

Chapter 11

Gender Differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimensions in the Middle East: Evidence From Palestine

Nidal A. Darwish

Al-Quds University, Palestine

Mohammed A. Bayyoud

Al-Quds University, Palestine

ABSTRACT

The research aims to explore and describe to what extent there is gender difference across the entrepreneurial orientation dimensions (risk-taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, competitiveness, and autonomy) in the Middle East. To achieve this goal, the authors employed a descriptive quantitative research design where 60 male and female entrepreneurs in Palestine were surveyed through a closed-ended questionnaire. The study findings indicate that males are more entrepreneurial-oriented than females, but to a relatively small extent. Moreover, the results showed that male entrepreneurs have a higher mean in risk-taking, competitiveness, and innovativeness, whereas females have a higher mean in proactiveness and autonomy. Additionally, the study showed that the traditions and customs prevalent in Palestine were the most critical restrictions for females to become entrepreneurs. Moreover, female entrepreneurs face different restrictions, including society's perception toward women, lack of funds, and legislation obstacles such as registration.

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INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurs have the most important effect on driving innovation in an economy. Such businesses were the primary source of change in traditional markets. Small businesses helped the economies to transform and embrace change by exploring new business opportunities. However, the concept of entrepreneurship in the Schumpeter period was different from the classical era. The Schumpeter entrepreneurs were innovators and change agents (Schumpeter 1954), while the classical entrepreneurs were risk-takers, capitalists, and rational and maximizing agents (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

The role played by gender on entrepreneurial behavior became an essential component of academic conversations around entrepreneurship. In recent years, an increasing number of studies focused on female entrepreneurship. In this regard, a long-lasting debate follows the entrepreneurial literature concerning gender roles in shaping entrepreneurial behavior. The increased participation of females in businesses by starting small independent businesses in different countries directed the academic investigators' attention as well as an international regulator to ensure diversity and equality. Preliminary findings reported that women make up approximately half of the global population (50%), but their ownership, participation, and management of international businesses are significantly low compared to men (Kim, 2007). Several reasons identified in the existing research such as lower women entrepreneurs include less activeness among women to develop new ends means frameworks, lack of entrepreneurial talent, social stereotypes, and lack of opportunities (Kim, 2007; Kelley et al., 2016). However, from a scientific point of view, the study of female entrepreneurship as a distinct area of inquiry is legitimate because women's entrepreneurship presents several distinctive characteristics that differentiate it from men's entrepreneurship.

Besides, the entrepreneurial behavior of women investigated the relationship with wealth formation, employment decisions, human capital development, labor market forces at work, and other factors. Researchers such as (Tsyganova & Shirokova, 2010; Johnson & Powell, 1994; Ayub et al., 2013) shed the light on the increased participation of males in entrepreneurial activities can be attributed to the differences in the levels of entrepreneurial orientations (EO) between the two genders. EO refers to "the processes, practices, and decision-making activities used by entrepreneurs that lead to the initiation of an entrepreneurial firm" (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; p.135). Therefore, beyond the simple gender perspective, it is vital to investigate and understand the differences in EO for both genders to see how these can affect female management of their entrepreneurial ventures.

Most literature on gender entrepreneurship is drawn from developed countries, and there is a lack of studies that focus on countries like Middle Eastern countries. The society in the Middle East is characterized by specific gender roles where women are supposed to be running a business or be on top of the firm's management. It makes the Middle East different and unique in the context. Palestine is no alien, so it is vital to investigate the phenomenon. Palestinian women face significant challenges in setting up independent small businesses and managing them in competition with their male counterparts. To date, there is a lack of research that investigates the differences in the perceptions of EO of Palestinian females and males. The current study aims to bridge this gap.

The current study aims to investigate and explore to what extent the perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females are different from those of their male counterparts. And to shed the light on the obstacles and challenges women entrepreneurs encounter while establishing their ventures. The study focuses on the gender differences in five EOs: risk-taking, innovativeness, pro-activeness, competitiveness, and autonomy for comparison between the two groups. Consequently, the current study is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

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- To what extent do perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females differ from those of their male counterparts in the middle east?
- What are the main constraints that affect female entrepreneurs launching their businesses in the Middle East?

To address this research question, we need an appropriate theory to explore the difference between the perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females and their male counterparts. Shinnar et al. (2012) stressed gender differences in entrepreneurial abilities, intentions, and other entrepreneurial attributes. Hence, we chose gender theory because Gender theory postulates that men and women have different approaches in managing their businesses (Quaye et al., 2015).

