

Entrepreneurial Orientation and MSMEs Internationalization: The mediating role of Politicisation

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Abstract. The study seeks to determine how entrepreneurial orientation in strategic decision-making process (SDMP) can affect the pace of internationalization, considering the mediating effects of politicisation. Using data from 298 Saudi companies that come under the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), based on survey and semi-structured interviews, and after the modelling process applying the structural equation model (PLS-SEM) approach, the study found that entrepreneurial orientation reduced the role of politicisation in SDMP; however, the findings did not approve any positive impact in the case of low-level politicisation on the pace of internationalisation. Likewise, this study did not find any influence of environmental munificence on the relationship between politicisation and the pace of internationalisation. Thus, studying and adopting both the resource-based perspective, the organisational information processing theory, and the pace of internationalisation will be fundamental for the MSMEs leaders, as they enrich and support each of their SDMP. The reduction of politicisation effect and the entrepreneurial orientation support the managers of firms to improve their export performance, innovativeness, and global competitiveness.

Keywords: organisational information processing; strategic decision-making processes; politicisation; pace of internationalization; entrepreneurial orientation.

1. Introduction

Researchers have devoted great attention to studying the links between international business, entrepreneurship, and strategic management (Petrou et al., 2020). Prior studies in the entrepreneurship field described International Entrepreneurship as the innovation, enactment, evaluation, and investment of opportunities across national borders (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005a, 2005b; Charoensukmongkol, P., 2016). The internationalisation of MSMEs is the main topic in this research field, especially the topic of the pace of internationalisation, since it relevant to the growth, development, and viability of small and medium enterprises (Garcia-Garcia et al., 2017). This study focuses on the stage before internationalisation for organizations (Jones and Coviello, 2005).

More specifically, the time between the starting of the firm and its initiation of international operations (Autio, et al., 2000; Calabrò, A., and al., 2017; Chen Weihong, and al., 2020). Whether the pace of internationalisation is fast or slow has an important bearing on the readiness and preparedness of small and medium enterprises, as seen in the resources that they devote to foreign markets (Costa, D. P., and al., 2016; Mohr et al., 2018). Studying the pace of small and medium enterprises internationalisation must enrich our understanding of the way in which practices differ in internationalisation pace whether fast versus slow internationalising small and medium enterprises which have practical implications for the small and medium enterprises that are obtaining to increase their growth. The pace of internationalisation has been studied in the previous literature on International New Ventures and Born Globals (Oviatt and McDougall, 1997, Zander et al., 2015; Bianchi, M., and al., 2017).

Based to the previous studies, internationalising companies may prefer aggressive market entry and try to have international orientation supported by founders who know and are related to about foreign markets (Frista, F., & Kenny, F., 2020; Lin, Mercier-Suissa, and Salloum, 2016, McDougall, 1989; Hedlund and Kverneland, 1985). In contrast, small and medium enterprises that are slow to internationalise have been studied, wherein these small and medium enterprises first develop a strong base at home and then follow a gradual process of market commitment as they accumulate and use knowledge about foreign markets (Ferreira, J. and Coelho, A. 2020; Hashai and Almor, 2004, Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). Although studies know much more about the differences among fast and slow internationalisers in the post-entry phase, studies realize much less about their differences as they consider the start of their international existence (Ferreira, J. and Coelho, A., 2020; Meschi, et al., 2017).

The SDMP defined by procedural rationality and politicisation followed by leaders to reach important decisions that include the alignment of resources (Elbanna et al., 2020, Papadakis et al., 2010; Dean and Sharfman, 1996). The study explores politicisation as a determinant of strategic decision-making processes which presented by political behavior that brings in alliance structure, interruptions, and resistance of decision-makers during the SDMP (Karami, M. and Tang, J., 2021; Thanos et al., 2017; Papadakis et al., 1998). Furthermore, the study provides visions into the way that SDMP motivate the pace of internationalisation by supporting the information processing demands. Previous studies of internationalisation have concentrated on the entrepreneur (e.g. Hagen and Zucchella, 2014; Acedo and Jones, 2007; Batsakis, G., & Theoharakis, V., 2021), giving little interest to the process of reaching the strategic decision. Based on previous studies, the study expands the current literature on the pace of internationalisation by revealing the discussion on the impact of SDMP. By building on organisational information processing theory and Resource-Based View, the research identifies that the capability of company to process information to establish SDMP enhanced the pace of internationalisation.

