

Culture, Islamic Capital, and the Entrepreneurial Behaviour of Family Firms in Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Purpose: There is a significant gap in understanding with regards to the role of cultural context in family business research. This paper aims to address this by exploring the critical and pervasive influence of culture in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviours of family businesses based in Saudi Arabia.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We adopt a qualitative interpretive case study approach, which draws upon interviews with the incumbents and successors of ten Saudi Arabian family firms.

Findings: Our empirical evidence reveals the importance of family ties and culture on the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms in general, and the influence of 'Islamic capital' on the intergenerational transfer of family legacy in particular.

Originality/value: We provide critical insights on how Islamic capital motivates Saudi family firms to maintain harmony, avoid disputes and create a legacy for future generations by engaging in entrepreneurial behaviours.

Keywords: Family business; cultural context; entrepreneurial behaviour; Islamic capital; Saudi Arabia

Paper type: Research paper

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the increased acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of family firms (Miller *et al.*, 2018), this acknowledgment does not extend to the heterogeneity of the context in which family firms operate (James *et al.*, 2020; Memili and Dibrell, 2018), with context often taken-for-granted or invisible (Wright *et al.*, 2014). This is surprising given that the critical influence of ‘context’ on new venture creation and entrepreneuring practices is well recognised (Welter, 2011; Welter and Gartner, 2016; Baker and Welter, 2018). In addition, family business research to date has been dominated by a focus on American and European family businesses (Luo, 2019; Sharma and Chua, 2013, **Krueger et al., 2021**), where the traditional family is becoming less prevalent with weakening social bonds between family members (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Harrison and Leitch, 2018). Such changes in family structure and relationships, which are not evident to the same extent in all cultures, influence venture creation and outcomes, thus motivating family business researchers to identify family and firm characteristics associated with the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms (Eddleston *et al.*, 2012; Zahra *et al.*, 2004). Entrepreneurial behaviour has been researched at both the individual and firm level (Baron and Tang, 2011, Clinton *et al.*, 2020). At the firm level, entrepreneurial behaviour is defined as “a set of activities and practices by which individuals at multiple levels autonomously generate and use innovative resource combinations to identify and pursue opportunities” (Mair, 2005, p.51).

Family entrepreneurship research is interested in the entrepreneurial behaviours of family, family members and family businesses (Bettinelli *et al.*, 2014). Despite the wealth of literature examining the entrepreneurial behaviour in family firms (Eddleston *et al.*, 2012; Naldi *et al.*, 2007; Cruz and Nordqvist, 2012; Nordqvist and Melin, 2010; Zellweger and Sieger, 2012; Zellweger *et al.*, 2012a; 2012b), the debate as to whether family firms are truly entrepreneurial continues. Moreover, little

is known about the entrepreneurial behaviour of next generation family members (Nordqvist *et al.*, 2013), their entrepreneurial tendencies and factors enabling or hindering such tendencies (Craig and Salvato, 2012), whether manifesting in the incumbent business, or through the use of inheritance to fund other businesses (Zellweger *et al.*, 2012b). While researchers have identified factors such as entrepreneurial legacy (Jaskiewicz *et al.*, 2015) and family entrepreneurial orientation (Zellweger *et al.*, 2012a) as drivers for transgenerational entrepreneurship, what still remains unclear is the role of cultural context in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms in general, and of next generation family members in particular.

Accordingly, there have been calls within the family business domain for research which appropriately reflects the unique cultural context in which family businesses operate (Samara, 2020; Basco, 2017; **Krueger et al., 2021**). Specifically, ‘as much as they may have in common, family business practices are not identical from one country to another ... we have much to confirm in and add to the literature’ (Hoy, 2014, p.626). While family firms must consistently manage the interface between family and business logics (Reay *et al.*, 2015), they ‘may also be influenced by logics associated with the state or religion’ (Reay and Zhang 2014, p.588). This paper aims to respond to this gap in understanding by exploring the critical and pervasive influence of culture and religion in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviours of family businesses based in Saudi Arabia.

Within this paper, we make the following theoretical contributions. First, we respond to calls for family firm research in a non-American/Western context (Luo, 2019; Zahra *et al.*, 2014; Sharma and Chua, 2013) and specifically in the Arab Middle East (Samara 2020; Basco, 2017; **Krueger et al., 2021**). **Specifically, we theorized the context by adopting a context-sensitive approach (Krueger et al., 2021) to family businesses in Saudi Arabia.** Second, as a result of this contextualisation, we acknowledge the influence of the cultural context in family firms (James

et al., 2020; Gupta and Levenburg, 2010; Zahra *et al.*, 2014; Sharma and Chua, 2013) and in doing so provide novel insights into the importance of Islamic capital in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviours of family businesses based in the region. As such, we extend Bourdieusian approaches in entrepreneurship (Scott, 2012; Spiegel, 2013; De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a; 2009b; Pret et al., 2016) to include the concept of Islamic capital and its role in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviours of family firms. Third, to date, little previous attention has been paid to the way in which family ties impact upon the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms. We address this gap in the literature by providing evidence as to how both harmonious and conflictual family ties influence the entrepreneurial behaviour of successors and encourage entrepreneurial renewal in family firms.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we set out the theoretical framework for the paper, developed in light of the influence of the cultural context on family firms. The following section presents our research design, methodological rationale and data collection and analysis protocols. This is followed by a summary of the key findings from our research, and in the final section of the paper by a critical discussion and evaluation of these. Finally, we conclude by considering the theoretical implications of our arguments.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Cultural Context and Family Firms

