ENTREPRENEURIAL COGNITION, DYNAMISM, AND THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE-EAST (SUMMARY)

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Principal Topic

Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old micro-entrepreneur, set himself on fire on December 17th, 2010, and was pronounced dead on January 4th, 2011, triggering what has been termed the Arab Spring. Having been refused entry into the army and other employment in a young country with a high unemployment rate, he had been working as a street vendor, until his wares were confiscated and he was harassed and humiliated by officials. His story demonstrates a larger problem in the Middle East: “The revolution has [reached] … other … states, whose frustrated young people are often written off as complacent” (Fahim, 2011). We wondered: Has the entrepreneurial potential of these young minds been underappreciated?

Moved by this story, we asked the following research questions:
• To what extent can entrepreneurial cognition research (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2002) shed light on the larger social challenges in the Middle East?
• How do Middle-East entrepreneurial cognitions differ from those of the rest of the world?
• How do Middle-East entrepreneurial cognitions differ across generations?

Method

We purposefully sampled 577 expert and novice entrepreneurs in Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey; each with a common culture and large population of youth in need of productive economic engagement. We measured entrepreneurial cognition (Mitchell et al., 2000) and transaction commitment mindset (Smith et al., 2009) using script cue recognitions as formative indicators for expert scripts and generational differences using age as a proxy indicator. We analyzed these data using exploratory factor analysis, MANOVA, ANOVA, regression and PLS.

Results

While similar to those found previously (in some respects), differences in entrepreneurial cognitions found by country within the Middle East may help explain aspects of the current entrepreneurial challenge in terms of both a transaction commitment mindset and the making of the venture creation decision. Our results, then, both support the concept of a global entrepreneurial mindset while also indicating important country differences. We also see evidence of generational differences in the arrangement and ability cognitions of entrepreneurs in this region, which (in the socially situated context of the Arab Spring), has implications for entrepreneurship public policy and education.

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