A considerable number of studies have focused on the nature of causality between EO and internationalisation, or have looked to the effect of innovation, environment factors, and rationality, (Karama and Tang, J., 2021, Ferreira, J. and Coelho, A., 2020, Chen Weihong, and al., 2020). That is why in this study the contribution appears in the role of politization level and internationalisation and the application on the sample of firms from developing countries. The mechanism explaining the

combination of variables as information processing gathering, sharing, analysis, environment munificence, taking into account firms' different size.

The article has been divided into 4 sections, the first section about introduction, the second dedicated to the literature review and research hypotheses, the third for research methodology, the fourth for data analyses, and the final section devoted for discussion and conclusions which integrated the recommendations, business practice, and further research.

2. Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

This study argues that the existence of the entrepreneurial orientation within organisations could limit the negative impacts of politicisation during the organisational information processing (information gathering, sharing, and analysing), when the top management making their strategic decisions. Moreover, this study argues that the speed and quality of strategic decision-making processes in organisations depends on the level of politicisation the top management employ. Given that the importance of entrepreneurial orientation that will affect the politicisation in these organisations, the internationalisation depends to the way that organisations using to increases the demand for information processing when organisations consider making strategic decisions. Moreover, the research revealed that the value of entrepreneurial orientation in organisations depends on the level of politicisation the top management employ. In Figure 1, this study identifies the entities and expected relationships in this theoretical model, which this study discusses in the next following sections.

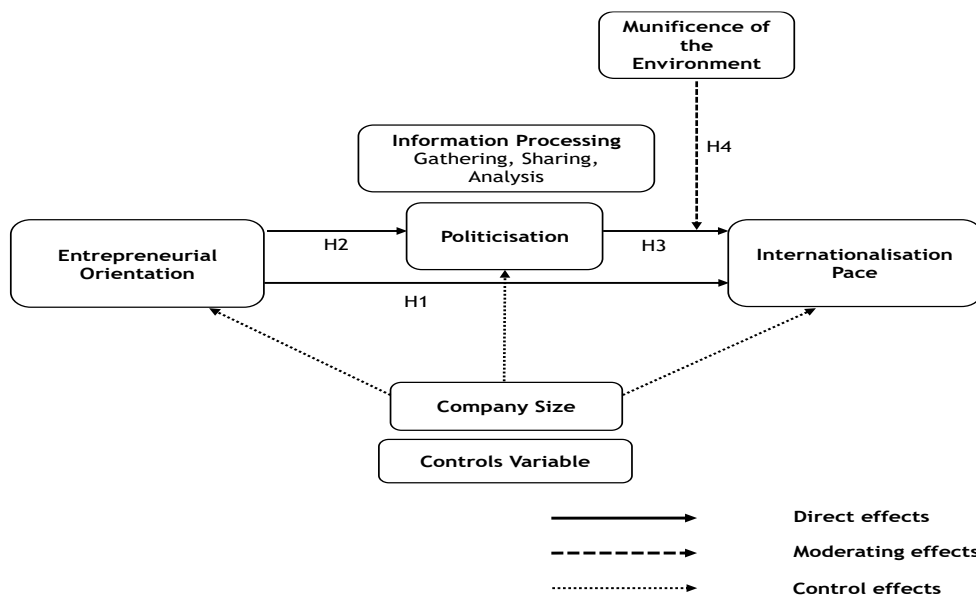


Fig. 1: Conceptual research model

2.1. Entrepreneurial Orientation and Pace of Internationalisation

The entrepreneurial orientation (EO) within organisations has involved a significant share of interest during the last years and it has been influenced by a global trend to open market and competitors' motivation (Drugova, E. A., & Kalachikova, O. N., 2019; Dada and Fogg 2016, Wales, 2016, Wales et al., 2013). In such cases, organisations that implement entrepreneurial orientation defined by innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking are seen as gaining a critical resource for firm competitiveness (Ramoglou and Tsang, 2016; Dada and Fogg, 2016, De Clercq et al., 2015, Reijonen et al., 2016,). due to these organisations are always seeking opportunities, as well as focusing on leveraging the resources to reach the firm objectives, thus, entrepreneurial orientation will consequently support them to achieve a sustainable competitive benefit (Deligianni, I., and al., 2016; Alvarez and Busenitz, 2001, Uncapher, 2013). Miller (1983) considered entrepreneurial orientation as a composite