The contribution of this study is twofold: First, it contributes to the entrepreneurship literature, there was a growing interest and research that focused on women's entrepreneurship (e.g., Boyd, 2005; Bruni et al., 2004; Brush et al., 2006; Lerner & Pines, 2010; Pines, 2002; Pines & Schwartz, 2008). Second, it attempts to enrich the gender theory by understanding the difference between male and female entrepreneurial behavior. Indeed, research on women's entrepreneurship in the context of the Middle East is scarce and this study can provide an overview of the obstacles and the support required for the development of women's entrepreneurship in this region. (Ghouse et al., 2019).

The chapter is structured as follows: an introduction to the theoretical background. Then, the methodological approach of this study is described. Finally, the findings are provided, followed by a discussion of the study's implications for theory and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Entrepreneurship

Global interest in women entrepreneurs has been growing (Marlow & McAdam, 2013) as there is recently a significant increase in female entrepreneurs (Hughes et al., 2012). According to the emerging literature, women can contribute significantly to entrepreneurial activity (Noguera et al., 2013), economic development (Kelley et al., 2017; Hechevarra et al., 2019), job creation and GDP growth (Bahmani-Oskooee et al., 2013; Ayogu & Agu, 2015), with positive effects on poverty reduction (Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Rae, 2015). However, the percentage of women who choose to pursue an entrepreneurial career is lower than that of men (Elam et al., 2019), and this difference becomes more pronounced as the country's level of development rises (Coduras & Autio, 2013). As the number of women starting new businesses grows, significant efforts have been made to investigate the impact of gender on entrepreneurship (Braches & Elliott, 2016; Henry et al., 2016). Women still face more difficulties and pressures when managing their businesses (Bui et al., 2018). For example, the entrepreneur stereotype includes masculine characteristics such as assertiveness, risk-taking, opportunity recognition, and economic growth (Ahl, 2006).

Women's businesses, on average, are smaller and more likely to be organized as sole proprietorships than corporations, in lower occupational status sectors, grow more slowly, have fewer sales, and are less profitable (Marlow & Patton, 2005; Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Moreover, property rights facilitate access to resources, and in many institutional contexts, women are particularly limited in their access to the economic resources required for entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009), as entrepreneurs must rely more on informal networks that are typically dominated by men (Brush et al., 2009). Furthermore, men

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can be more effective in dealing with government officials due to gender-defined social positioning (Bardasi et al., 2011). However, there is empirical evidence that a woman's decision to start a business is influenced by her sociocultural background (Ahl, 2006) due to gender stereotypes. Ahl (2004) discovered that in all of the texts reviewed in her study of how academics contribute to perpetuating stereotypes about female entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs were considered secondary to men. The reasons for this "negative representation" continue to be the subject of international debate, with no expected outcomes. This stereotypical and male-centered vision discourages some women from participating in business activities, which may also impact people who interact with women in the community, creating an additional barrier (Langowitz & Morgan, 2003).

According to the findings of Sullivan and Meek's (2012) systematic analysis, the attributions of society and the various socialization processes relating to men and women may create barriers for women due to unequal distribution of assets and services, educational objectives, and daily life activity expectations. It appears critical to increase the percentage of women in entrepreneurship, which has sparked political interest in recent years, by emphasizing the potential economic benefits (Carter et al., 2015), claiming that gender equality contributes to economic growth. The "global gender gap" is at the heart of EU policy, as it identifies a clear economic logic for encouraging women to become self-employed (Carter et al., 2015; Sorgner et al., 2017). Finally, according to Boyd (2016), a critical counterweight must be added to the public debate. There is no collective questioning among all actors working in various fields to understand gender-related discrimination, which is required for long-term development (Cardella et al., 2020).

Women Entrepreneurs in the Middle East

Women entrepreneurship in developing countries is difficult due to a lack of opportunities, limited resources, and unique challenges (Panda & Dash, 2014, 2016; Panda, 2018; Verheul et al., 2006). According to the literature, one of the significant challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the Middle East is access to financial resources (Jamali, 2009; Halkias et al., 2011; Maden, 2015; Naguib & Jamali, 2015; Ramadani et al., 2015). However, the number of women entrepreneurs in the Middle East is increasing, providing more opportunities for women to start, shape, and manage their businesses (Tlaiss, 2015; Dechant & Lamky, 2005). Middle Eastern countries are male-dominated societies where gender roles are strictly defined and differentiated. Men are expected to be decisive, whereas women are expected to be intuitive and focused on relationship building and quality of life (Hofstede, 1994).

