

SMEs Branding: The Interaction of Entrepreneurial Orientation

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Abstract-*The purpose of this research is to find the extended impact and interaction of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as a moderator variable on the relationships between brand strategy (specifically brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness) and brand performance. Retroactively, the direct relationship between brand strategy and brand performance should be elucidated. The basic methodology of this research is positivism, specifically a deductive approach to which really on previous understanding and propositions that extracted from previous works. A well-designed and tested questionnaire is used to collect data for this research, and the data is analysed by applying the partial least squares technique, which is a method of structural equation modelling technique of analysis. Prior to this step, a confirmatory factor analysis is performed to inspect measurement constructs. The result indicates a significant positive and direct impact of brand orientation and brand identity on performance of brand where brand distinctiveness has no impact. On the other side, when entrepreneurial orientation is interactive as a moderator factor, the relationships between brand orientation, brand identity and brand performance increase and become stronger. Previous research and studies elucidated the impact of various factors of brand strategy on brand performance. However, entrepreneurial orientation as a moderator variable has not been examined. What makes this research different from others is the practical investigation and the examination of the impact of entrepreneurial orientation as an important factor of brand strategy in SMEs*

Keywords- Brand Orientation; Brand Identity; Brand Distinctiveness; Brand Performance; Brand Management; Brand Strategy; Entrepreneurial Orientation; SMEs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Branding, as a strategic marketing aspect, is a fundamental topic these days. Customers do remember the brand and relate what might be good things or bad things to that brand. While many companies may thrive in the market with no recognised brand name, they struggle with growth. Having a vigorous and well-recognised brand brings many benefits like a high premium price (Thomson et al., 2005)[72], adding value to products or services (Kam Fung So & King, 2010)[37] and being able to extend product lines on existing brand name (Park et al., 1986)[58]. Strategic branding management consists of various aspects and concepts. Brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness are addressed in this research as essential aspects of strategic branding management. Conceivably, the key to creating a strong brand is innovativeness and brand orientation. If there is no willingness, readiness and desire to build a strong brand, entire processes and attempts will fail (Wong & Merrilees, 2005)[77]. This willingness and desire are reflected in brand orientation, which has to exist among the whole organisation. Along with brand orientation, brand identity must be defined to reflect real benefits and strengths of products or services (Bergström et al., 2010)[11]. Furthermore, brand identity is normally linked to corporate values, norms and character that define the organisation's characteristics and business style. To peruse the process of branding, a brand should be

distinguished in the market. That makes brand distinctiveness the most important practical procedure in branding. Similar to a competitive advantage, which distinguishes such a company from others, a brand should also be distinguished from other rivals. The process of brand distinctiveness requires substantial experience and knowledge of the marketplace.

On the other hand, good performance of a brand is a result of its structured and planned strategic management. In the long run, a brand becomes a valuable asset that consists of financial value that reflects years of hard work. For example, the Coca-Cola brand name is valued at 79.96 billion dollars in 2018 (Statista, 2018)[71] and this value has grown over the years. That might applicable in large organisations, but how about SMEs? How can they build their own brand with a limited budget and experience? In a perspective of approaching brand strategy, both large companies and SMEs have similar paths to building a brand (Berthon et al., 2008)[12]. Indeed, the majority of SMEs are owned and managed by entrepreneurs, those how are responsible for processes and works. Thus, marketing and branding strategic decisions and processes are subjected to their perceptions and attitudes, and brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness are influenced by entrepreneurial orientation. Over review of previous literature, the interaction of entrepreneurial orientation as an important moderating factor on a brand strategy to achieve a good brand performance has not been

examined. This gap is considered as the main contribution of this research.

2. BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Brand Strategy and Management

2.1.1. Brand Management

The term “brand” has in-depth meaning for customers’ expectation. When it comes to the “brand” term by itself, it contributes to a name, design, sign and symbol, which can identify and distinguish a company from its competitors (Kotler, 1991)[44] and lead to conceptual identity. Therefore, brand identity is the core factor of brand management, and to figure a brand image along with brand positioning, brand identity should be clearly defined (Kapferer, 2004)[39]. Nevertheless, the main question that has remained under research for a long time is, what does a brand consist of? A brand by itself is not only a name or logo, but “it is more than that, a brand represents different things for different constitutions and the key to effectively managing brand equity is to understand what goes on inside the head of the customers” (Merrilees, 2007; p. 403)[48]. Sometimes, a brand can present a “product (Diet Coke), service (UPS), retailer (Gap Kids), company (IBM), person (a politician, celebrity), organisation (the Boy Scouts), group (a sports team) or place (city brand)” (Park et al., 2008; p. 3)[59]. Consequently, brand is linked to all the good and bad attitudes of customers about a certain company or product.