construct described within three interrelated criteria: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking. Consequently, the previous literature has linked entrepreneurial orientation within organisations with the pace of organisations internationalisation. Therefore, taking these ideas into consideration, the study argues that:

HI: The greater the entrepreneurial orientation, the better will be the pace of organisations internationalisation.

2.2. Entrepreneurial orientation and Politicisation

Politicisation in Strategic Decision-Making

Given that the emphasis in this study seeks to analyse the relationship between an entrepreneurial orientation and politicisation in strategic decision-making (SDM), a baseline hypothesis referring to the major consequences of this orientation is briefly developed (Rayees Farooq., 2017). The study baseline hypothesis follows on from the evidence found in the majority of published research on this theme. In light of this, it is expected that organisations exhibiting high levels of EO will reduce the level of politicisation in SDM during the organisational information processing (information gathering, sharing and analysing), when the top management making their strategic decisions (Raissi, N., & Matoussi, H., 2020; Walter, S. G., & Block, J. H., 2016). Moreover, this study argues that the speed of SDMP in organisations depends on the level of politicisation the top management employ. The study put these hypotheses for three reasons. First, organisations adopting innovative ideas are potentially will be unable to make strategic decisions, such as entering new global markets based on incomplete and unclear information, and several opportunities could be missed, that means reducing the positive effects of the EO and suffering negative returns (Walter et al., 2006, Eriksson et al., 2015). Scholars have discussed and defined politicisation in different ways, however, most definitions confirm that politicisation related with the attempts by the decision-making team members to affect decision-making so as to satisfy and serving their own interests, rather than those of the firm (Teglasi, H., 2022, Elbanna, et al., 2015, Thanos et al., 2017). In their attempts to impact on the strategic decision outcomes and protect their own interests, decision-makers in organisations often coalition formation and participate in political behaviours, for example, operation, professional communication, delaying decisions on resource allocation, likewise restrict and distort information flow, and divert decision-makers' engagement from their organisational goals and distract it towards their own self-interests (Elbanna, 2006; Pettigrew, 2014; Dean and Sharfman, 1996). Existing studies in the literature showed that mostly large organisations, broadly identify a negative relationship between politicisation and organisations outcomes (Bouquet and Birkinshaw, 2008, Geppert et al., 2016). However, the influence of politicisation on small and medium-sized enterprise strategic decision-making has received little attention, existing evidence in the literature shows the negative impact of politicisation on the speed and effectiveness of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises strategic decisions (Elbanna et al., 2015). Moreover, prior studies that studies on the relation among international business and international entrepreneurship suggest that politicisation might negatively impact the development of international strategies as well as international performance outcomes in organisations (Lee, J. Y., et al., 2020, Thanos et al., 2017).

Information processing requirements

Existing studies in the literature that contribute to the improvement of strategic decision-making process appear that SDMP can take place at various speeds (Thywissen et al., 2018; Baum and Wally, 2003). Speed of strategic decisions making is usually determined by the information processing requirements of strategic decision-making processes (Felzensztein, C., and al., 2015; Daft andLengel, 1986). Furthermore, information processing needs specialised resources, for instance, accessing important information related to the market, integration of information mechanisms and option-testing mechanisms, which are not plentiful in many small and medium-sized enterprise (Jansen et al., 2011). Internationalisation is seen as a challenge for many micro, small and medium-sized enterprise because