Moreover, Middle Eastern societies are also highly collectivist: members are expected to adjust their aspirations to meet or fulfill the group's goals, emphasizing group conformity (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, men are expected to provide financial support for their families, while women are expected to care for the home and family. Such a culture promotes the idea that a woman's proper place is in her home (Sultan, 2016). No law in the Middle East prohibits women from working or owning a business. However, the business environment is heavily skewed toward men. Women entrepreneurs face various challenges and constraints that limit their economic participation and, as a result, contribute at a lower rate than men (Hisrich & ztürk, 1999). Consequently, women's entrepreneurship rates in the Middle East are the lowest in the world, and their enterprises are small and focused primarily on 'feminine' sectors (World Economic Forum, 2011).

Women in many Middle Eastern countries, including Palestine, struggle against inequality and restrictive practices in economic participation and are constrained by family roles (Hattab, 2012). Many

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of these unfair practices and limitations originate from local cultural traditions (Haber & Reichel, 2007). For Example, women entrepreneurs in Palestine encounter external barriers such as a lack of financing, exclusion from male-dominated informal networks, and social perception that business ownership is a male activity. These barriers are primarily informal, based on cultural norms, values, and customs (Mohsen, 2007). However, there is little research on the problems experienced by women entrepreneurs in the Middle East, as the majority of research on women entrepreneurs has been conducted in Western or developed economies context (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2013).

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurship is a “behavior in which an individual or group of individuals takes a risk to start a new business and owning it” (Brush et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship is more about the processes, methods, and styles individuals adopt to practice their Entrepreneurship. It also acts as a market force to drive economic and social development in an economy. It helps people to personally develop and fulfill their needs on a self-basis without depending on anyone. Developed and developing countries showed a significant increase in entrepreneurial activities in the past decade. However, entrepreneurial firms contribute to the growth and progress of society and the welfare of the citizens (Bruton et al., 2013; Dana, 2000).

Over the years, there is an increase in the academic literature on the need for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be entrepreneurial, if they want to survive and grow (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Rauch et al., 2009; Wales et al., 2013). This entrepreneurial trend is referred to in academic literature as entrepreneurial orientation (EO). EO is closely related to the propensity to take advantage of business opportunities, which has a positive effect on firm performance (Yoon, 2012; Radipere, 2013). EO is defined by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) as “the processes, practices, and decision-making activities used by entrepreneurs that lead to the initiation of an entrepreneurial firm.” EO is also viewed as the strategic processes, practices, and decisions that key decision-makers of business use to enact their firm’s organizational purpose, sustain its vision, and create a competitive advantage (Bazile, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003). Mahmood and Hanafi (2013) mentioned that EO is an important factor for business success. Rauch et al. (2009) and Fatoki (2014) emphasize that EO is a significant component of business success and profitability. Also, Radipere (2013) and Van Geenhuizen et al. (2008) observed that EO is a source of competitive advantage and thus acts as a remedy to the problems facing businesses that desire to achieve a sustained competitive advantage. Furthermore, studies (e.g., Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005; Rauch et al., 2009) showed that businesses that have high EO are more willing to take a risk, more innovative, and highly proactive toward unexploited opportunities in the marketplace and opt for new mass of buyers and thus are better positioned to manage the impact of the macroeconomic shocks on their business activities.

Miller (1983) first conceptualized Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO) The concept of entrepreneurial orientation where he categorized EO using three dimensions (innovativeness, pro-activeness, and risk-taking). Miller elucidated that the three dimensions of EO act together to form a basic unidimensional strategic orientation and thus should be combined into a single scale in entrepreneurship research. Subsequent theorization by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) introduced two more formal dimensions (autonomy and competitive aggressiveness). These researchers believe that the EO dimensions can vary independently of each other and thus can be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional scale. Nonetheless, in spite of the huge opinion differences on the methodological and measurement issues of EO by researchers (Cassia & Minola, 2012; Covin & Wales, 2011; Tang et al., 2009; Hughes & Morgan, 2007) the EO construct

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proved to its reliability and validity (Runyan et al., 2012; Kreiser et al., 2002). For the purpose of this study, the five dimensions of EO – namely, innovativeness, pro-activeness, risk-taking, autonomy, and competitiveness as developed by Lumpkin and Dess (1996) will be used.

