). The respondents were selected on the basis of business survival where the majority of businesses were older than five years. 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 women business support organisations. 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. 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.

Although research on the relationship between culture 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’ behaviour and subsequent outcomes (Kaciak and Welsh, 2018, p.631). Therefore, this study attempts to close this gap through taking a closer look at the country-specific cultural factors creating differences in female entrepreneurs’ success strategies within the context of Turkey and the UK.

Moreover, understanding the differences in the success strategies of established female businesses in different countries will help female entrepreneurs develop feasible market entry strategies towards internationalisation; an almost inevitable step to ensure survival in the realm of the globalised economies and markets of today.

This study, additionally, evaluates whether the established female entrepreneur’s success is a culture-independent phenomenon that can be achieved through employing similar, potentially advantageous strategies regardless of national context, or whether adjustments are required before entering a foreign market. Should any female business strategy have become successful in one country, then policy-makers and women support organisations can work on developing ways for benchmarking.

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