Subsequently, the entire process of handling a brand—it is referred to as “branding”—is related to brand management. Brand management is usually associated with a high level of management at any type of business entity. As a strategic essence, brand is a key for the successful positioning and identification of a company in the market. Ordinarily, consumers link products’ quality with brand name where sometimes a strong and high reputation brand is linked to high price. Precisely, those companies invested in a high and strong brand enjoy several more advantages than those not invested in branding (Randall, 1997;[63] Knight, 2000)[43]. Customers are willing to pay a premium price for a brand that has a sound reputation and attached to distinguishes criteria (Thomson et al., 2005)[72]. The criteria that give customers value when they acquire such a brand. Thus, what can distinguish a certain brand from the others is the value added to such a brand. One of the main objectives of branding is to illustrate a brand’s features and make them tangible to customers (West et al., 2006;[75] Christensen and Bower, 1996)[21]. Therefore, the connection between brand image or identity and brand reputation can be realised through brand management where the last term refers to several functions that maintain the gap between an organisation’s capabilities and customers’ expectations (Schultz & Barnes, 1999)[68]. Honestly, there are many researches, studies and literature that explain the difference

between brand image and brand identity where the latter is more general.

2.1.2. Brand Identity

Managing a brand is a long process that starts earlier at the stage of establishing a company and having to specify a brand image, meaning and brand components to convey customers (Gardner & Levy, 1955)[27]. Creating a new brand name is similar to creating and innovating new products or services that share similar characteristics of product creation (Abimbola, 2001)[4], but brand name on its own can make distinctive positioning in the market (Penrose, 1995)[61]. However, it consists of the long process of branding activities to be entrenched in the market. Branding or brand strategy involves several concepts that are related to a brand itself and the customers. Brand knowledge, brand perceptions, brand equity, brand awareness, brand image, brand perceptions and brand loyalty are vital concepts in branding, and each concept implicates specific feathers (Kapferer, 1992;[38] Hitt et al., 2001;[33] Keller, 2003)[41]. Rooting a powerful brand provides many advantages for both sellers and customers. With sturdy brands, sellers can offer a high price and extend product lines on the same brand with customers enjoying peace of mind and the expected benefits and moral advantages of gaining a certain brand (Hoeffler & Keller, 2002;[34] Blythe, 2009)[13].

In fact, building a brand has been articulated widely in literature. However, the process of building a brand should consider four main steps: intelligence gathering, strategy, communication and management in general (Gregory & Sellers, 2002)[29]. The intelligence gathering is related to important information and data collected from the market. It is not only about customers’ needs but also about competitors as well. Strategy refers to the process of identifying a long-term plan of branding and defining the features to be attached to the brand. A good plan to communicate with the customers in order to inform them about brand attributes should be carefully conducted. Brand management does not end at the stage of creating a brand; continues follow-up and management are required to maintain market changes and secure brand sustainability. Interestingly, brand lifecycle has different aspects of product lifecycle whereas a brand can last more than 100 years and consist of several products that might disappear earlier (Park et al., 1986)[58]. However, extending the current brand with a new product can be dangerous if the existing brand was not well embedded and has a weak reputation in the market (Vaidyanathan & Aggarwal, 2000)[74]. That is one of the most critical decisions that might destroy an entire company if brand expansion was not taken seriously. Specifically, over time “brand become icon not because they offer distinctive benefits, but because they deliver culture expressions that meet the ideological needs of their target consumers” (Ertimur & Coskuner-Balli, 2015; p. 57)[24].

2.1.3. Brand Equity

Properly, the main contribution of strategic brand management is related to brand equity and the value of

customer experience (Kam Fung So & King, 2010)[37]. Brand equity is “a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm’s customers” (Aaker, 2010, p. 51)[2]. Brand equity has different scopes: one is related to accounting to determine the value of the brand in case of merging or acquiring such a brand, and the other is a marketing scope. However, the value of a brand from the scope of accounting has no value if a brand is not strategically embedded and creates a recognised value for the customers (Keller, 1993;[40] Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 1999)[1]. Indeed, brand valuation is a matter of talk these days and we can notice how much the value of Coca-Cola or Pepsi brands are. Internationally, the strategy of brand adoption in the market needs a good understanding of international customers’ behaviours as well as physical and psychological attributes of the new market (Pham & Muthukrishnan, 2002)[62].

2.2. Brand Strategy in SMEs

2.2.1. Brand Performance

Sometimes, brand management in SMEs has less attention; even general marketing management is usually referred to sales management rather than to take a strategic action (Krake, 2005)[45]. However, SMEs are able to communicate their own brand better than large companies, in spite of branding budget. SMEs can specify and define their customers’ demand more clearly than large organisations; it is easier for them to communicate with customers and maintain value-addition which is linked to the brand (Gilmore et al., 1999)[28]. Nevertheless, SMEs should think seriously about building a strong brand as an important factor of success in the market, especially those SMEs that work in changeable and unstable environments (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007;[3] Epure and et al., 2009)[23]. Due to the lack of financing and low budget for marketing, SMEs might think of traditional marketing and the 4Ps to gain the advantage of spreading their own brand name, but it should be associated with a unique and creative approach (Carson, 1990;[17] Carson & Gilmore, 2000)[16]. However, the idea of pursuing a brand strategy using traditional marketing these days could be inadequate. Thus, for SMEs and new ventures, Merrilees (2007; p. 403)[48] proposes a branding mechanism that has a sequence of processes that include “opportunity recognition, innovation, business model development, capital acquisition, supplier acquisition, customer acquisition and success harvesting”. In addition, Berthon et al. (2008)[12] examine brand management dimensions among large organisations and SMEs to allocate practice differences between them and found that both types of organisations are alike to approach brand identification, but large organisations are willing to understand customers’ need and gain feedback of previous branding activities more than SMEs. Therefore, financial barrier is not the only SME problem that proceeds branding activities and brand strategy. Market experience,

customers’ perceive, human capital and non-financial capabilities all present highly difficult restrictions in building a brand name.