The context in which the family firm operates is habitually intertwined with social, family and business environments (Welter, 2011; Zahra and Wright, 2011). These contextual effects span the socio-economic environment reflecting culture, institutional norms, time, space and regulation –

as such, there are a multiplicity of influences which shape the role and position of family firms (Whetten, 1989). Although it has been acknowledged that differences do exist among family firms in different cultural settings (Gupta and Levenburg, 2010; Sharma and Manikuttu, 2003), and despite increased interest in culture in this broader sense more widely in entrepreneurship (Chiu and Kwan, 2010; Hayton *et al.*, 2002), culture has remained widely ignored or understudied within the family business domain (Zahra and Sharma, 2004). This is particularly the case in the Arab Middle East (Basco, 2017), where culture plays a role in all aspects of family businesses including their values, succession process, HR practices, and governance structure (Samara, 2020; **Krueger et al., 2021**).

Culture is a term that refers to a large and diverse set of mostly intangible aspects of social life. Its content includes a wide range of phenomena including norms, values, shared meanings, and patterned ways of behaving (O'Reilly, 1989; Boyd and Richardson, 1988; Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952). Culture is important in shaping social relationships, maintaining and challenging social order, determining how we make sense of the world and our place in it, and in shaping our everyday actions and experiences in society. It is, in other words, the total socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people. It consists of the patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of a society (Harris, 1975)

The non-material aspects of culture are the values and beliefs, language, communication, and practices that are shared in common by a group of people (Harrison and Carroll, 2006; Schein, 1996). Expanding on these categories, culture is made up of our knowledge, common sense, assumptions, and expectations. It is also the rules, norms, laws, and morals that govern society

(Brumann, 1999); the words we use as well as how we speak and write them; the symbols we use to express meaning, ideas, and concepts. Culture is also what we do and how we behave and perform. It informs and is encapsulated in how we interact with others; how we behave, how we express identities of race, class, and gender, among others, and shapes the collective practices we participate in, such as religious ceremonies and the celebration of secular holidays.

Although family represents an important layer of culture (Ijaz *et al.*, 2012), to date it is little understood (Joseph, 2014). This is surprising given that family is the first group that has a significant imprinting influence on an individual's values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours (Giddens, 1984; Sharma and Manikutty, 2003). It is now commonly accepted among anthropologists that families can vary in fundamental ways based on the values they regard as foundational. Indeed, Todd's (1985, p. 12) typology of families, which has been applied to research on family firms (Ling, 2002), is the basis for the argument that the family by definition reproduces people and values. Unconsciously but inevitably, each generation absorbs parental values which define elementary human relationships: between parents and children, between siblings, between husband and wife.

This intergenerational reproduction of people and values is echoed in Bourdieu's (1996) argument that the family is central to understanding and making sense of how broader structures of social and cultural domination are lived, reproduced and transformed in everyday life (Atkinson, 2014). The cultural environment, in relation to family business, can be therefore defined as consisting of all the elements of the social system and culture of a people which positively or negatively affect and influence entrepreneurial emergence, behaviour and performance (Adeleke, 2003). We thus argue that culture, as distinct from political, social, technological or economic contexts, has significant relevance for family business (Shane, 1993; Shapero and Sokol, 1982),

and that greater acknowledgment of the cultural context is required in order to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of these firms generally (Chirico and Nordqvist, 2010), and their entrepreneurial behaviour specifically.

2.2 Islamic Capital

Religion can play an important role in business decisions, operations, and ethical behaviour (Alrubaishi, McAdam and Harrison, 2020). The intersection of spirituality and religion with entrepreneurship has attracted the interest of scholars, with particular attention paid to understanding how these values impact and influence entrepreneurial activity (Balog et al., 2014; Godwin et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2016). Balog et al. (2014) posit that the entrepreneur's experience, religious and/or spiritual values and family background, all intersect to guide and influence entrepreneurial enactment. Specifically, Ganzin et al. (2020) suggest that spirituality is related to future decision orientation among entrepreneurs. Relatedly, spirituality and religion have recently been acknowledged in the family business domain, as family businesses are often referred to as value-drive organizations (Astrachan et al., 2020).

Although Islam is the world's second largest religion, limited attention has been paid to Islam in the entrepreneurship and family business research (Davis, 2013; Gumusay, 2015). Islam is based on the Qur'an (words of Allah) and teachings and actions of prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him], which governs all aspects of Muslim lives, including social, economic, political, and legal aspects (Kayed and Hassan, 2010). In relation to entrepreneurship, Islam is deemed to support entrepreneurial behaviours, as a result of the verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad which specifically refer to the engagement in entrepreneurial activities (Davis, 2013). Moreover, Islam stresses the importance of ethical behaviour in all business dealings. The Qur'an declares: "The noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best of you in

conduct” (Holy Qur’an, 1989, 49: 13). On many occasions, Prophet Mohammad addressed issues related to work and business, stressing the importance of honesty and good dealings (Ali and Al-Owaihan, 2008). For example, he stated: “The truthful, honest merchant is with the prophets and the truthful ones and the martyrs.”

