

## **Effects of the Entrepreneurial Environment on Tunisian Individuals' Decision to Start a Business**

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**Abstract:** *Due to the severe competitiveness in the marketplace, venture creation in big towns, such as Sfax-Tunisia, has become a serious challenge. Then, considering entrepreneurship as a source of wealth creation, economic growth, social progress, and technological development, the current paper seeks to identify the motivating factors that are triggering new venture creators' decision to start their businesses. To identify the observed motivations, we developed a questionnaire that we addressed to 86 new entrepreneurs drawing on the theoretical and empirical literature.*

*The application of factor analysis has revealed that business creators' decision to launch their ventures rests upon three main motivational dimensions: socio-economic conditions, entrepreneurial skills, and financial and non-financial assistance. The study also suggests some recommendations to enhance entrepreneurship in Tunisia.*

**Keywords:** *Entrepreneurship, business creators, Motivators*

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### **I. Introduction**

Entrepreneurship has been overwhelmingly considered as one the major sources of wealth creation, economic growth, social progress, and technological development (Herrington, Kew and Kew, 2009; Chen and He, 2011). In fact, one of the most eminent constructs that has predominantly contributed to the flourishing of entrepreneurship, not only as a career choice but also as a field of research, is individuals' entrepreneurial intention (Covin and Slevin, 1991; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996). On this basis, entrepreneurial intention is accounted for as a primary step towards new venture creation in the entrepreneurial process. Evidently, some eminent determinants are expected to either enhance or impede the launching of ventures (Engle *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, given that individuals' start-ups is subject to a set of factors, investigating what motivates business creators to embrace the field of entrepreneurship and to successfully manage their ventures has become an illuminating area of research.

In fact, the issue of employability has received much attention from policy makers because the growing body of unemployed people in Tunisia places an additional burden on limited government budget. Thus, by enhancing entrepreneurship in Tunisia, policy makers anticipate that new venture founders will no longer rely on the welfare of the State since they will be able to achieve economic independence. Besides, when enterprising, business founders will focus more on achieving their self-esteem as productive players in the marketplace and as "engines of economic growth" (Baron and Shane, 2008). Finally, entrepreneurship has become a national strategy, mainly in emerging countries, as it helps governments alleviate poverty, reduce the rate of unemployment, and avoid income inequality among individuals.

Therefore, we seek to respond to the following research question: what are the effects of the entrepreneurial environment on promoting the decision to create a business?

The current paper aims at identifying the main attributes of the entrepreneurial concept and its motivating factors in the Tunisian context. In the literature, there has been a focus on entrepreneurial components, such as entrepreneurs' innovativeness, competitiveness, proactiveness, and risk-taking. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to use the concept of venture creation as our theoretical lens so as to examine new business creators' entrepreneurial incentives determining their tendencies to create their own business.

This paper is structured as follows: first, we present a review of literature on the topic of motivating factors. Then, we explain the applied survey and methodology. Afterwards, we display the obtained results, discuss their implications and, finally, draw a conclusion.

## **1. Literature Review**

Literature on entrepreneurship has revealed the fact that some theoretical frameworks have contributed to the whole make-up of the field, relying mostly on the behavioral and cognitive aspects of the individual. For instance, Shapero and Sokol's (1982) Entrepreneurial Event Theory focuses on the impact of changing events, such as job losses or else availability of financial support, on individual desirability and feasibility with regard to venture creation.

Then, in Bandura's (1986) Process Driven Theory, behavior is presented as dependent on individuals' perceptions of their abilities to perform things and to achieve what they intend to do. This theory also assumes that thoughts, shaping attitudes and forming intention, are subject to the effects of external environment. Moreover, Ajzen (1991), in his Theory of Planned Behavior, maintains that individuals' actual behavior is determined by their intentions to enterprise and the act of becoming a business creator. Following Gnyawali and Fogel (1994), business ventures are enhanced in environments conducive to entrepreneurship. In fact, entrepreneurial environments are categorized into four eminent levels: 1. government policies and procedures, 2. socioeconomic conditions, 3. entrepreneurial skills, and 4. financial as well as non-financial assistance.