From the perspective of communicating a brand, Ojasalo et al. (2008)[55] find in their case study research that brand management in software SMEs is less important than developing technology, and most of them prefer to communicate and be associated with a partner that has a strong brand name. Wong & Merrilees (2008a)[78] also examine factors that affect international communication and brand adoption of SMEs and they discovered that there is a need to provide human capital and enough funds to communicate brand internationally. In a research work that explored branding strategy in the websites of SMEs, Garcia & Diaz (2010)[26] inspect 12 Spanish SMEs’ websites to understand their branding strategy on the internet and found that SMEs are very much accessible on the internet but they are still missing appropriate contents and interaction with their customers. Again, it is an issue of communication where SMEs have several problems. Even non-profit organisations need to present themselves with a strong brand to communicate and convince their customers. Khan & Ede (2009)[42] show how important it is for non-profit organisations to gain the advantage of having a strong brand if possible; otherwise, working with a partner to spread an existing brand name is an appropriate decision, especially if SMEs work internationally.

Juntunen et al. (2010)[36] introduce a functional framework to build a brand at each stage of an SME’s growth. Each stage involves several functions along with certain activities assigned to a specific actor. A quantitative approach research work in South African SMEs shows a significant role of brand reputation (Cant et al., 2013)[15]. As like any other SMEs in different countries, South African SMEs could not afford the cost of branding strategy, and they are too busy with daily activities such as management and increased sales volume to build a strong and reputable brand (Cant et al., 2013)[15]. Also, a cross-sectional research work that examined corporate brand and product brand among fashion SMEs confirms that corporate trademark has an influence on SMEs’ performance, specifically sales growth while product trademark has no impact (Agostini et al., 2014)[6]. Ahmed et al. (2014)[7] examine a proposed model of branding leadership that drawn process and effectiveness of brand leadership on corporate financial performance, where the result confirms a significant impact of the process of branding leadership and implementation on financial performance at the end. In contrast, Moghaddam & Armat (2015)[51] find that brand capability—one of the high levels of marketing strategy—has a low impact on marketing performance. However, this result is incoherent due to the limitation of a very narrow context.

Even raw materials companies or assistance suppliers—B2B—need a brand name. Uusitalo et al. (2010)[73] discuss the importance of creating brand names for SMEs

suppliers using a well-known and established brand name; for example, an SME that produces Coca-Cola bottles can exploit and promote its company through a brand related to a well-known brand. Centeno et al. (2013)[19] develop a framework for building a brand for SMEs in a sequence of five phases: brand as a person, brand as products, brand as a symbol, brand as an organisation and brand growth. Each phase should add differentiation in brand identity.

2.2.2. Brand Orientation

Brand orientation has gained much attention in literature due to its important role of starting branding process. If there is no ordination for branding among organisations, there will be no intention to build a brand. In other words, branding is a comprehending process that everyone must cooperate with. Brand orientation of SMEs is highly correlated with marketing performance (Wong & Merrilees, 2005)[77]. It is true that marketing performance can be measured through many different aspects; brand orientation is one of these main aspects, which streams to brand performance and—as a result—to marketing performance in general. Reijonen et al. (2014)[65] survey 492 SEMs to find the impact of growth intention on brand orientation, and they find that corporations with a high intention for growth are likely to become highly brand-oriented. Another research establishes a significant relationship between brand orientation and customer relationship performance and that whenever brand orientation increases there will be an increase in customer relationship performance (Chovancova et al., 2015)[20]. In addition, research conducted by Hirvonen et al. (2016)[32], including 396 B2B SMEs in Finland, found a significant positive impact of brand orientation on business growth. However, the impact is at a minimal level where the influence comes from two paths: brand performance and customer relationship performance (Hirvonen et al., 2016)[32].

H1a: There is a significant relationship between brand orientation and brand performance in SMEs.

H1b: The relationship between brand orientation and brand performance is affected by entrepreneurial orientation in SMEs.

2.2.3. Brand Identity

Brand identity and brand image sometimes refer to similar objects. The difference between both of them is that the brand image is a reflection of the idea and concept of a corporation or product that an organisation wants to be combined in customers' mind. In a case study research, Rode & Vallaster (2005)[67] designate a concept confusion amongst SMEs and new ventures to assign a brand image and distinguish it from corporate identity. Relevantly, websites can facilitate and support brand names of SMEs. Opoku et al.'s (2007)[57] suggestion was concentrated on food SMEs and they should communicate brand personality by encouraging their customers to visit and interact with their website regularly. Continually, in a published thesis, Bergsrtom et al. (2010)[11] propose a useful implication model for SMEs to build a brand name that begins with brand essence when corporate identity