For Franceschelli and O’Brien (2014), ‘Islamic capital’ builds on and gives some specificity to religious and ethnic capital as a body of convertible resources originating from Islam and used in the intergenerational transmission of values. This concept of Islamic capital draws on Bourdieu’s discussion of three related constructs: first, cultural capital (e.g. kinship ties), as the content parents pass on to their children (Bourdieu, 1986); second, religious capital (e.g. Islam), as the production, reproduction and distribution of religious goods (Bourdieu, 1991); and third, the family (e.g. family structure), which has a decisive role in the maintenance and reproduction of a certain social order through the accumulation and transmission amongst its members of different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1996).

Entrepreneurship, of course, is no stranger to Bourdieu’s concept of capital (Spiegel, 2013): Hill (2018), for example identifies and analyses 27 entrepreneurship papers that discuss some aspect of Bourdieu’s theory of capital, a tally which she admits is incomplete. For Bourdieu (1986) the concept of capital involves the ‘capacity to reproduce itself, produce profits, expand and contains the tendency to persist’: it is, in other words, the product of an investment which can secure a return (Moore, 2004) or an asset which embodies, stores or gives rise to cultural value in addition to whatever economic value it may possess (Throsby, 1999a; 1999b). Our theorising of Islamic capital, therefore, builds on existing Bourdieusian approaches in entrepreneurship as a social and economic process embedded in complex networks of resources, power relations and

institutions (Scott, 2012; Nijkamp, 2003, Spiegel, 2013; De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a; 2009b; Pret *et al.*, 2016).

In so doing, and in addition to the concept of cultural capital itself, we draw on three further elements of Bourdieu's theory of embodied practice to understand how cultural capital is imprinted, embodied and transmitted (Grenfell, 2004). First, the notion of the field "lies at the heart of his work" (Hilgers and Mangez, 2014, 1). For Bourdieu, fields are arenas for strategic decision-making, social spaces in which interactions, transactions and events take place (Bourdieu, 2005). As a set of objective historically conditioned relations between actors, structured by the pursuit of a common goal, fields exist at a number of levels and constitute a space within which actors, depending on their position in it, struggle and/or succeed in the competition for capital (Bourdieu, 1990). Social interaction relies on participants implicitly agreeing to follow 'the rules of the game', internalizing the field's structures, *modus operandi* and hierarchies so that they become normalized over time. Second, the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital relies on habitus, 'a system of durable and transposable dispositions ... which generate organized practices and representations' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53). Habitus represents a plurality of logics, a complex differentiation of fields with different modes of thought, internalized understandings and dispositions, and comprises the socialised norms and tendencies, referred to by Bourdieu (1990) as 'socialised subjectivity', which guides actors' thinking and behaviour. Through being in sympathy with a field, skilled and knowledgeable actors who have gained a thorough understanding of 'the rules of the game' will intuitively know the right action to take in any given situation (Carter and Spencer, 2014, p. 958). By participating in the field, actors develop a sense of it and an embodied understanding of its rules and how these might apply to them given their status and position (Tatli *et al.*, 2014; Schwartz, 1997). Habitus, in other words, shapes individual

actions which in turn inform social practice and reproduce or transform the social structure (Bourdieu, 1984). Third, each habitus also contains a unique doxa, a combination norms and beliefs that are learned, fundamental, deep-founded and unconscious and which shape the distinctions we make and actions we take in a particular field (Bourdieu, 1984). Doxa, which Bourdieu considered to be beyond question, is ‘an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 471). Consequently, doxa are so embedded in everyday life that they have become unremarkable and even invisible so that they are unquestioned and unquestionable. As the understanding of what is being played out within a field doxa is the basis for the relationship between the players in that field (Bourdieu, 1977; 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For Bourdieu there is an intrinsic interplay between field, capital and habitus such that membership of a field is a para-doxal commitment to a set of presuppositions (doxa) linked to the discovery of stakes and demands (Bourdieu, 2005).

4. METHODOLOGY

In alignment with the aim of the paper, we adopted an interpretive qualitative case study methodology. The appropriateness of case studies in ascertaining relevance and understanding of unexplored phenomena is widely acknowledged (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2013), and in particular by family firm scholars (De Massis et al., 2013; Leppäaho et al., 2016; Reay and Zhang, 2013; Wasim et al., 2018). Specifically, the application of a case study approach is advocated by De Massis and Kotlar (2014, p.15-16), who describe it as a ‘powerful methodology that can be used in a rigorous, creative and wide-ranging variety of ways to advance family business research’, and by Reay and Zhang (2015, p.579) for whom case studies ‘can enable meaningful comparisons

across sites ...[and]... effectively investigate family businesses while maintaining an integrated consideration of context’.