### **2.1. Effects of government Policies and Procedures on Decision to Start a Business**

As for the entrepreneurial environment, it is assumed that government policies and procedures can enhance an entrepreneurial culture in a community aspiring growth and being accustomed to taking risks when creating ventures (Fogel, 2001). In fact, the perceptions of the politico-economic environment influence the interest in starting a business. As Davidson (1991) has observed, individuals are objectively more susceptible to the perceived conditions than they are to the real ones.

In this token, research has proved that several governmental variables can take part in enhancing entrepreneurship. For instance, Aldrich and Wiedenmayer, (1993) maintained that less bureaucracy embodied in the flexible rules and the procedural facilities motivates potential entrepreneurs to indulge into the realm of venture creation. Begley *et al.* (1982), in turn, assumed that a political system in a given country needs to be built on freedom of choice, individual rights and democratic rules so that governments could promote entrepreneurship. For instance, regulations such as taxation rates and licensing policies can have a tremendous effect on entrepreneurship. In this sense, the tax structure must be well defined to emphasize social objectives towards new economic activity, social security, public expenditure and social equality (Davidsson *et al.*, 1994). So, potential entrepreneurs need to feel safe and protected, which helps them engage in risky activities and raises their tendency to be innovative. Similarly, the regulatory systems need to recognize the corporate form, allow limited liability, ensure fair treatment of bankruptcy, restrict monopolistic practices and implement law enforcement (Stiglitz, 1992). Therefore, entrepreneurs aspire to work within a supporting legal framework and enjoy well defined protective laws, such as the well-defined legislative rights and the impartial enforcement of contracts.

On the basis of what we have displayed in connection with factors relating to the entrepreneurial environment, we can issue the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H1): Government policies and procedures in Tunisia positively influence individuals' decision to launch their business.

### **2.2. Effects of socio-Economic Conditions on Decision to Start a Business**

When considering socio-economic conditions, Davidson *et al.* (2006) assume that the launching of individuals' businesses can depend on their attitudes towards the realm of entrepreneurship which are developed by parents, family, friends, etc. In addition to role models residing in the cognition of potential business creators, these attitudes can motivate individuals to found their own projects. For instance, since self-employed parents are perceived as mentors for the new generation, an entrepreneurial family is expected to motivate its members and, hence, raises their likelihood towards enterprising (Matthews and Moser, 1995). In the same vein, it is empirically evidenced that people's strong self-efficacy, mainly when it is coupled with the availability of national support programs and efficient networks, can be considered as the thread motivating entrepreneurs to indulge into the realm of venture creation (Sequeira, Muller, and McGee, 2007; Franco *et al.*, 2010).

Concerning the economic motivators, it is worth signaling that globalization has played a key role in offering individuals unlimited possibilities to start their own businesses. That is, the availability of capital flow, the enhancement of products exchange, and the widespread of multiple internet-related businesses in high-tech

areas have all enhanced the emergence and the flourishing of entrepreneurship. This, in turn, has widened chances for entrepreneurs to benefit from available opportunities to make their own ventures.

When it comes to the creation of business value, the more economies provide scarce resources and offer high profits through price fluctuation of products, the more entrepreneurial activities will be developed (Morris, 1998). The availability of supporting services from the part of professionals (accountants, tax experts, lawyers and consultants) enhances not only the intentional phase of potential entrepreneurs, but also the operational stage of the enterprise.

The supporting services provided by specialized professionals in the field of business creation would enable new business founders to acquire better initiation about the process of venture creation. They are not only convinced that competitive conditions reinforce their inclination to make new ventures, but also raise their precautions of business failure resulting from unexpected environmental changes and risks (Begley, Tan and Schoch, 2005).