should be focused along with customer expectation of company's view. Then a brand should reflect brand strengths but should not ignore weaknesses, and all processes should contribute to the brand equity of SMEs (Bergsrtom et al., 2010)[11]. Furthermore, a case study research investigates four consumer goods SMEs and shows that owners' personality, values and beliefs play significant roles in building and transmitting brand identity (Spence & Essoussi, 2010)[70]. In particular, SMEs' founder or owners should take advantage of any opportunity to talk about their own company and promote the company's brand name (Centeno & Hart, 2012)[18]. Service SMEs could also benefit from creating a brand name. Horan et al. (2011, p. 114)[35] conduct in-depth research among service SMEs in Ireland and they find that branding strategy is powered by four factors: "characteristics of SMEs, the role of customer importance, the role of management and staff and brand equity". Once more, brand identity is a customised procedure based on the attitude of corporate assertiveness. On the other hand, limited resources usually restrict the branding process where many SMEs cannot afford to pay the expenses of branding. In a case study research, Mexican SMEs show that owners or managers are the main players of any practice of branding and their personality is highly observed, not only within branding strategy but also among all marketing activities (Centeno & Hart, 2012)[18]. To that extent, it seems that SME owners are the major—sometimes only—player in determining brand identity. Mitchell et al. (2012)[50] find in a case study research that consists of 12 retail SMEs that owners or managers control branding management and functions by themselves and it mostly counts as one of the main daily duties of their work. Recently, research that involved 721 SMEs examined brand identity components—brand vision, brand values and brand positioning—to indicate if there is any impact of these components on brand performance individually (Muhonen et al., 2017)[54]. The result shows a direct impact of brand positioning and brand vision on brand performance, which is related to a positive impact on financial performance (Muhonen et al., 2017)[54].

H2a: There is a significant relationship between brand identity and brand performance in SMEs.

H2b: The relationship between brand identity and brand performance is affected by entrepreneurial orientation in SMEs.

2.2.4. Brand Distinctiveness

Brand distinctiveness is typically connected to brand positioning. It reverberates unique brand feathers and is consistent with a corporation's competitive advantages. Few expressions can be found in literature about 'brand distinctiveness' as part of a brand's components. Bresciani & Eppler (2010)[14] investigate the process and practices of building a brand among new start-up ventures, and their suggestion is that young companies should not compare themselves to well-established companies in a matter of adopting a similar brand strategy where capabilities are totally different. However, they provide a framework for

strategic branding that suits SMEs and new start-up ventures. Omar & Ali (2010)[56] investigate the impact of advertisement on brand equity and customer loyalty and their suggestions were mainly focused on developing an integrated communication strategy to acquire a better brand position. In literature, there are many research works and studies that examine and investigate branding strategy in different stages of growth. However, maintaining brand distinctiveness over time is also a critical issue and needs extraordinary attention. Parrott & Roomi (2010)[60] in their study suggest that SMEs should secure and acquire “brand experience” that is gained and accumulated over the time of branding and customers’ feedback.

Four principles of brand equity (brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty) were examined to determine the impact of overall brand equity on SMEs’ performance, and the results point out a significant impact of brand loyalty on brand equity and corporate performance (Asamoah, 2014)[8]. In a very critical stage of building a brand of SMEs, the business founder highly influences the branding process and might become a heavy heritage of the brand that might transfer to a new manager. But the question is how the unique contents of the brand can be transferred to a new generation without the founder’s influences. Razeghi et al. (2014)[64] prove that brand alignment helps to eliminate the founder’s effectiveness over time.

H3a: There is a significant relationship between brand distinctiveness and brand performance in SMEs.

H3b: The relationship between brand distinctiveness and brand performance is affected by the entrepreneurial orientation in SMEs.

In a perspective of entrepreneurial orientation, the concept has been widely addressed in the literature. Many authors prove the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on different aspects of business and organisation (Miller, 1983[49]; Morris & Paul, 1987[53]; Covin & Slevin, 1989[22]; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001)[47], and there are various researches and studies applying different measurements of entrepreneurial orientation. Acs (1992)[5] urges that entrepreneurial orientation is linked and related to small and medium enterprises and it might have an impact on business strategy directly or indirectly. However, it has been suggested to include entrepreneurial orientation as a moderated factor when surveying SMEs. To demonstrate and facilitate measurements and test research hypotheses, a research model is developed as shown in figure 1.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Problem

Brand strategy and brand management in SMEs approaching different practices than large companies. According to the reviewed literature on SME brand management, SMEs encounter many challenges when they start building a brand. The challenges are mainly related to finance, experience, human capital and strategic thinking. Various aspects and concepts associated with brand

management have made pursuing appropriate and adequate brand processes complicated. For example, building a distinctive brand in a market should not be processed unless there is a good understanding and clear meaning of brand identity. SMEs sometimes are not able to distinguish between brand identity and corporate identity and Saudi Arabia’s SMEs are facing a similar situation. Branding efforts are obvious and notable during daily duties. However, their attempts may or may not succeed because of inappropriate planning and execution of branding. Are Saudi Arabia’s SMEs aware of appropriate and convenient branding processes? If so, how would brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness contribute to brand performance? In addition, how would entrepreneurial orientation impress these contributions?

3.2. Aim and Objectives

This research aims to understand branding strategy among Saudi Arabia’s SMEs in Tabuk City. In SMEs, owners or entrepreneurs usually take the responsibility of marketing management where branding strategy is considered one of the top managers’ responsibilities. Based on the research aim and the above questions, the following objectives are determined to facilitate the research path.

- To examine the impact of brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness on brand performance among SMEs.
- To examine and understand the role of entrepreneurial orientation leverage on brand performance among SMEs.
- To increase knowledge of brand performance in a certain context such as an emerging economy.