Such an approach allows us to build understanding of the properly contextualized experiences of the family firms in Saudi Arabia and as such “rather than being treated as a control variable, context becomes part of the story” (Zahra and Wright, 2011, p. 72). Furthermore, this approach allowed us to build understanding of the properly contextualized experiences of family firms in Saudi Arabia rather than imposing a particular framework upon them (Discua Cruz et al., 2020). This enabled us to focus on the way in which contextual factors were constitutive of the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms, and in so doing we shift the research focus from internally-focused context-as-variable approaches to more externally-oriented research (Welter, 2011).

4.1 Saudi Arabia Context

Saudi Arabia is one of the top 20 economies in the world (World Bank, 2019). The majority of registered businesses in the country (63%) are family businesses contributing to approximately 32% of the country’s GDP (Alrubaihi and Robson, 2019). In Saudi Arabia, ‘more than in any other area of the world, business is viewed as a way to enhance a family’s social standing rather than as an impersonal, wealth-generating, market-driven activity’ (Davis *et al.*, 2000, p. 217). Accordingly, Saudi Arabian society is economically and culturally dominated by the importance of family values and ties (Davis *et al.*, 2000; Peterson, 2001), with a family business in the Saudi society regarded as a lasting legacy for future generations. Saudi Arabia is a Muslim nation, with high cultural homogeneity based on tribal and Islamic affiliations (Alkhaled and Berglund, 2018). The traditional Muslim family is extended, with its family structure compatible with that of tribal

lineage and an inter-generational family model including multiple generations of aunts, uncles, and cousins in addition to siblings from different mothers (Forrest Zhang, 2004; Long, 2005).

Saudi Arabia is characterized by a highly collectivist society, where the family and tribe take priority over other non-kin relations (Mellahi, 2006). Indeed, family loyalty and conformity in Saudi Arabia is valued (Gannon and Pillai, 2010), and family relationships an important factor in everyday life, both culturally and economically (Peterson, 2001).

4.2 Method

Within the extant literature, there is no common consensus regarding the definition of a family firm (Steiger *et al.*, 2015). However, family business research has employed operational definitions, based on variables that include family ownership, governance, and management (Eddleston *et al.*, 2012) as well as theoretical definition based on intentions and vision (Chua *et al.*, 1999). For this current research, family firms are defined by the following criteria. First, the firm had to be family owned and managed with at least two family members actively involved in the business. Second, the family firm had to be large enough to represent the family's main income and, therefore, ensure family management was financially motivated to engage in entrepreneurship (Jaskiewicz *et al.*, 2015; Clinton *et al.*, 2018; Clinton *et al.*, 2020). Third, the family had to aspire to pass the business onto the next generation which is necessary for transgenerational control intentions, with a potential successor selected. Fourth, the family firm must have been operating for a minimum of 10 years with a minimum of 10 employees, thus ensuring that the family firm was established long enough to have identified a potential successor.

Our sampling was purposive in nature (Seawright and Gerring, 2008; Gartner and Birley, 2002; Pratt, 2009): in total, ten family businesses were selected to represent an eclectic range of industries and generations, and to reflect as far as possible the heterogeneity of family firms within the constraints of gaining access to appropriate respondents (Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017). Sampling stopped when saturation was reached, whereby no new patterns or themes emerged and further sampling was deemed redundant. Although there is no ideal number of cases per multiple case study design, Eisenhardt (1989) advocates the inclusion of four to ten cases, as fewer than four may result in difficulties establishing complex theories, and more than ten may result in superfluity of data. The ten firms varied in terms of industry sector, size and number of family generations but all share the same geographical and cultural context namely Saudi Arabia, thus limiting external variation (Welter, 2011). Table 1 includes background information relating to each family firm included in this research and thus serves as a basis for the subsequent discussion.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

We conducted semi-structured interviews separately with the incumbents and successors of these 10 Saudi Arabian family firms. Gathering the perceptions from both the incumbent and successor allows us to address both individual experience and macro categories such as ethnic and religious identities, helping us to understand multi-dimensionality and social complexity. Interviews lasting between 60-80 minutes and follow-up interviews lasting between 30-40 minutes were conducted with the incumbent and successor of each firm. All interviews were taped recorded and transcribed. In addition, we gathered archival and secondary documents from various sources including company documentation and online web material (approximately 260 pages) which were typically produced in ‘real time’ and served as a means of triangulation, thus counteracting any anomalies, preferential hindsight or retrospective memory bias that may have arisen during the

interviewing process (Yin, 2013). We made efforts to guarantee the trustworthiness of our data. First, we provided a traceable chain of evidence consisting of transparent and comprehensive documentation of the process undertaken (Leitch, Hill and Harrison, 2010) which increased validity and reliability and helped alleviate the limitations associated with qualitative research (Yin, 2013). Second, we continually sought to clarify and validate our analysis via follow-up interviews with informants.