Therefore, regarding literature on the roles of socioeconomic conditions, we display the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H2): The socio-economic conditions are positively related to individuals' decision to start their own businesses.

#### 2.4. Effects of Entrepreneurial Skills on Decision to Start a Business

Researchers take into account the prominent role of entrepreneurial skills in enhancing individuals' tendency to start their own ventures. For instance, Devonish *et al.* (2010) and Davey *et al.* (2011) assume that individuals with previous working experience and entrepreneurial competencies are expected to perform well even when encountering challenging tasks. On this basis, entrepreneurial education and the availability of training programs can help young entrepreneurs gain business skills, and encourage them to delve into the realm of entrepreneurship (Yusof *et al.*, 2007).

Thus, the link between the effect of entrepreneurial skills and individuals' decision to found their own businesses is translated as follows:

Hypothesis (H3): The entrepreneurial skills of potential business founders have a positive effect on their decision to start a business.

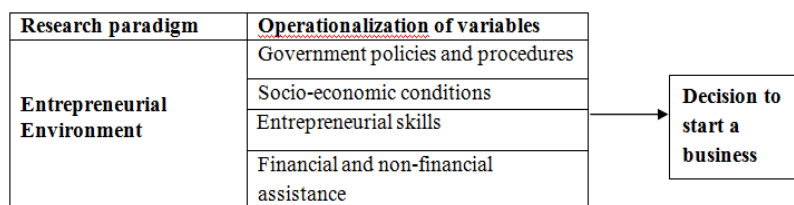
#### 2.5. Effects of Entrepreneurial Environment on Decision to Start a Business

Financial assistance, as an element incorporated in the entrepreneurial environment, is considered as a motivating factor for people aspiring to become entrepreneurs. Hence, financing business creators serves the diversification of the start-up risk, getting start-up capital, and expanding the business in a later stage (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994). However, apart from the availability of financial support, business creators are also in need to post-investment contribution and diligence of investors (Wiltbank, 2005). In this respect, along with financial support, entrepreneurs perceive the actual possibility of starting a business through the acquisition of non-financial assistance (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994). Thus, the focus is on the role of incubators in assisting and enhancing entrepreneurship. According to Aernoudt (2004), early-stage ventures need incubators that provide an adequate business environment and offer business counseling assistance, which positively impacts individuals' perception and likelihood of entrepreneurial activities.

Thus, literature on the effects of financial and non-financial assistance on individuals' decision to embrace the field of entrepreneurship allows us to make the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis (H4): Financial and non-financial assistance are positively related to individuals' decisions to launch their own projects.

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework relating to the effect of the entrepreneurial environment in Tunisia on potential entrepreneurs' decision to create their own projects:



**Figure 1: effects of environmental factors on individuals' decision to start a business**

## II. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample and Data

The current study focuses on the extent to which the entrepreneurial environment has an effect on Tunisian new entrepreneurs' decision to found their own businesses. Three criteria have determined the choice

of our sample. First, our sample is limited to young entrepreneurs who have already established their projects. Second, the age of these companies is less than two years from the date of creation. Third, the respondents are specifically Tunisian business creators who have already launched their own businesses. Given the diversity of variables needed in our study, we collected our variables from multiple sources. In fact, information was, in major part, obtained by means of a questionnaire distributed to companies under study. Additional information was manually collected from company websites and from company leaders themselves. In order to respond to our research problem and to check the validity of our hypotheses, we conducted a quantitative study. In what follows, we will proceed in displaying our survey method.

Survey, in major part, consists of a large-scale investigation conducted on a hundred people to systematically gather a set of relevant information on the subject under study. The questionnaire is the measuring instrument that is used in a sample survey (Benzing *et al.*, 2009). As a data collection technique, the questionnaire presents a series of formal questions to collect data from respondents. The chosen method of administering the questionnaire is face to face.

In our context, any choice of other methods rather than a questionnaire (phone, mail or electronic means) will generate a low response rate and will prove enormously expensive.