Entrepreneurship Orientation Dimensions

Innovativeness

Lumpkin and Dess (1996: 142) define innovativeness as the tendency of a business “to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, services, or technological processes.” Kropp et al. (2006) identify innovativeness as an important success factor for new businesses. Studies on the gender differences in innovation by De Vita et al. (2014) reveal that female entrepreneurs are less innovative than their male counterparts, thus less inclined to expand and export orientation. Research by Verheul et al. (2006) pointed out that while women entrepreneurs have a greater tendency to innovate on their products despite getting fewer growth expectations, male entrepreneurs, on the other hand, tend to focus on the development of new markets that can enhance the growth of their businesses. Furthermore, several studies (Masona et al., 2015; Soininen et al., 2012; Hameed & Ali, 2011) established a positive relationship between innovativeness and firms’ performance.

Autonomy

Autonomy can be defined as an individual’s independent aptitude to bring forth an idea or a vision and see it through to its completion. Callaghan and Venter (2011) view autonomy as the concept of free and independent action and decisions taken by the entrepreneur. Sexton and Bowman-Upton’s (1990) study on female and male entrepreneurs reveal that female entrepreneur scored significantly higher on the traits related to autonomy than male entrepreneurs. Concerning performance, while Awang et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between autonomy and performance, other studies like Casillas and Moreno, 2010; Hughes and Morgan, 2007, fail to find any significant relationship between autonomy and performance.

Proactiveness

Proactiveness is an opportunity-seeking behavior that characterizes an entrepreneur’s quest for pursuing and exploiting new business opportunities, such as introducing new products/services before competitors (Martin & Javalgi, 2013). Jalali et al. (2014) pointed out that proactive firms are innovative and thus can achieve a competitive advantage. Craig et al. (2014) observed that proactive businesses are usually far ahead of their competitors in identifying profitable opportunities and taking initiatives that enhance their businesses’ performances. In addition, studies (Masona et al., 2015; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001) revealed a positive relationship between pro-activeness and firm performance. Concerning gender and pro-activeness, Tan (2008) established that women entrepreneurs are more proactive than men as they are more willing to take bolder decisions to move into risky and untried ventures when compared to their male counterparts.

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Competitiveness

Competitiveness refers to how a business “relates to competitors and responds to trends and demand that already exist in the marketplace” (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996: 147). Schillo (2011) views competitive aggressiveness as a business way of engaging with its competitors. Studies on gender differences in competitiveness have mainly focused on the experiment. Shurchkov (2012) observed that women are significantly more likely to compete when task stereotypes and time constraints are absent but will be more often stay away from the competition if both sources of pressure are present. Furthermore, the nexus between competitiveness and a firm’s performance seems to produce mixed results. Some studies (Masona et al., 2015; Le Roux & Bengesi, 2014) found a positive relationship between competitiveness and a firm’s performance. In other studies, Casillas and Moreno (2010) fail to find any relationship.

Risk-Taking Propensity

Tang and Tang (2007) define risk-taking propensity as an individual’s current inclination to take or avoid risks. Risk-taking is considered an essential part of entrepreneurship because an entrepreneur cannot know whether the desired product or service can be produced if it will meet the needs and expectations of potential customers; and whether it will generate profit. Risk-taking enhances the profitability of a business (Miller & Le Bruton-Miller, 2011). Jalali et al. (2014) believe that entrepreneurs partake in risk-taking activities when anticipating an expected return. In addition, Masona et al. (2015) found a positive relationship between risk-taking and performance. With regards to gender differences in terms of risk-taking, studies (Sexton & Bowman-Upton, 1990; Kepler & Shane, 2007; Wagner, 2007) established that there is a significant difference between men and women, with women being more risk-averse than men. The fear of failure, the low tolerance for uncertainty, and the ability to identify opportunities limits their abilities to start their businesses and thus account for the lower existence of female entrepreneurship (Minniti & Nardone, 2007). Conversely, Furdas and Kohn (2010) did not find any significant gender differences in the risk tolerance behavior of entrepreneurs in Germany. However, Tan (2008) found that women entrepreneurs participate in more risky ventures than their male counterparts.