taking advantage of foreign market opportunities in an intelligent way makes rigorous information processing requirements (Hosseini, M., and al., 2018; Johanson and Vahlne, 1990, Li et al., 2015). This is because managers of internationalising micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to reduce the level of uncertainty must gather and comprehensively analyse information. Hence, managers of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises often simplify information processing through, looking for foreign markets that have similar with their domestic market characteristics in terms of culture, regulations and institutions or at least shared with some of the domestic market characteristics, also, though, tapping into collaborative networks (Musteen et al., 2010, Child and Hsieh, 2014, Meschi et al., 2017). However, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises still face considerable challenges in strategic decision-making processes, in the methods you rely on to process information because understanding international markets and identifying opportunities needs massive amount of information about the market such as customers, partners, competitors and institutions (Felzensztein, C., and al., 2021; Child and Hsieh, 2014). Therefore, taking these ideas into consideration, the study argues that:

H2: *The greater the EO, the weaker will be the politicisation in SDM.*

2.3. Politicisation and Pace of Internationalisation

The study emphasises on politicisation in strategic decisions as a mediator between the model constructs. The research argues that politicisation reduce the pace of internationalisation in small and medium-sized enterprises because politicisation their internationalisation decisions. To the extent that decision-makers try to impact decision outcomes and serving their self-interests, efficiency in decision-making is likely to be obstructed (Fernandes, J., & Machado, C. F., 2016; Dean and Sharfman, 1996, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988). This happens because the political behaviour by the decision-making team members in the organisations such as manipulation and secret communication deployed through different managerial coalitions in the organisation is likely to distort the smooth and accurate sharing of information among decision-makers, which is required for efficient and speed strategic decision-making (Pettigrew, 1973, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988, Dean and Sharfman, 1996, Teglassi, H., 2022, Elbanna et al., 2015). Therefore, decision-makers become less effective in analysing and using relevant information to make strategic decisions (Raissi, N., 2018; Hannan and Freeman, 1984). Thus, the unwillingness of decision-makers to share correct information about global opportunities in a flexible way is likely to obstruct small and medium-sized enterprises in their efforts to decide quickly about internationalisation (Lee, J. Y., and al., 2020; Chetty, Johanson, and Martín, 2014). Thus, taking these points into consideration, this study argues that:

H3: *The weaker the politicisation in SDM, the better will be the pace of organisations internationalisation.*

2.4. The Moderating Role of Environmental munificence

This study focuses on environmental munificence as a moderating variable. The literature review on SDM revealed that, environmental condition had an impact on the strategic decision-making process and outcomes (Lengler, J. F., and al., 2016; Kreiser et al., 2002). Slevin and Covin (1990) pointed out that variation of strategy to suit environmental hostility or munificence is crucial for organisational success. Thus, the measurement of the environmental munificence in relation to strategic decision-making is necessary. Furthermore, Goll and Rasheed (2005) found that the environmental munificence acts as a moderator on the relationship between strategic decision-making and organisational performance. However, prior studies revealed that our understanding of the role of environmental munificence within the SDM determinants (i.e. rationality and politicisation) persists limited (Misra Cagla Gul., 2019; Rajagopalan et al., 1993, Papadakis and Lioukas, 1996). Consequently, taking these results into consideration, the study argues that:

H4: *The higher the environmental munificence, the stronger the relationship will be between the politicisation in the SDM and pace of internationalisation.*

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research design and sampling

The research model described the causality relationship between Entrepreneurial orientation as an independent variable on pace of internationalisation as a dependent variable through the level of politicisation as a mediator variable. The study analyses the hypotheses within a sample of international Saudi Arabian MSMEs and based on a quantitative research method which help to operationalize the concepts and measured variables. The data collection has been adopted based on electronic survey which chosen as the appropriate method. To avoid common method bias, data for the pace of internationalisation were collected from formal sources. Also, the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority and Saudi Arabia Ministry of Commerce and Investment database were used as the sampling frame and initially, a random sample of 298 Saudi Arabia MSMEs was obtained that met with a specific measure. The questionnaire was approved using a panel expert pre-test method. For the modelling approach the study used a Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method to validate the constructs and items. Due to this, the research relied on testing causal relationships hypothesised in the conceptual model of multiple explanatory and exploratory variables.