Based on a sample of 120 new business creators, our test seeks to test the effect of the entrepreneurial environment (i.e., 1. government policies and procedures, 2. socio-economic conditions, 3. entrepreneurial skills, and 4. financial and non-financial assistance) on new entrepreneurs' decision to create a business.

To identify significant associations between environmental factors and the decision to create a business, we relied on multiple regression analysis. Indeed, this technique is suitable if the variable to be explained and the explanatory variables are quantitative. The regression is performed using SPSS software.

The research instrument was developed taking into consideration other similar studies such as Wong and Choo (2009), Benzing *et al.* (2009) and Pihie (2009). The questionnaire was pre-tested on a sample of 12 respondents coming from different regions and having distinct occupations.

The Cronbach's alpha was used as the measure of reliability. The normality of the data was determined by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The pairwise deletion method was used to treat missing values. The data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, T-test and the principal component analysis. Cooper and Schindler (2003) describe principal component analysis as a multivariate statistical method used to describe variability among observed variables in terms of fewer unobserved variables called factors. Principal component analysis could be used to verify a construct of interest. Principal component analysis has two main purposes. Firstly, it is used for data reduction and secondly for detection of structure (underlying dimensions) in a set of variables. Leech, Barrett and Morgan (2005) point out that the decision about which factor to retain depends on the percentage of the variance accounted for the variable, the absolute variance accounted for by each factor, and whether the factor can be meaningfully interpreted. Factors with Eigenvalues greater than one are usually retained.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Response Rate and Demographics**

The total number of questionnaires distributed to young entrepreneurs was 160 and 120 were returned which represents a response rate of 75%. The majority of the respondents were 32 years old and below, followed by the 31-27 age range and the 26-24 had the least representation in that range. Female respondents constituted of twenty-six (26) and ninety-four (94) were male. Most respondents (68.76%) were graduates while 12.54% were undergraduates and 8.7% were post-graduates.

#### **4.2 Verifying the Conditions of Application of the Regression and Quality of the Model**

The verification of conditions for the application of multiple linear regressions is performed by the SPSS Windows software (version 19.0). These conditions relate to the linearity of the model, the normality of residuals, and the homoscedasticity of residues. Then, lack of bivariate and multivariate multicollinearity is verified.

The empirical results show that 65.2% of the propensity of Tunisian students to create their own projects is explained by certain policies and procedures of the government, socio-economic, entrepreneurial skills and financial and non-financial assistance.

The statistics of Fisher (F) confirms the good quality of the model ( $F = 53.758$  and  $sig. = 0.000$ ). We can conclude that the model is statistically significant and is illustrative of the studied phenomenon.

Regarding the significance of the independent variables, we see that all variables are statistically significant except for government policies and procedures.

Table 2 below shows the explanatory power of the model, the beta coefficients, the t-Student, the F-statistic, its significance, and a summary of the regression results on the set of explanatory variables of this model.

**Table 1: Results of the multiple linear regression model**

Explanatory variables	Coef.	T- Student	Sig
Constant		4.231	0.000**
Government policies and procedures	- 0.199	-2.648	0.009*
Socio-economic conditions	0.563	7.070	0.000***
Entrepreneurial skills	0.231	4.113	0.000***
Financial and non-financial support	0.371	4.677	0.000***
$R^2 = 0.652$ $R^2$ adjusted = <b>0.639</b> F = <b>53.758</b> Sig. <b>0.000</b>			

**4.2.1 Analysis of the Impact of Government Policies and Procedures on the Decision to Create a Business**

The first hypothesis (H1) is used to check whether government's policies and procedures positively influence the decision to create a business. Examination of statistical tests shows that this variable has a negative effect on individuals' decision to start a business. Indeed, the examination of causal relations shows that the coefficient associated with the link between government policies and procedures and the decision to start a business is negative (-.199) and not significant (the associated t value is -2.648, p value = 0.009).