3.3. Population and Sample

The population is assigned to be all SMEs in Tabuk City, Saudi Arabia. According to account records of the Tabuk Chamber of Commerce and Industry, there are 2769 registered SMEs in Tabuk City. They are classified into one, two, three and four. However, these organisations are within SMEs criteria, which is adapted from Monsha’at (2018)[52] (Small and Medium Enterprise General Authority in Saudi Arabia). The criteria are based on three classes. Any company that consists of 1 to 5 full-time employees with an annual turnover below 3 million Saudi riyals is considered as micro-small. Any company that consists of 6 to 49 full-time employees with an annual turnover of 3 million to below 40 million Saudi riyals is considered a small company. Any company that consists of 50 to 250 full-time employees with an annual turnover from 40 million to 200 million is considered as a medium company. To determine the sample size of this research, the following formula is applied, which is adapted from Bartlett et al. (2001)[10] for a continuous data:

$$N_e = \frac{(t)^2 * (s)^2}{(d)^2}$$

Symbol (t) is the value of the selected alpha level of .05, which in each tail = (1.96). Symbol (s) is the estimate of standard deviation in the population which = (1.167) using 7 range of scale. Symbol (d) is the accepted margin of

error, which is a calculated number of (points of primary scale * acceptable margin of error) = (7*.03). The calculation sample is 118 considered minimum returned sample size that a researcher must attain. Because the

survey will be handled manually and there may be lost addresses, the sample size is increased to 5% of the total population = (139). The minimum required sample size will remain as stated above (118).

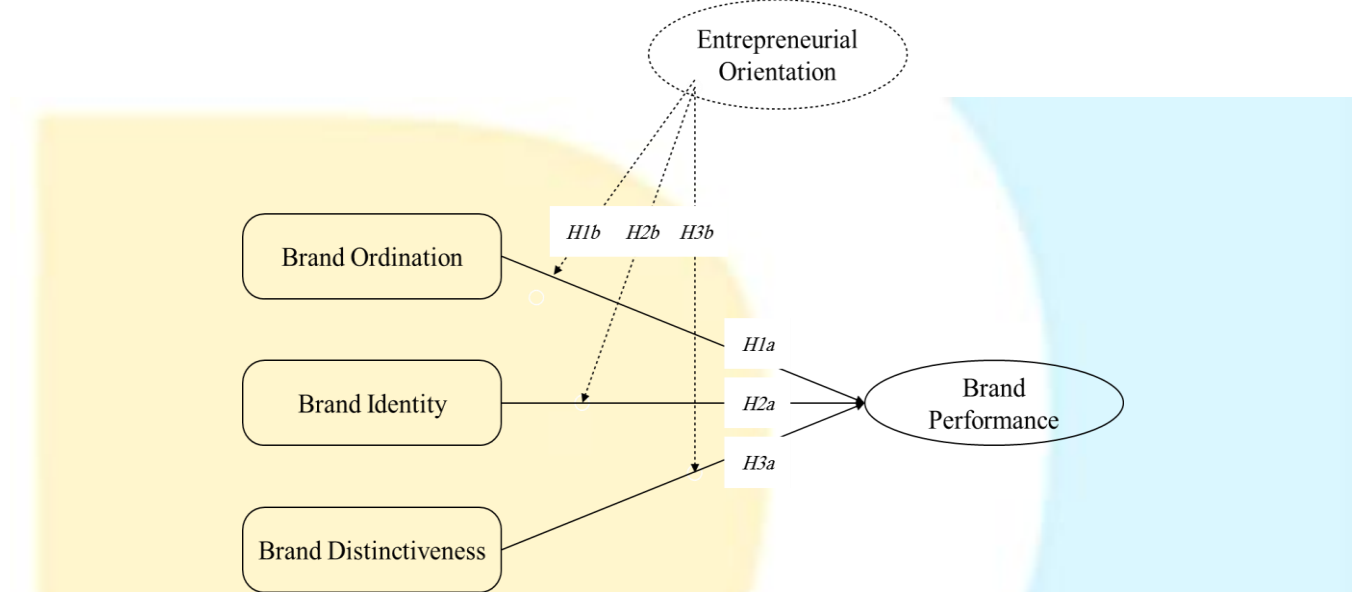


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Research
Source: Author

3.4. Measurement

According to the reviewed literature and previous research of branding in SMEs and for the purpose of testing proposed hypotheses, several items were adopted from various resources. Brand orientation and brand distinctiveness variables' items were adopted from Wong & Merriless (2008b)[76]. Each variable consists of five items. The items were tested and showed a substantial loading into each construct with high reliability (Wong & Merriless, 2008b)[76]. Brand identity variable's items were adopted from Hirvonen & Laukkanen (2011)[31] and the variable consists of eight items. Those three variables are the independent variables. Entrepreneurial orientation items were adopted from Smart & Conant (1994)[69], which are developed by Laukkanen et al. (2013)[46] and consists of five items. This variable is the moderator variable. The last variable is brand performance, which is a dependent variable. The items were adopted from Wong & Merriless (2008b)[76] and consist of five items. All items' statements are measured by the Likert scale ranging from 1 "totally disagree" to 7 "totally agree".