3.2. Measurement

The study applied well established measures of constructs, that had been commonly used and tested in the literature and have significant validity and reliability levels. In this way, we used Likert scale with 5 levels as a measure instrument applied to model criteria to prove the consistency of different items and constructs (5-point scale: from total disagreement to total agreement). Assuming that the research model contained 5 latent variables with 17 items presented as follow: Munificence of the environment as a moderator variable (3items), Chowdhury, S. K., & Endres, M. L., (2021); Entrepreneurial orientation as independent variable (9items), Lee, Y., & Hemmert, M., (2021); Politicisation as mediator variable (3items), Jia, F., and al., (2020); Company size as control variable (1item), Lee, J. Y., and al., (2020); and Internationalisation pace (1item), Lin, W.-T., and al., (2021).

3.3. Data Analysis techniques

The assessing causal relationships hypothesize in the model (Figure 1) through paths and different constructs effects. To bring the modeling of latent variable by the technique of SEM, it has been applied SPSS and SmartPLS software for exploratory and confirmatory approaches. The structural equation modelling was divided into a measurement and a structural model. The analysis of data used the measurement and structural model to explain the correlation between the constructs and their items and/or themselves.

4. Results

The first step of analysis has been as objective to identify the items consistency with their constructs. The results in table 1 showed that all constructs approved a high coherence with their criteria and the Cronbach's Alpha revealed more than 78.5%, CR indicator range the 87.3%, and the AVE with a minimum of value around 70%. These values explained a strong presentation of items to their constructs in our research model.

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Co Size	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
EO	0.954	0.983	0.961	0.730
IP	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
ME	0.857	0.935	0.904	0.759

Mod ME P IP	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
P	0.785	0.870	0.873	0.699

As highlighted in Table 2, the salient findings of this study revealed that there was no significant relationship between EO and Internationalisation pace in organisations. Likewise, the findings indicated that there was no statistical significance for entrepreneurial orientation between EO and politicisation in SDM, in which, the higher the level of EO in organisations meant the weaker will be the politicisation in SDM.

Table 2. Total Effects

No	Relationships	Sample	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
H1	EO -> IP	-0.057	-0.061	0.075	0.752	0.452
H2	EO -> P	0.091	0.088	0.086	1.063	0.288
H3	ME -> IP	0.155	0.169	0.068	2.286	0.023*
H4	Mod ME P IP -> IP	0.017	0.019	0.064	0.267	0.789
H5	P -> IP	0.062	0.064	0.065	0.953	0.341

* Significant at $p < 0.05$, ** Significant at $p < 0.01$

Moreover, the study findings also presented that was no significant relationship between a low level of politicisation in SDM and internationalisation pace in organisations. In addition, the results of this research presented that there was no significant impact of the environmental munificence (i.e. capacity, growth and opportunity) on the relationship between politicisation and internationalisation pace in organisations. Though, the munificence of the environment proved a high correlation with internationalisation pace, this case showed that the environment affects positively the strategy of MSMEs internationalisation.

Table 3. Total effects of the control on politicisation in strategic decision-making, internationalisation pace, entrepreneurial orientation.

No	Relationships	Sample	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
1	Co Size → EO	0.017	0.007	0.096	0.173	0.863
2	Co Size → IP	-0.030	-0.030	0.058	0.510	0.610
3	Co Size → P	-0.077	-0.082	0.062	1.255	0.210

* Significant at $p < 0.05$, ** Significant at $p < 0.01$

According to table (3), the relevant results of the study revealed that the total effect of the companies' size on EO, politicisation in SDM and internationalisation pace that obtained p-values more than a (0.05) percent level of significance, which are (0.863, 0.610, 0.210). This means that the p-values did not obtain any statistical significance; thereby this result approved the negative impact of the firm's size on EO, politicisation in SDM and internationalisation pace.