These results, which do not confirm the first hypothesis (H1), indicate that new entrepreneurs believe that government policies and procedures have a negative impact on the decision to create a business.

This can be explained by the fact that Tunisian young entrepreneurs, when attempting to launch their own projects, feel that they are not constrained to government policies and procedures. This indicates the extent to which they do not expect that administrative procedures, tax policies, government approach and support such as loans, business facilities, rules and regulations, etc. may motivate them to start a business. Thus, our findings do not corroborate literature on government policies and procedures as a motivational determinant for young entrepreneurs to found their business (Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994; Klapper, 2004; Simola, 2011). However, our results confirm other studies' findings on government policies and procedures as obstacles impeding individuals' inclination to become entrepreneurs. For instance, Young and Welsch (1993), Fleming (1996), Zhuplev *et al.* (1998) and Kozan *et al.* (2006) found out that strict government regulation, excessive taxation, high rate of inflation, etc. are considered as impeding factors that hinder not only the development of entrepreneurship but also as obstacles facing potential entrepreneurs when deciding to concretize their entrepreneurial endeavor.

**4.2.2 Analysis of the Impact of Socio-Economic Conditions on the Decision to Create a Business**

The second hypothesis (H2) states the link between socio-economic conditions and the decision to start a business. Examination of statistical tests shows that this variable positively and statistically influenced business creators' decision to launch their own projects. The examination of the causal effect shows that the statistical coefficient associated to this variable has a positive value (0.563) and is statistically significant (the associated t value is 7.070 with p = 0.000). This means that socio-economic conditions have a significant and positive effect on young entrepreneurs' decision to start a business. This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H2).

So, our findings are in agreement with research on the positive effect of socio-economic conditions on individuals' decision to become entrepreneurs. For instance, Davidson *et al.* (2006), Sequeira *et al.* (2007), and Franco *et al.* (2010) assume that not only attitudes towards the realm of entrepreneurship which are developed by parents, family, friends, and role models but also the eminent roles of national support programs, efficient networks, and the availability of capital flow, are among the eminent triggers of business creation. These conditions are proven to offer unlimited possibilities to individuals to delve into business creation.

**4.2.3 Analysis of the Impact of Entrepreneurial Skills on the Decision to Create a Business**

The aim of the third hypothesis (H3) is to check whether entrepreneurial skills positively influence business creators' decision to launch their projects. The examination of the statistical tests shows that this variable has a positive and significant effect on individuals' decision to found their businesses. Thus, the examination of causal relations shows that the coefficient associated with the link between entrepreneurial skills and starting a business is positive (0.231) and is statistically significant (the associated t value is 4.113 with p = 0.000). This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H3).

Our findings are, therefore, fine-tuned with other authors' findings on the link between individuals' entrepreneurial skills and their decision to start a business. For instance, Mukhtar *et al.* (1999), Lena and Wong, (2003), Thandi and Sharma (2004), Ooi (2008), and Sandhu, *et al.* (2011) concluded that young entrepreneurs capitalize on their previous working experiences when deciding to delve into the realm of business creation.

#### **4.2.4 Analysis of the Impact of Financial and Non-Financial Support on the Decision to Create a Business**

The fourth hypothesis (H4) is used to check the link between financial and non-financial support and young entrepreneurs' decision to create their projects. Examination of statistical tests shows that this variable has a positive and significant effect on individuals' decision to start a business. Indeed, an examination of causal relations shows that the coefficient associated with the link between financial and non-financial support and the decision to start a business is positive (0.371) and statistically significant (the associated t value is 4.677 with  $p = 0.000$ ). These findings indicate that financial and non-financial support has a positive and significant impact on the decision to create a business among individuals. This corroborates the predictions of hypothesis (H4). Thus, our findings are consistent with literature on the positive effect of financial as well as non-financial support on young entrepreneurs to start their own businesses. In fact levels of support provided by banks, parents, family and friends, accompaniment structures, coaching, counseling, etc. are accounted for as the main triggers motivating entrepreneurs to start their businesses (Moy *et al.*, 2001; Zahariah, *et al.*, 2010).