The Relationship Between Gender and Entrepreneurial Orientation

Research on female entrepreneurs is increasing rapidly, but little academic literature focused on gender differences in entrepreneurs (Yordanova & Alexandrova-Boshnakova, 2010). This may be due to under-sized conceptualization in the milieu of female entrepreneurship (Brindley, 2005). Johnson and Powell (1994) emphasized on the significance of differences between male and female entrepreneurial behavior on the success of businesses because of their entrepreneurial orientation in decision contexts. Gender differences in behavior might be caused by gender differences in entrepreneurial orientation preferences, but they might also be caused by situational factors such as options provided to females and the advice they receive. Empirical research in business and finance reveals that females and males differ in their entrepreneurial orientation. Numerous studies approached gender differences in the contexts of risk orientation (Jianakopulos & Bernasek, 1998; Williams & Narendran, 1999; Croson & Gneezy, 2009) which is for the most part a central dimension of entrepreneurial orientation. For instance, Powell and Ansic (1997) stated that females have less risk preferences than males.

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Furthermore, Gustafson (1998) validated the thought discussed above by revealing females' and males' differences in risk perceptions both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The analysis of EO according to gender was not the subject of many studies. Indeed, few academic studies focused on the differences between the EO of women and men (Yordanova, Alexandrova-Boshnakova 2010). According to Ayub et al. (2013), research on woman entrepreneurs is increasing rapidly, but little is known about the gender differences between entrepreneurs. This can be due to a lack of conceptualization of the female entrepreneurship sphere (Brindley, 2005). Yet gender studies can enrich theoretical knowledge in the entrepreneurial field (Chasserio et al., 2016).

However, the five dimensions of entrepreneurship related to gender were studied by researchers in different studies, such as the disparity in risk preferences observed between women and men explains the differences in EO (Jianakopulos & Bernasek 1998; Williams & Narendran 1999; Croson & Gneezy 2009). Moreover, Fellnhofner et al. (2016) emphasize that gender inequalities are present in every organization and exist at various organizational levels. Thus, women and men evaluate their EO levels differently within the same organization (Wales et al. 2011).

Gender Theory and Entrepreneurship

Recently, advocates and scholars paid more attention to gender issues because of the growing correlation between gender and entrepreneurship success. In this sense, some authors have defined gender as socially constructed rules, relationships, and learned behaviors of males and women (Dejene, 2007). According to Orhan (2000), when gender theory and entrepreneurship are compared, two distinct gender frameworks—psychological and constructivism—emerge. According to constructivist scholars, the flexibility of entrepreneurship attracts entrepreneurs (especially women) more than the constraints of traditional employment. The psychological school of thinking contends that being an entrepreneur can be a lifestyle decision. Additionally, studies examined how discrimination against women affects their personal life and the growth of the national economy (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003). DeMartino and Barbato (2003) aimed to evaluate gender differences and how these differences could be used for entrepreneurship-based national development.

According to Fischer et al. (1993), looking at feminism through the lens of entrepreneurship reveals distinctions between male and female entrepreneurs. The socialization process and overt discrimination against women are the main causes of this discrepancy. Some scholars suggested relationships between entrepreneurial orientation and several other variables, including performance. Others have utilized entrepreneurial orientation as a moderating factor for variables such as business performance (Su et al., 2011), sales growth (Chaston & Sadler-Smith, 2012), and firm strategy growth (Moreno & Casillas, 2008). Some of this research identified several dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation were revealed in some of these studies.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

In the current study, we employ a descriptive research approach as we aim to describe, clarify and explain its inner relationships and properties (Huczynski & Buchana, 1991). Descriptive research will portray an accurate profile of people, events, or situations (Robson, 1993). Descriptive research in contrast with

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exploratory research defines questions, people surveyed, and the method of analysis prior to the beginning of data collection. In other words, descriptive research defines the research aspects, who, what, where, when, why and sometimes how of the research. Therefore, the study follows the descriptive approach to achieve the aim of the study (Yin, 1994), which was to examine the gender differences regarding entrepreneurial orientation dimensions.

To achieve the study's objective deductive method was adopted by using the survey as the primary tool for gathering data from the sample of male and female entrepreneurs that would help understand the differences between genders and other dimensions regarding entrepreneurial orientation in Palestine. The same will also assist in identifying what are the constraints that affect female entrepreneurs in launching their businesses. Therefore, the study adopted a quantitative approach for collecting and analysing the data gathered from the sample of the research population (Saunders, et al, 2009). For the purpose of the study, we took a purposive sample. The quantitative measures were made on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1. Adjustment mean scale

Low Degree	1.00-2.66
Middle Degree	2.67-3.66
High Degree	3.67-5.00

Data Collection

The primary data was collected through a closed-ended questionnaire via phone calls and personal meetings to fulfill the questionnaires and by communicating with the district's chambers of industry and commerce in West Bank to help identify a list of women and men entrepreneurs and support the fulfillment of the questionnaires. Closed-ended questions help to arrive at opinions about a product or service, and sometimes, about a company, in a more efficient manner (Saunders et al., 2009). We also employed open-ended questions. The questionnaires were distributed to over 75 entrepreneurs, and only 60 questionnaires were retrieved to be analysed statistically. Hence, the data collection process consisted of three steps. Where in the first step, the researcher had personal meetings with entrepreneurs. In the second step, questionnaires were fulfilled by phone. In the third step, the researcher communicated with the Industrial and Commercial Chambers around the west bank to make the process more official.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the closed-ended survey questionnaire were analysed through statistical tools including the percentages, the averages, and the standard deviations.