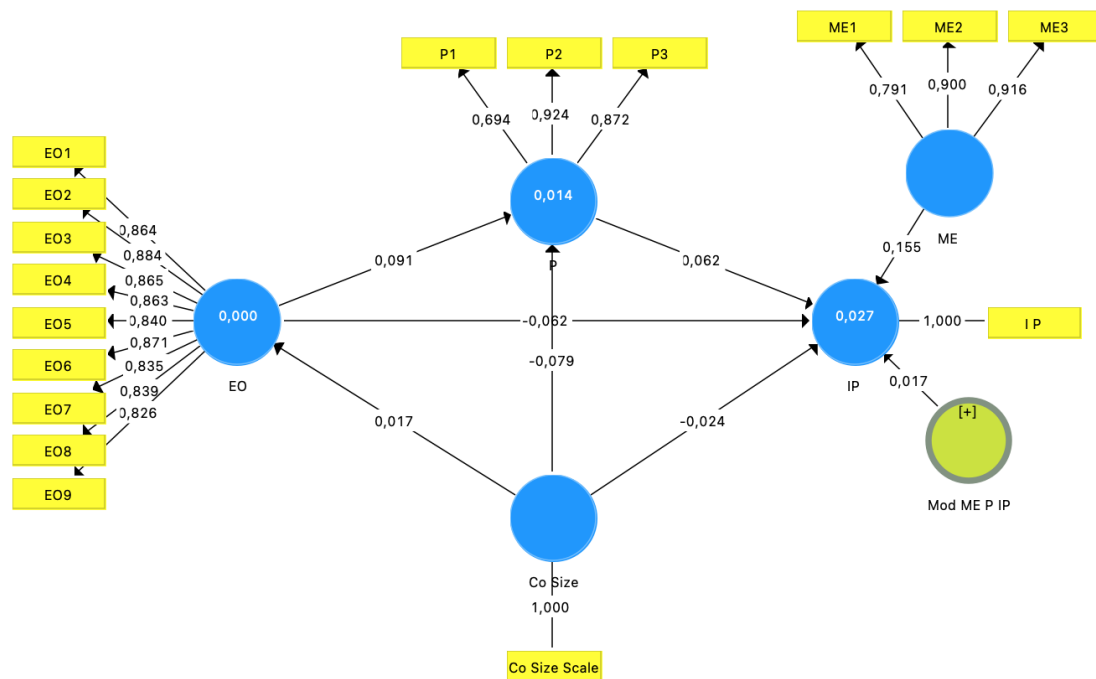


Fig. 2: Research model with parameters (n=298)

The complex solution offered by the model fit indicators revealed that our model is robustness and when we look at the fit indices like SRMR, RMS_theta and NFI, the values of these measures are considered a good fit. The SRMR value is $0.044 < 0.08$ or 0.1 ; the NFI value is 0.885 close to 1 ; and the RMS_theta is about 0.148 . The results obtained approved the hypotheses H1, H2, and H4 which claimed respectively that the company size has been a negative effect on different model constructs; and the analysis of relationship between dependent, independent, mediator and moderator variables approved that exist a very low effect of politicisation on SDM and internationalisation pace in Saudi MSMEs. The exception in our case has been approved by the H3 which explain a good correlation between munificence of the environment and internationalisation pace. The MSMEs internationalisation orientation depends to environment motivations and the SDM on this way explained the role of environment factors to encourage firms toward the global market.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this article is to examine the relationship EO, politicisation in SDM and internationalisation pace, considering mediating relationships. The findings suggest companies that adopt (innovativeness, risk-taking and proactiveness) will reduce the level of politicisation in their SDMP. However, the lower level of politicisation did not affect the internationalisation pace positively. The empirical setting of this study was the international Saudi Arabian MSMEs. The decision to focus on the financial sector because this sector considered a key driver for trade in many economies (Hair, J.F., and al., 2019; Raissi, N., Hakeem, A., 2017), but, as for the decision to focus exclusively on Saudi Arabian companies was consistent with recent calls for the importance of considering different cultures when examining the study model (Imran, M., and al., 2018; Thanos et al., 2017). In turn, there are several important theoretical implications that can be drawn from these findings. Firstly, the negative relationship between entrepreneurial orientation (proactiveness, risk tolerance and innovation), and the pace of internationalisation suggests that the proactiveness, risk-taking and innovation are highly dependent on the availability of sufficient, complete, and clear information as well as the generosity of the international environment about the targeted international markets; this result confirm the