4.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed per verbatim and yielded 80,964 words over 120 single-spaced pages. As NVivo remains unreliable when used in Arabic (Di Gregori, 2000), analysis was conducted manually (Miles and Huberman, 1994). To ensure consistency of coding, especially as two coders were involved, we developed a coding manual, which included definitions of each category and examples (DeCuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011). Using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), themes were initially identified in a hierarchical step-based approach in which codes were identified, linked and related to wider analytical theme areas. This process was an iterative process conducted by two members of the research team and, as such, was continued until sufficient coding consistency was achieved (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). A third member of the research team, who was not involved in the data collection or initial coding, acted as quality control, thus mitigating any potential coding disagreements (Armstrong *et al.*, 1997). Interrater agreement is 0.74, which is above the proposed threshold of 0.70 (Kreiner *et al.*, 2009).

The substantive analysis of the data followed matrix analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to explore the role of cultural context on the entrepreneurship of family firms. This technique is suitable for analysing semi-structured interviews and emphasise the visual display of data analysis. The coding process began by reading each transcript carefully and then assigning codes to ‘chunks’

of text. The initial coding of the data resulted in 36 codes arranged in five matrices where rows represent cases and columns represent first order codes. As such, all similarly labelled text was placed under one column. In some instances, text related to more than one code was duplicated in more than one column. Matrix analysis is flexible in terms of types of data entered into cells, and as such data can take different forms such as paraphrased text, quotes, or symbolise (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As the data resulted from interview transcripts, direct quotations were entered into cells of the five constructed matrices (Nadin and Cassell, 2004). Codes were revised and re-revised until a satisfying set of codes that reflected the data was reached. After agreement on the set of first order codes, theoretical categories and aggregate theoretical dimensions were developed, which are illustrated in our Data Structure Figure (Figure 1). This figure provides a graphical representation of how we progressed from the raw data to the emerging themes (Gioia et al., 2013), as detailed below.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

5. FINDINGS

We now present the emerging themes in detail as illustrated with fragments of the narrative in the form of power quotes. Power quotations represent the most compelling and insightful evidence available and their usage has been advocated in the representation of qualitative data (Lee, 2014; Coviello, 2014). More comprehensive proof quotes are outlined in Tables 2-4.

5.1 Cultural Context

The cultural context in which the ten family firms were situated emerged as an important factor informing their entrepreneurial behaviour. In particular, Islamic values, kinship ties, family structure and the preservation of good manners were deemed relevant for the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms (See Table 2). This finding is important as acknowledgment of the cultural context is vital to the advancement of both family business research in general and entrepreneurship research in particular (Zahra *et al.*, 2014; Sharma and Chua, 2013; Clinton *et al.*, 2018). This applies particularly to the notion that religious values have a role in the decision-making and ethical behaviour of family firms (Astrachan *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, our findings revealed that Islamic work values and ethics (Kayed and Hassan 2010) which were deeply embedded within the fabric of the region, served in the prioritization of honesty in all business dealings. As Ajyal's incumbent stated, 'Honesty is my motto, I only work with those who are honest, they win and I win', whilst Mabany's successor commented 'those who want to succeed must be honest, success doesn't come without honesty'. The prioritisation of good manners above monetary gains (Sharma and Manikutty, 2003) was emphasized in the Saudi context and disseminated across generations; for example Aqary-successor commented, 'My father used to say, don't feel that you are better than others because you have money, and this has had a lasting effect on us'. Honesty also appeared instrumental in enhancing the family's reputation as illustrated by Aqary's successor, 'My uncle is well known by his honesty and faithfulness, and that is the basis of our business, he built a reputation! We are known wherever we go'. Whilst Aswar incumbent commented 'good dealings and honouring Allah is what sustains the business'. Furthermore, Islamic work values and ethics were evident in the building of relationships with customers, 'When you satisfy Allah, Allah will bring you more clients' (Abraj-incumbent).

Accordingly, faith in Allah emerged as instrumental in facilitating entrepreneurial activities: ‘I have faith in Allah, Allah gave us this and Allah will take it from us; they ask me to have insurance on my warehouses but I don’t and they ask me where is your insurance policy and I tell them with Allah!’ (Suruh-incumbent) and Maydan’s incumbent commented, ‘All things in the hands of Allah, when you have faith in Allah you know that your effort won’t be for nothing’. This faith was deemed particularly instrumental in preserving family bonds and cohesion as Aqary incumbent commented ‘religious faith is present in my family in a good way, when something happen and we say it is Allah’s willing all discussions stops and we all respect that’.

Kinship and tribal affiliation, characteristic of the region (Sidiani and Showail, 2013), also emerged as influential. ‘In Saudi Arabia, we have close families, we meet on a weekly basis, even the married ones go and visit their families, every week, I think we have closer families’ (Abraj-incumbent). It was also evident that strong kinship bonds within the Saudi Arabian family structure provided a breeding ground for entrepreneurial behaviours (Long, 2005; Kayed and Hassan, 2010). ‘We have strong relations between all of us as a family, we are brothers from different mothers, you never feel that this is my sister from my dad’s side or this is my brother from my father’s side, we share all the sadness and happiness moments together’ (Ajyal-suc.). Furthermore, the preservation of this family bond was deemed paramount in all activities – ‘Losing my brother for money isn’t worth it’ (Abraj-suc).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