Gender Differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimensions in the Middle East**RESULTS**

The study's findings can be divided into three sections. First, we will present the findings from the first research question. In addition, the main study hypothesis is tested in the second section. Finally, in the third section, we present the answer to the second research question.

Results of the First Research Question

Different statements were analysed under the question to determine the level of entrepreneurial dimension in males and females concerning risk-taking, innovativeness, competitiveness, proactivity, and autonomy. As shown in Table 2, the degree of entrepreneurial orientation in males is higher in innovativeness with (3.97 mean) than in females with (3.89 mean), this is could be because males encourage their employees to explore and develop new ideas. However, females are more innovative toward seeking new marketing methods whereas males seek out new ways that add value to the product/service. In a similar way, when it comes to risk-taking for males is higher with (3.92 mean) compared to female entrepreneurs where the mean is (3.7). Therefore, male entrepreneurs tend to be more risk-takers than female entrepreneurs.

The competitiveness means of both show that male entrepreneurs are more competitive with average means of (3.71) than females with average means of (3.51), as they adopt more aggressive competition tools toward their competitors. Moreover, the Proactivity dimension of males (3.69 mean) and females (3.56 mean) are similar in terms of monitoring the market trends and identifying the future needs of customers. On the other hand, female entrepreneurs have a higher mean of autonomy (3.83 mean) than males having a (3.68) mean implying that females prefer having the freedom toward anything necessary in their work and do not ask for help in making decisions. In total, the average mean for males of the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is (3.79 mean) which is higher than for female entrepreneurs with an average mean (3.7). Given that, we can conclude that male entrepreneurs are more entrepreneurial-oriented than females but to a limited degree in the Arab world.

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of male and female entrepreneurial orientation (EO)

Standard Deviation	Mean	Number	Gender	EO
0.59	3.97*	29	Male	Innovativeness
0.52	3.89	31	Female	Innovativeness
0.42	3.92*	29	Male	Risk Taking
0.39	3.70	31	Female	Risk Taking
0.57	3.71*	29	Male	Competitiveness
0.51	3.51	31	Female	Competitiveness
0.6	3.69*	29	Male	Proactivity
0.53	3.56	31	Female	Proactivity
0.46	3.68	31	Male	Autonomy
0.53	3.83*	29	Female	Autonomy
0.54	3.79*	29	Male	Total
0.35	3.70	31	Female	Total

Gender Differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimensions in the Middle East**Hypotheses Testing**

Main hypothesis: There were no significant differences at $\alpha=0.05$ of the level of the extent perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females' difference compared to those of their male counterparts.

We used a t-test to test hypotheses for the differences in the level of the extent perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of female's difference compared to those of their male counterparts according to gender, as follows:

Table 3. The results of (T-test) for the differences in the level of the extent perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of female's difference compared to those of their male counterparts

	Gender	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	DF	T	Sig
Risk Taking	Male	29	3.92	0.42	58	1.993	0.051
	Female	31	3.70	0.39			
Innovativeness	Male	29	3.97	0.59	58	0.544	0.589
	Female	31	3.89	0.52			
Proactivity	Male	29	3.69	0.60	58	0.907	0.368
	Female	31	3.56	0.53			
Competitiveness	Male	29	3.71	0.57	58	1.449	0.153
	Female	31	3.51	0.51			
Autonomy	Male	29	3.68	0.53	58	-1.109	0.272
	Female	31	3.83	0.46			
Average value	Male	29	3.81	0.41	58	1.056	0.296
	Female	31	3.70	0.35			

The results of the analysis in the table above indicate that there were no significant differences at $\alpha=0.05$ for the level of the extent perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females difference compared to those of their male counterparts according to the gender. This is the core objective of the study, when we can say from the results that there are no significant differences between male and female entrepreneurs in all dimensions in general, but there are differences in a number of dimensions. This means that the managerial and intellectual circumstances and environment for both genders encourage both genders toward adopting all dimensions and being an entrepreneur. We believe that both genders have the same opportunities toward adopting and applying the entrepreneurial dimensions, but with conservations related to females, in which they face some social and economic obstacles.