hypothesis H1 which consists that “the greater the entrepreneurial orientation, the better will be the pace of organisations internationalisation”, and it is similar as a previous studies of Teglassi, H., and al., (2022); Klueter, T., & Monteiro, F., (2017); Johanson, M., & Kalinic, I., (2016); Eisenhardt and Martin, (2000). Thus, the lack of sufficient, complete, and clear information, as well as the hostility of the environment of the targeted international markets will lead to a negative effect between the entrepreneurial orientation and the pace of internationalisation, the findings obtained consistent with the researches of Nutt, (1984), Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, (1992), Das and Bing-Sheng, (2001), Ftes, (2013); Hair, J. F., and al., (2017); Vu, H. N., (2017); Kostrykina, S., and al., (2021); and the Hypothesis H2 which argued that “the greater the EO, the weaker will be the politicisation in SDM” has been confirmed. This study findings reflects similar findings in previous studies, which show that, Rodrigues and Hickson (1995) argued that successful decisions are more likely to result from use the adequate information and means of implementation are available; the result confirmed the hypothesis H3 “the weaker the politicisation in SDM, the better will be the pace of organisations internationalisation”. Analysing this study conclusions supportive evidence is found that shows a growing competitive between organisations who adopt entrepreneurial orientation push them to internationalisation only if they have the adequate information about the targeted international markets. Moreover, the explanation for the negative relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and the pace of internationalisation, particularly in Saudi Arabian organisations that who adopt entrepreneurial orientation, could be that religion, cultural, and social responsibility features of organisations also could have an influence on the decision to internationalise companies; the hypothesis H4 which showed that “the higher the environmental munificence, the stronger the relationship will be between the politicisation in the SDM and pace of internationalisation” has been approved, and it was consistent with the findings of Marek Hetmański., (2018); Moser, R., and al., (2017); Raissi, N., Hakeem, A., (2017). The results suggest that the entrepreneurial orientation within organisations would reduce the level of politicisation in strategic decision-making, and the lower levels of politicisation in strategic decision-making as a result of being influenced by entrepreneurial orientation would not affect the pace of internationalisation positively.

Practical implications.

The recession of politicisation level could be used as a motivated factor that stimulate the entrepreneurial orientation and support the managers (practitioners) of international firms to develop their financial performance, innovation, competitiveness, and leadership style. The structure that explains organizational effectiveness to internationalisation produces through the EO and the sensitive behaviour and firms’ ability by enhancing the rationality and technology (Decision support system) adoption in strategic decision-making.

Theoretical implications.

Thus, studying and adopting both the resource-based perspective, the organisational information processing theory, and the pace of internationalisation will be fundamental for the MSMEs leaders, as they enrich and support each of their SDMP.

Limitations

This study investigated the intangible resource for organisations that is captured by entrepreneurial orientation, and how entrepreneurial orientation affects the politicisation in SDM as the way of organisational information processing, that companies using when consider they make strategic decisions. It then sought to determine how entrepreneurial orientation and politicisation in strategic decision-making can affect pace of internationalisation, based on the case of Saudi Arabian enterprises MSMEs. However, the above findings revealed a several limitations. The MSMEs in Saudi Arabia classified as an emergent sector and the experience of companies in internationalisation has been limited in the average of 5 years which didn’t reflect a high contribution to the domain; but it presented many significances about the different opportunities offered to sector in the future. Also, the choice of politicisation as a mediator variable between EO and pace of internationalisation didn’t reflect the real causality within model constructs; and there are many other factors as rationality, organisational culture,

leadership, etc, that can contribute in this way and may showed a similar or a contrary findings for the same sector. For the perspective of this research, future studies could focus on comparison of firms in GCC region or by including a start-up or new ventures companies. It is recommended to investigate the same model with different sector (agriculture, industry, service, IT, etc).

Further research

The researchers should be more interesting to focus on the different firms factors internal or external, and to define which affect positively the internationalisation. It is worthwhile to support managers and to give them a good managerial benchmark or best practice to access speedily and with efficiency to foreign markets.

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