5.4 Family Ties

5.4.1 Founder stage - Entrepreneurial Behaviour of Successor

Six out of the ten family firms were at the founder stage. Amongst these six family firms, differences emerged in relation to the entrepreneurial behaviour of the successors. Further analysis revealed that family bond/cohesion and communication were key enablers, with strong entrepreneurial behaviour observed in family firms that had close relationships between family members (See Table 3). The entrepreneurial behaviour of successors in such family firms was evidenced by strong ambitions to grow the business. As Abraj's successor remarked 'We will reach contentment when we are done, reach the point where we are perfect, but we will never reach that point!'. Whilst, Ajyal's successor commented 'taking care of the main activities of the company is our priority but so is expanding and adding other activities'. This was augmented by a desire to enter new markets, with Sawahil's successor stating, 'we opened a new activity of mobile applications (IT), which is little bit different than the original activity of the company, we put ourselves outside the box'. It was also evident that strong family bonds provided a harmonious breeding ground for entrepreneurial behaviours to manifest, 'I have a very supportive family, if a brother needs help from his brother, he will help him without thinking' (Abraj-suc.). Such cohesion resulted in a unified vision 'because if it is their family business, they (family members) will be more concerned and eager to maintain it' (Sawahil-incumbent).

However, evidence of a lack of entrepreneurial behaviour of successors was observed in families with weak relationships and poor communication. For example, in relation to entrepreneurial ambitions, Aswar successor's clearly stated, 'our business is not entrepreneurial!'. Whilst Maydan's successor when referring to his father's high technology business commented 'there is nothing we can add to our projects, there is no place for creativity, where you can add to'. These successors belonged to family firms that were characterised by weak family bonds, miscommunication and lack of trust, which often resulted in conflict (Kellermanns and Eddleston,

2007). For example, Aswar's successor further remarked 'we have clashes, and these clashes have led to sensitivity between us'. There also appeared to be a lack of family cohesion within such families, with such a lack even motivating some successors to seek employment external to the family business (Zellweger *et al.*, 2011). For instance, Maydan's successor remarked 'I have been offered governmental positions but they were outside my area so I rejected them, if they were in my area I would have accepted. I see myself in the future working in the private sector not in the family business' (Maydan-suc.). In sharp contrast to the environment where strong entrepreneurial behaviour was evident, lack of trust appeared to play a role in inhibiting entrepreneurial behaviours (Parker and Van Praag, 2012). For example, Aswar's successor commented 'Sometimes when I come back from a trip [hesitant voice], an employee would say: your brother did so and so. And when I go to ask him or ask my father, they would eye me in a bad way [very uncomfortable voice]'

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

5.4.2 Non-Founder stage – Entrepreneurial Renewal

Four out of the ten family firms were at the non-founder stage. Amongst these four family firms, differences emerged in relation to the role of valence (negative or positive) in the continuity of the family firms (See Table 4). It is well acknowledged that family businesses are 'fertile grounds for misunderstanding and conflict' (Marchisio *et al.*, 2010, p. 367). Indeed, negative valence in the form of tensions, disagreements and conflicts served to hinder the entrepreneurial function of the founder's family firm. For example: 'When my father passed away, one of my brothers became the CEO, the business continued with many troubles and mismanagement because decisions were taken sentimentally. I stopped developing and searching for new opportunities because my brother did not want me to! That's not good!' (Suruh-incumbent).

In some instances, this resulted in some family members leaving the family firm due to a lack of entrepreneurial activity, 'I worked two years under his management system. There was no development, so I I withdrew quietly in order to protect my family's harmony; my family harmony is far more important than financial aspects' (Wadi-incumbent). Hence, in family firms where there was negative valence, the successors left the incumbent venture and started a new venture in order to protect the family name and to pursue their own entrepreneurial ambitions (Nordqvist and Melin, 2010). Furthermore, Suruh incumbent commented: 'We decided (me and my brothers and sisters from the same mother) to take one activity from the family business and manage it separately and we did! we restored a dead business, a terminated business!'

Interestingly, positive valence in the form of harmony also resulted in family members exiting the family firm to engage in another entrepreneurial venture in order to protect their family bond. For example, Aqary's incumbent explained: 'I was like a ceiling over my younger brothers, if anyone of them wanted to grow they would be confronted by this ceiling, so it was either they move out or I move out, and I didn't want my brothers to be apart from each other so I chose to leave'. Indeed, the preservation of harmony was evident amongst such firms, 'As per the saying, people who cooperate never get beaten (Arabic saying), we are all happy to be together!' (Amar-suc). Interestingly, positive valence meant that those exiting the family firm were keen to mentor and pass on their knowledge to the successor (Chirico, 2008), which was not evident in instances of negative valence. Accordingly, these examples of mentoring highlight the unique socialization process within family businesses whereby role modelling and working alongside family members serves as an effective mechanism in the transmission of entrepreneurial behaviours and beliefs (Randerson *et al.*, 2015). For instance, Aqary's incumbent remarked: 'I changed him! I am his

source of information, I gave him my experience, as if he was drinking tea or water, I put it in his mind and filled his body with it, and it became a base for him to build his future on’.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