Results of the Second Research Question

The second research question is: what are the main constraints that affect female entrepreneurs launching their businesses in the Middle East?

Gender Differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimensions in the Middle East*Table 4. Mean and standard deviation for the questions of the study as ordered with their importance*

	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree
8	Traditions and customs prevalent in Palestine put a lot of restrictions on the women	3.94	1.09	High
9	Women in Palestine lack awareness about their potential	3.90	1.04	High
13	You obtain support from your spouse toward running your project	3.84	1.06	High
2	I have difficulties securing a fund for my business	3.77	0.66	High
11	I face a lot of competition from men	3.68	0.87	High
10	Society is dominated by males	3.65	0.91	Middle
5	Balancing between business and family life is difficult.	3.58	0.95	Middle
3	I always struggle to be taken seriously	3.58	1.05	Middle
1	I face social obstacles as a woman entrepreneur	3.55	1.12	Middle
12	Women are easily cheated in the market	3.16	1.00	Middle
4	It is hard for me to build an extensive and supportive network	3.03	1.01	Middle
7	I suffer from a negative view of the society	2.94	1.23	Middle
6	I don't have enough support from the family	2.81	1.35	Middle
	Average	3.49	0.54	Middle

Table 4 indicates that the traditions and customs prevalent in Palestine form the most critical restrictions among females toward being entrepreneurs. Also, women in Palestine lack awareness of their competencies. Moreover, married women in Palestine, are the most supported by their husbands, but they face a lot of competition from men, this is related to the Eastern community which prevents women from doing all things that men can do, such as work, and innovativeness. But at the same time, the Palestinian community created an environment for women with the ability to achieve their objectives, the same as men. This reflects in the middle average and degree sentence, in which the women do not have enough support from their families.

Furthermore, we posed an open question to female entrepreneurs: “what are the main constraints you faced when you started your business as a woman?”. When starting their businesses, all women entrepreneurs who responded to this question faced a variety of challenges, some related to society and others to managerial, financial, and other issues, as follows:

Gender Differences in the Entrepreneurial Orientation Dimensions in the Middle East*Table 5. Main obstacles faced by women toward being entrepreneurs*

Number	Statement	Number of responses	Valid percent
1	Lack of funds.	16	18.6
2	Society's perception of the woman.	10	11.6
3	Legislation obstacles	9	10.4
4	Inequity between both genders.	7	8.1
5	Adaptation between family and work.	7	8.1
6	The masculinity of the society.	5	5.8
7	Administrative Obstacles	4	4.6
8	Traditions of the society	3	3.5
9	Family objection toward woman's work.	3	3.4
10	Woman's perception of herself	2	2.3

Table 5 indicates the most critical obstacles among females, which are society's perception of women; however, the other two barriers faced by both women and men together toward being entrepreneurs are lack of funds and legislation obstacles such as registration. These obstacles ensure that women and men also fail to be an entrepreneur. Palestine has many points of failure in laws that prohibit women from registering and doing all legislative issues, while men are not. Indeed, it is worth mentioning that the Palestinian and Arabian communities are the main obstacle against women, with old traditions and thoughts regarding women who must stay at home to care for children, which is not acceptable in the contemporary world.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the questionnaire showed that there is a difference in risk-taking, innovativeness, and competitiveness entrepreneurial dimension between male and female entrepreneurs. Risk-taking is identified in the literature as one of the most important attributes of entrepreneurs. Risk-taking attribute mainly leads to business success. The findings of the study are similar to the finding of the literature where Tsyganova and Shirokova (2010) indicated that due to the male gender attribute, male entrepreneurs are more risk-taking than females. Dana (2000) argued that female entrepreneurs are less likely to take risks. However, findings related to innovation are different from the literature as Brush et al. (2009) identified that female entrepreneurs are more innovative than male. Innovation is one of the key determinants of a successful enterprise. An entrepreneur should be able to encourage and adopt innovative ideas in order to improve business performance and gain market share in the industry.

As far as competitiveness is concerned, literature such as Dana (2000) found that male and female entrepreneurs both can be equally competitive. Competitiveness is another important attribute of the entrepreneur because competitiveness boosts innovation in identifying the consumers' needs and fulfilling them accordingly. The current study found that both male and female entrepreneurs are competitive in their own sphere thereby they both possess competitiveness attributes.