The research is applied in Saudi Arabia where the instruments had to be translated into Arabic. It has been suggested to send the complete questionnaire to four or five academic professionals in the same field to check if there is any miss-wording or misunderstanding of the statement and to make sure of all items related and linked to construct. The questionnaire was handed to four academic professionals in the field of marketing and there were few changes, which were amended. The amendments were related to rewording several items to

eliminate ambiguity that might occur when the items were translated into Arabic. Then the questionnaire was tested among 10 respondents of the targeted population. The results of this step had slight changes in rewording few statements.

The research model and proposed hypotheses were tested using the Partial Least Square (PLS), which considers as one of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) methods of analysis. This technique depends on the degree of variation between model variables. PLS technique is widely used to measure reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity synchronously (Ringle et al., 2012)[66]. The PLS is one of the strongest statistical analysis techniques to evaluate the measurable model and structural models that consist of more than one latent variable with various indicators or items. In addition, the PLS measures items' reliability and validity along with hypotheses relation directions both at the same time (Hair et al., 2010)[30]. The principle of analysing data depended on two steps that are mentioned by Hair et al. (2010)[30]. The first step is to test measurable instruments, finding reliability and validity of existing items through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The second step is to evaluate the research model by testing each hypothesis. The two steps were performed using Warp PLS 4.0.

3.5. Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to SMEs in Tabuk City. Three hundred questionnaires were handed to owners or managers of SMEs in hard copy, and they were required to manually answer all questions fairly and voluntarily. Two hundred and eleven were returned, which

is a response rate of 70%. Twenty-three questionnaires were unusable and removed. One hundred and eighty-eight questionnaires are valid and included in the analysis process. The sample respondents were males and females. However, males are 64.9% of total respondents. The

majority of respondents' age is between 36–45 and 46–55 at 36% and 32%, respectively. More than half of sample respondents graduated from university. Table 1 shows the sample characteristics.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	122	64.9
Female	66	35.1
Age		
18-25	17	09.0
26-35	28	14.9
36-45	68	36.2
46-55	60	31.9
56-65	15	08.0
Above 65	0	0
Education		
Below secondary school	4	02.1
Secondary school	55	29.3
Diploma	26	13.8
Graduate	97	51.6
Master	6	03.2
Doctorate	0	0
Years of Company		
Below 5 years	105	55.9
5 years to below 10 years	44	23.4
10 years to below 15 years	26	13.8
15 years to below 20 years	9	04.8
20 years and above	4	02.1
No. of employees		
From 1 to 5	107	56.9
From 6 to 49	77	41.0
From 50 to 249	4	02.1
250 and above	0	0
Annual turnover		
Less than 3 million	169	89.9
3 million to below 40 million	17	09.0
40 million to 200 million	2	01.1
More than 200 million	0	0

Source: Author

4. ANALYSIS AND RESUTLS

4.1. Measurement Model

In this section, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is performed to evaluate research-measurable instruments. This analysis technique is very common to evaluate various variables with various dimensions and indicators that enable producing a measurable model with high reliability and validity and that can be generalised (Ringle et al., 2012)[66]. The result of CFA illustrates convergent validity and discriminant validity as shown in tables 2 and 3. According to convergent validity based on all levels of basic variables that can be tested using average variance extracted, all variables present a value more than 0.05. This value is the lowest accepted value for AVE (Fomell

& Larcker, 1981)[25]. As shown in table 2, variables' AVE of brand orientation, brand identity, brand distinctiveness, entrepreneurial orientation and brand performance are 0.0681, 0.693, 0.686, 0.0680 and 0.668, respectively, and that reflect almost similar reliability among each variable's items. In addition, the table shows factor loading for each item to construct variables where all values are greater than 0.70. That means the explained variance of each item is expected to be related to a variable construct that was supposed to be loaded in previously. All loading factors are significant at $p < 0.05$. On the other hand, discriminant validity can be measured using the testing square root of AVE. Fomell & larcker (1981)[25] mention that discriminant validity occurred when the square root of AVE for each variable is greater

than the variable correlation of each variable with others, and that is shown in table 3. Finally, the internal consistency of each construct was measured using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. As shown in table 2, brand orientation, brand identity, brand

distinctiveness, entrepreneurial orientation and brand performance indicate high-reliability value with 0.88, 0.89, 0.88, 0.88 and 0.87, respectively. According to Hair et al. (2010)[30], any value greater than 0.70 is accepted in the social science studies.