6. Discussion

Family ties appeared to be the primary factor influencing family firm’s entrepreneurial behaviour in our Saudi Arabian family firms. In fact, family ties were deemed significant in informing the entrepreneurial behaviour of successors at the founder stage; with strong entrepreneurial behaviours, evident in successors belonging to family firms with strong family ties (Eddleston et al., 2008; Breton-Miller *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, our findings illustrate that family ties between family members after the founder’s death whether harmonious or conflicting motivated family members to engage in other entrepreneurial ventures through portfolio entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial exit, in order to protect family ties. Thus, certain configurations of family harmony will have a positive impact on the resultant family ventures due to the fostering of entrepreneurial behaviours through mentoring (Randerson *et al.*, 2015; Clinton *et al.*, 2018). Our findings also revealed that even discontinuance or disengagement of successors can be beneficial for long term value creation. Thus, how the family firm creates new economic activity across time with valence (positive or negative) determines the balance between renewal and continuity in the family firm (Chirico and Nordqvist, 2010; Salvato *et al.*, 2010).

Concurring with Astrachan et al. (2020) with regards to the role of religious values in family firms’ decision making, we demonstrate that family businesses interpreted the entrepreneurial success of their businesses through the lens of religion. Thus, our study demonstrates that Islamic resources and unique social capital accrual (Islamic capital) as a result of the Saudi Arabian cultural context can be leveraged to facilitate entrepreneurial activities.

Although strong family ties may potentially lead to issues of nepotism (Bertrand and Schoar, 2006) and are negatively related to the likelihood of starting a new business (Renzulli *et al.*, 2000), altruistic kinship ties are found to reduce conflict (Eddleston *et al.* 2008; Eddleston and Kellermanns 2007) and may have a positive impact on entrepreneurship (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003), opportunity recognition (Jack 2005) and innovation (Eddleston *et al.*, 2012; Kellermanns *et al.*, 2012).

Our findings provide new insights into the influence of ‘Islamic capital’ on the intergenerational transfer of family legacy within Saudi Arabia which may actually serve to motivate Saudi family firms to maintain harmony, avoid disputes and create a legacy for future generations by engaging in entrepreneurial behaviours (See Figure 2). The intergenerational transmission of religion, or religious values, is fundamentally a matter of negotiating the tension between tradition and change and maintaining religious traditions alongside adaptation to new opportunities (Becher, 2008). While the internal cognitive mechanisms involved in this intergenerational transfer are important (Barret, 2000), our research points to the contextual factors shaping this.

Unlike race or ethnicity, for example, which can be thought of as ‘given’, religious identity is often represented as an individual choice (Meer, 2008) and as such reflects an interplay between individual agency and the social world which goes beyond belief and practice to encompass religion as a legacy, a source of values and behaviours (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2013). The representation of the intergenerational transmission of values and practices as ‘Islamic capital’ has its immediate roots in notions of ‘ethnic capital’, as a body of resources negotiated between the family and the community (Modood, 2004), and ‘religious capital’, the formal and institutional

expression of faith, and ‘spiritual capital’, as personal faith and beliefs, which guide and motivate individual actions (Baker and Miles-Watson, 2010). As such, it represents a body of resources negotiated between the family and the wider community, as the family is an integral part of but does not exhaust the contribution of Islam. Islamic capital, and the cultural context within which it is embedded, is the source of legitimation for family roles, informing the family system of values, transmitting a sense of morality, informing aspirations and generating social capital across generations (Franceschelli and O’Brien, 2014). In this sense, Islam is more than a religion but a way of life, forging both everyday practices such as clothing and eating and also social relationships and views of the world. As embodied in Islamic Capital, Islam is both a transmitting strategy and part of the content of that transmission, where it is less the theology than the values, beliefs, moral teachings and everyday practices attached to Islam that are pertinent. However, as Figure 2 also acknowledges, there is a two-way relationship between entrepreneurial behaviour and Islamic Capital which is both direct and mediated through the evolution of family ties, which in turn will affect the wider cultural context. In other words, entrepreneurship impacts its context and it is not just that contextual factors (e.g. race, ethnicity and religiosity) influence the nature and extent of entrepreneurship (Dopfer et al., 2004). We therefore respond to calls for theories of context that acknowledge both the top-down effects of context on entrepreneurship and bottom-up processes influencing context (Wadhvani et al., 2020).

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

In keeping with our findings above, as a social field, the family plays an important role in the reproduction of socioeconomic status across generations (Lareau, 2011; Atkinson, 2014). As such it is ‘not culturally neutral but is influenced by specific historical and socio-economic conditions, which determine both strategies and content of transmission’ (Brannen and Nilsen,