#### **5. Conclusion and Perspectives**

In the current paper, we attempted to highlight the prominence of motivating factors which affect the decision of new business creators to launch their own businesses. Throughout the study, we have grouped motivational factors in connection to the entrepreneurial environment with reliance on the theoretical and empirical studies. Thus, we have set forth four hypotheses to assess the extent to which they corroborate with the respondents' perceptions and, subsequently, with our findings.

Therefore, the results do not corroborate the first hypothesis since our findings indicate that government policies and procedures do not have an effect on business creators' tendencies to launch their projects.

The remaining three hypotheses are validated in this study. Thus, the second hypothesis is confirmed since the results indicated that socio-economic conditions can have a positive effect on fostering individuals' decisions to found their own ventures.

Similarly, the third and fourth hypothesis is confirmed since our findings indicate that entrepreneurial skills have a significant effect on individuals' decision to enterprise.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed since our findings indicate that financial and non-financial support is accounted for as an element that stimulates individuals to become business creators.

In short, the results of this study provide new insights into factors shaping and fostering the launching of entrepreneurial activities among those expressing their likelihood to delve into the realm of entrepreneurship in Tunisia. In this sense, this paper empirically contributes to the existing research in the field of business creation, which allows for bridging the gap existing between entrepreneurial theoretical frameworks and the poor institutional and individual investment in this field.

Therefore, illuminating business creators with motivational factors and enhancing their tendencies to concretize their own projects may raise the rate of potential entrepreneurs embracing the field of entrepreneurship. It also serves to ascertain the rate of success and sustainability of new ventures.

#### **6. Managerial Implications and Recommendations**

The results of our analyses reveal that factors related to the entrepreneurial environment are motivating and triggering individuals' decisions to enterprise in Tunisia. Therefore, the hybrid of elements related to the entrepreneurial environment serves to give a thorough picture about the required profile of projects founders.

However, our findings indicate that business founders do not care about government policies and procedures though they encounter a number of difficulties when attempting to launch their own ventures. Therefore, to improve their tendencies to subscribe in the realm of entrepreneurship as a career choice, policy makers are called to reinforce the motivational factors and work on enhancing the development of entrepreneurial intentions among job seekers.

One of the ways to enhance individuals' business start-ups is through entrepreneurial education, which contributes in fostering skills and knowledge. These skills include creativity, innovation, risk-taking and ability to interpret successful entrepreneurial role models and identification of entrepreneurial opportunities. In this sense, education is expected to provide prospective entrepreneurs with the basics of practical business practices so as to overcome the evident mismatch between the skills that are acquired in Tunisian educational institutions and the required entrepreneurial competencies to ascertain the survival and sustainability of their businesses in the marketplace. In this sense, entrepreneurship should be encouraged and embedded in education from early formative years and be part and parcel of the curriculum in all stages of education. Similarly, it is recommended that university students should go for industrial and technical trainings during their study to gain valuable managerial and practical experience.

In addition, non-governmental organizations should be well funded through local and international grants to manage the training needs of business founders. Furthermore, added to “learning from peers”, a mentorship strategy can be instituted by government agencies to help individuals participate in entrepreneurship trainings and avoid depending on government for limited job opportunities and grants. This study recommends that excessive regulations should be loosened, which encourages youths to register in undertaking business activities.

#### **IV. Limitations and Perspectives**

The present paper is subject to some limitations as it has solely dealt with new business founders from Sfax and relied on their perceptions of entrepreneurial motivating factors. So, a limitation might be signaled since divergent opinions can be highlighted between these individuals and others coming from other regions of the country. Therefore, broadening our sample to other towns in Tunisia may yield more generalized findings to this study.

Similarly, investigating other motivational entrepreneurial factors may yield other significant results apart from those signaled in this study, mainly when the respondents come from urban as well as rural areas.

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