Table 2: CFA, Reliability and Convergent Validity

No.	Items	SFL	α	CR	AVE
Brand Orientation (BO)					
1	Branding is essential to our strategy	0.953	.880	0.914	0.681
2	Branding flows through all our marketing activities	0.796			
3	Branding is essential in running this company	0.847			
4	Long-term brand planning is critical to our future success	0.747			
5	The brand is an important asset for us	0.766			
Brand Identity (BI)					
6	We have differentiated our brand from the competitors	0.971	.897	0.909	0.693
7	We have created a brand that is personal and memorable	0.845			
8	We know where we are heading in the future	0.791			
9	We know what needs to be done to achieve our future goals	0.746			
10	Our brand represents the values of our organisation	0.757			
11	Our marketing is guided by our brand values	0.643			
12	We strive for the integration of our marketing activities	0.756			
13	Our office layout, logo, and clothing represent our brand values	0.782			
Brand Distinctiveness (BD)					
14	Our firm has a different approach or position in the market compared with our competitors	0.962	.881	0.915	0.686
15	Our overall marketing strategy is very distinctive	0.861			
16	We know our main strengths and that really helps us compete in the market	0.828			
17	Our products/services are differentiated from those of the competitors	0.659			
18	We know where we are heading in the future and how to market the business to get there	0.801			
Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)					
19	Relative to our competitors, our company has higher tendency to engage in strategic planning activities	0.868	.882	0.914	0.680
20	Relative to our competitors, our company has higher ability to identify customer needs and wants	0.831			
21	Relative to our competitors, our company has higher level of innovation	0.820			
22	Relative to our competitors, our company has higher ability to persevere in making our vision of the business a reality	0.786			
23	Relative to our competitors, our company has higher ability to identify new opportunities	0.817			
Brand Performance (BP)					
24	Our advertising/promotions create the desired brand image in the market	0.837	.874	0.909	0.668
25	Our firm has built a strong brand awareness in the target market	0.799			
26	Our firm has built a solid reputation	0.734			
27	We are very satisfied with our brand marketing	0.824			
28	Our firm has built strong customer brand loyalty	0.885			
SFL: Standardised Factor					

4.2. Structural Model

PLS technique is applied to measure the effective role of the moderator, which is entrepreneurial orientation among the relationships between independent variables (brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness) and the dependent variable (brand performance). The relationships were measured through two models as shown in table 4. The first model tests the direct impact of

brand orientation (H1a), brand identity (H2a) and brand distinctiveness (H3a) on brand performance. The model is significant at $p < 0.001$ with ($R^2 = 0.67$). The result shows that brand orientation and brand identity have a significant positive impact on brand performance at $p < 0.001$ with ($\beta = 296$) and ($\beta = 644$), respectively. These results support H1a and H2a and both hypotheses are accepted. The two significant variables explain 67% of

brand performance variance. However, brand distinctiveness shows insignificant impact at $p > 0.05$ with ($\beta=0.006$) on brand performance and the null H3a is accepted. Notably, brand identity is the strongest variable that has an impact on brand performance. In the second model, entrepreneurial orientation as moderator variable interacted to test H1b, H2b and H3b. The impact of the moderator variable occurred if it strengthens or weakens the relationship between independent and dependent variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986)[9]. The result of PLS as shown in table 4 indicates a significant impact of entrepreneurial orientation on the relationships between brand orientation and brand performance at $p < 0.01$ with ($\beta=206$), and H1b is accepted. That means, whenever entrepreneurial orientation is increased, the relationship between brand orientation and brand performance becomes stronger and important. In addition, the result indicates that entrepreneurial orientation has a significant impact on the relationship between brand identity and

brand performance at $p < 0.01$ with ($\beta=208$), and H2b is accepted. It means, whenever entrepreneurial orientation is increased, the relationship between brand identity and brand performance becomes stronger and important. The result also shows the insignificant impact of entrepreneurial orientation on the relationship between brand distinctiveness and brand performance, which means the null of H3b is accepted. Finally, the second model as shown in table 4, which includes entrepreneurial orientation as a moderator variable, is significant at $p < 0.001$ with $R^2=0.79$, which means entrepreneurial orientation can explain 79% of the variance of brand performance. In other words, entrepreneurial orientation as a moderator variable has increased variance explanation for the relationship between brand orientation and brand identity as independent variables and brand performance as a dependent variable with 12%. This result indicates that the model is reliable and predicts any change that might happen on brand performance.

Table 3: Factor Correlation Matrix with Square Roots of VAE

Constructs	BO	BI	BD	EO	BP
BO	0.825				
BI	0.754	0.832			
BD	0.746	0.779	0.828		
EO	0.704	0.654	0.721	0.824	
BP	0.721	0.639	0.617	0.741	0.817

Note: Correlations between variables were all significant at $p < 0.01$
 Square root of AVE on diagonal
 BO: Brand Orientation, BI: Brand Identity, BD: Brand Distinctiveness, EO: Entrepreneurial Orientation, BP: Brand Performance.

Source: Author

5. DISCUSSION

Based on analysis results, it seems that brand orientation and brand identity have a direct impact on brand performance. SME owners or managers can easily understand the process of branding in two aspects: being brand-oriented and identifying their own brand. These two steps of building a strong brand name are manageable and could be linked directly to owners or managers. At the same time, owners or managers are responsible for spreading brand orientation all over the organisation. These results support those of Wong and Merrilees (2005)[77], Reijonen et al. (2014)[65] and Chovancova et al. (2015)[20], which relate marketing performance (which includes brand performance, customer performance and market growth) to a good setting of brand orientation. Brand identity also shows a significant direct impact on brand performance. Similar to brand orientation, brand identity is usually determined by owners or managers. However, the process needs teamwork to integrate the identity of the brand with the organisation's marketing and other activities. This result supports those of Spence and Essoussi (2010)[70] and Centeno and Hart (2012)[18]. Brand distinctiveness shows an insignificant impact on brand performance. It is not a surprising result due to a highly confusing presence

between brand distinctiveness and competitive advantage. Furthermore, SMEs fail to imitate large organisations in their branding strategy. As mentioned earlier, Bresciani and Eppler (2010)[14] had cautioned SMEs not to adopt the branding strategy of large organisations due to many reasons, huge marketing and branding budget, for example. Unlike other researches in SMEs branding, this research adopts an entrepreneurial orientation (EO) as an effective moderator in branding strategy and processes. The results of PLS prove that EO is interactive, which supports Morris and Paul (1987)[53] as well as Lumpkin and Dess (2001)[47] that entrepreneurial orientation is interactive and influence the whole organisation. The main reason for including entrepreneurial orientation in this research is that SMEs are managed individually most of the time. Thus, entrepreneurs have huge power over the business, and branding strategy is one of the main concerns of their duties. In addition, entrepreneurs' beliefs, norms and personality also influence the entire business, especially in the start-up stage where branding strategy is planned.