2006). Therefore, the family also exists as part of the social structure, which creates both social expectations and the social understanding of family itself in terms of the reciprocal obligations bonding the members' (Franceschelli and O'Brien, 2014, p. 1193). Given the substantial cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic differences as well as geographical dispersion of Muslims, our study focuses on the birthplace of Islam, Saudi Arabia. While Islam is a universal religion in which Muslims worldwide agree on the core beliefs of Islam, Muslims vary considerably in the extent of their religiousness and in accepting different interpretations of their faith (Yilmaz, 2014). This variety can be attributed to cultural diversity (Akbarzadeh and Smith, 2005; Lukens-Bull and Zahn, 2018), where religious and cultural practices are intertwined (Yilmaz, 2014). Such diversity is witnessed between countries and even within regions in the same country (Abu-Raiya, and Pargament, 2011). Indeed, when examining Islamic practices the "assumption of homogeneity is not defensible" (Fattah and Butterfield, 2006, p. 49). Extending our model (Figure 2) to other Islamic contexts and thus exploring more fully the nature of Islamic capital will reinforce our initial evidence on the importance of cultural context in the entrepreneurial behaviour of Saudi family firms.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have explored the critical and pervasive influence of the Saudi Arabian culture in shaping the entrepreneurial behaviours of family businesses based in the region. In so doing, we revealed the influence of Islamic capital in shaping and informing the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms in Saudi cultural context. Accordingly, we provide new insights into how entrepreneurial behaviour was enabled by strong kinship ties and Islamic values inherent within the Saudi Arabian context. Another interesting layer of culture was the influence of the

family structure on subsequent entrepreneurial behaviour. This is of significance as the Western model of the nuclear family still dominates family business research (Forrest Zhang, 2004), thus resulting in a paucity of understanding regarding important differences in family structure across cultures. For example, in Saudi Arabia, family refers to relationships beyond that of just parents and children living together but rather includes relatives of both affine and kin (Stewart, 2003). Thus, within this paper, we provide insights into the influence of other prevalent family forms on entrepreneurial activity (Howorth *et al.*, 2010; Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012) and sheds light on the variance of family as a concept across cultures (Gupta and Levenburg, 2010).

Based on our analysis, we make the following contributions to the literature. First, by focusing on the entrepreneurial behaviour of Saudi Arabian family firms, we respond to calls for research to be undertaken in a non-American/Western context which is currently lacking in the family business domain (Luo, 2019; Zahra *et al.*, 2014; Sharma and Chua, 2013), **and in the Arab world specifically (Krueger et al., 2021). Moreover, we theorised the context to better understand the heterogeneities of family businesses based on their cultural context in the region.** The importance of this, is reflected in the fact that references to ‘culture’ in two recent collections on family business research (James et al., 2020; Memili and Dibrell, 2018) relate almost entirely to proximate cultural contexts (the social environment of family business/entrepreneurship as represented in family and organisational culture) and not to distal cultural contexts, such as the countries and societies in which the family business is embedded (Gupta and Levenburg, 2010).

Second, based on this acknowledgment of the influence of the cultural context in family firms (Zahra *et al.*, 2014; Sharma and Chua, 2013), we provide insights into the influence of ‘Islamic capital’ on the intergenerational transfer of family legacy within Saudi Arabia, and demonstrate how this serves to motivate Saudi family firms to maintain harmony, avoid disputes

and create a legacy for future generations by engaging in entrepreneurial behaviours. In doing so, we unpack the entrepreneurial behaviours of family firms from a Bourdieusian perspective (Scott, 2012; Spiegel, 2013; De Clercq and Voronov, 2009a; 2009b; Pret et al., 2016).

Third, by investigating the impact of family ties (e.g. harmonious or conflictual) on the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms, we provide a nuanced understanding of how family relationship/ties are related to performance and firm valuation in family business research (Eddleston and Kellermanns, 2007; Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2001; Rousseau *et al.*, 2018). In particular, we indicate how context influences the manner in which the family firm creates new economic activity across time in light of positive or negative valence which determines the balance between entrepreneurial renewal and continuity.

The findings of our study revealed the role of cultural context on the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms **in Saudi Arabia, a cultural context dominated by the importance of family values and ties (Davis et al. 2000) where the family is a core pillar of society (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Practitioners and consultants in the country are thus advised to take into consideration the cultural context when designing solutions to family businesses and refrain from ‘one size fit all’ approach to family businesses across the world (Krueger et al., 2021) by redesigning global solutions to fit the specific nature of the country culture. A such, policy makers and family business advisors in other countries should pay more attention to the heterogeneous nature of family firms and provide support and solutions to family businesses based on their cultural context.**

Our discussion suggests a number of possibilities in terms of future work to address some of the limitations of this study. Our investigation in their entrepreneurial behaviour across different stages of their life cycle (Nordqvist *et al.*, 2015) was limited to two generations. However, this

may not be surprising given that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was only founded in 1930. Therefore, a longitudinal focus involving the collection of data at future points in time would enable the capturing in real time of the emergence, development/ change in family firms' entrepreneurial behaviour. Moreover, given the cultural and social importance of the 'family' in 'family business' under Islam and the importance of the family in the intergenerational transfer of values and a sense of morality to reinforce family ties (Scourfield *et al.*, 2012), further exploration of the nature and role of 'Islamic capital' as a distinctive context for the evolution and functioning of family businesses in Islamic cultures such as Saudi Arabia is an important question. Finally, although conflict within the family business context is not new, the impact of family ties (e.g. harmonious or conflictual) on the entrepreneurial behaviour of family firms and the role of context in this regard is. Future research therefore could investigate the manner in which conflict determines entrepreneurial behaviour namely entrepreneurial renewal and continuity across a variety of contexts. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that as a research domain, family entrepreneurship can benefit from this research given its unique insights in the Saudi Arabian context.

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