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Autonomy is also important for effective entrepreneurship because it helps in making them work according to their own goals, values, tastes, and beliefs. The current study findings show that females are more autonomous than male entrepreneurs, as female entrepreneurs enjoy freedom in decision-making whereas male entrepreneurs like to consult other employees. Tsyganova and Shirokova (2010) identified that autonomy can be effective in entrepreneurship to some extent only. However, too much autonomy can be risky for the success of the enterprise.

Moreover, the findings of the study showed that the managerial and intellectual circumstances and environment for both genders encourage both genders toward adopting all dimensions and being an entrepreneur. It implies that both genders have the same opportunities toward adopting and applying the entrepreneurial dimensions, but with conservations related to females, in which they face some social and economic obstacles. These findings are similar to the findings of Brush et al. (2009) that found that male and female managerial circumstances determine how both genders adopt entrepreneur attributes. Male entrepreneurs, although, are likely to have more entrepreneurial attributes, and female entrepreneurs share the same level of attributes in risk-taking, proactive approach, autonomy, competitiveness, and innovativeness regardless of age and gender difference.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of the current study is to explore and describe whether and to what extent there are gender differences across the EO dimensions (risk-taking, innovativeness, proactiveness, competitiveness, and autonomy). Therefore, the central research question is, “to what extent do perceptions of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of females differ from those of their male counterparts in the middle east?” To achieve this goal, we employed a descriptive quantitative research design where 60 male and female entrepreneurs in Palestine were surveyed through a closed-ended questionnaire. The study findings indicate that males are more entrepreneurial-oriented than females but to a relatively small extent. Moreover, the results showed that male entrepreneurs have a higher mean in risk-taking, competitiveness, and innovativeness, whereas females have a higher mean in proactiveness and autonomy.

The second research question is, “what are the main constraints that affect female entrepreneurs launching their businesses in the Middle East? Findings indicate that the traditions and customs prevalent in Palestine form the most critical restrictions among females toward being entrepreneurs. Moreover, the results indicate that essential obstacles among females are society’s perception toward women, lack of funds, and legislation obstacles such as registration.

Both male and female entrepreneurs have low levels of innovativeness, competitive aggressiveness, and proactiveness, indicating the importance of developing these competencies among Middle Eastern entrepreneurs because these EO dimensions can significantly improve the performance of their businesses. Furthermore, entrepreneurs and managers can improve their businesses’ overall EO posture by empowering their employees to act entrepreneurially through entrepreneurial skill development. Furthermore, risk-taking and proactiveness are widely recognized for influencing business performance and growth. However, this study found significant gender differences in these two factors, with men being risk-takers and females being more proactive. As a result, they are forming gender-balanced partnerships that will allow business owners and managers to have optimal levels of both factors to improve their company’s performance and growth.

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Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that the governments, decision-makers, and politicians in developing countries, particularly Palestine, work on updating the laws toward giving women more rights in the social and economic aspects of life. It is also important to engage both women and men in entrepreneurial education to develop the right abilities, skills, and competencies critical for women to make vital contributions through entrepreneurial ventures. More attention should be paid to women's economic and social empowerment to change the community's perspectives against women. The current study also recommends that women should be promoted as entrepreneurs. It should also be ensured that women have access to education at all levels. Dedicated women's business centers should be developed, offering essential business information, networks, knowledge sharing, training, and mentoring.

The study also recommends allocating programs that support women's entrepreneurship to encourage more women to become entrepreneurs and change the gendered entrepreneurship discourse. Such programs are critical for women to achieve their personal and economic goals (Marlow & Patton, 2005). According to Hanson (2009), a greater emphasis on empowering women entrepreneurs within support programs will enable women to challenge gender structures. Women entrepreneurs must network more to become more successful, establishing that women, not structures, must change (Hughes et al., 2012). However, governments of emerging economies, policymakers, and international donor organizations embraced entrepreneurship as a strategic tool for economic growth and social advancement (Al-Dajani et al., 2015). Therefore, they should support women entrepreneurs, especially in emerging and developing economies, and they should believe that women are good at entrepreneurship and that entrepreneurship is good for women.

The gendered experiences of women entrepreneurs and the effects on their enterprises in various country contexts, particularly in developing countries, both during and after COVID-19, may thus be explored in future research using qualitative methodologies. We would also encourage such research to undertake longitudinal analyses to explore these impacts and uncover women's creative responses to business recovery.

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