In the second model results where entrepreneurial orientation is interactive, the relationship between brand orientation and brand performance is increased and becomes stronger. In other words, when SMEs practice the real meaning of entrepreneurial and being

entrepreneurship-oriented, the process of branding strategy becomes organised and planned. Organisations may differ in the fundamental orientation of the company which determines business model and style. Companies might rely on sales, marketing, delivery, customers or even management flow process. However, being entrepreneurship-orientated, in particular as SMEs, enhances marketing orientation and therefore branding strategy. Thus, branding decision, budgeting and targets can be easily decided. Furthermore, the relationship between brand identity and brand performance will be strengthened and become more effective when the orientation of entrepreneurship is interactive. Like corporate identity, brand identity needs innovative thinking and experience in marketing and marketplace to launch or relaunch a brand with an extraordinary and clear identity. Innovation thinking is one of the basic

components of entrepreneurial orientation. Thus, intelligent thinking and innovativeness support a successful brand identity in the market in order to achieve good brand performance. On the other hand, entrepreneurial orientation has no impact on the relationship between brand distinctiveness and brand performance. Even the direct impact of brand distinctiveness on brand performance does not exist. This negative result may be ascribed to a complicated and mixed understanding of brand distinctiveness and brand identity among SME owners or managers. They might not be able to distinguish between brand identity and brand distinctiveness. Finally, SME owners or managers should rely on entrepreneurial orientation and expand this orientation among their own business employees to build a strong brand in the market.

Table 4: Partial Least Square Analysis

Predictors	Dependent BP			
	Without Moderating effect		With Moderating effect	
	B	<i>p</i> -value	β	<i>p</i> -value
BO	0.296	0.001	0.211	0.001
BI	0.644	0.001	0.732	0.001
BD	0.006	0.465	0.026	0.358
EO				
BO*EO			0.206	0.002
BI*EO			0.208	0.002
BD*EO			0.034	0.320
<i>R</i> ²	0.67		0.79	
BO: Brand Orientation, BI: Brand Identity, BD: Brand Distinctiveness, EO: Entrepreneurial Orientation, BP: Brand Performance.				

Source: Author

6. CONCLUSION

To summarise research flows, the aim of this research was to investigate the impact of brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness on brand performance in a special case where entrepreneurial orientation is interactive and find out whether it moderates the impact of SMEs' brand performance. All variables are measured using previous instruments, which are tested and proved to be of high reliability. Several hypotheses were developed through previous research on SME branding strategy. A unique technique of analysis—partial least square—was applied to measure the interaction of entrepreneurial orientation as a moderator variable. The research context was SMEs in Tabuk City, Saudi Arabia, with 188 samples. There were similar research works on SMEs' branding strategy. However, involving entrepreneurial orientation as a moderator variable gives this research an extensive capability to understand the roles of entrepreneurial orientation in branding strategy and process. The findings reveal that the impact of brand orientation and brand identity on brand performance will increase and the relationship will be stronger when entrepreneurial orientation is interactive. Brand

distinctiveness has no impact in both models, directly on brand performance or when entrepreneurial orientation is interactive. Finally, SME owners and managers should manage brand strategy through diffused entrepreneurial origination among the organisation's staff and adopt the real meanings of being entrepreneurship-oriented.

7. LIMITATION

There are two points that limit this research. Branding strategy is not restricted to the three variables—brand orientation, brand identity and brand distinctiveness. It includes, for example, brand personality, brand awareness, brand equity and image, where all of these concepts involve various processes. Because the context of this research concerns an emergent economy, the author decided not to extend the strategy and process of branding to element confusion of different branding concepts. Another limitation of this research is the moderator variable itself. Even this research proves the significant interaction of entrepreneurial orientation; still whether to be a moderator or mediator should be determined earlier. Due to time limitation and the weakness in previous studies, this step could not be complete.

8. FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research can extend branding strategy aspects involving brand awareness and recognition and investigate the impact on brand equity and brand performance in general. Researchers can also investigate branding strategy in a financial wise. However, this type of research might face a lot of restrictions due to financial data that need to be collected. Most companies refuse to provide financial data, especially SMEs. Nevertheless, research can be applied to certain samples of companies like medium enterprises. Another lesson from this research is that researchers can extend entrepreneurial orientation's aspects to include factors from different perspectives. In this way, researchers can expand the effectiveness of entrepreneurial orientation and find which aspect of entrepreneurial orientation might affect and play a more significant role than others. Finally, the population of this research was SMEs in Tabuk City. Further research can extend the population to different regions of Saudi Arabia, and results can be compared between various regions.

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