



Are Moroccan job seekers different than job creators? An exploratory study of differences in entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine differences between Moroccan entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in order to circumvent the nature and origin of their differences.

Design/methodology/approach – This research was carried out in Morocco with a sample of 20 entrepreneurs identified as individuals who have been operating their own business or who have unsuccessfully started a small business, and a contrast sample of 20 non-entrepreneurs, classified as career professionals working for other organizations such as the public service and/or the private sector who wanted to start their own business but failed in doing so. The study methodology adopted a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews due to the exploratory nature of the subject. The in-depth interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

Findings – The findings highlight that there are no differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in terms of personality traits and characteristics. The interviewees emphasize the importance of financial resources, business networks and connections as vital factors in the decision to start a venture.

Research limitations/implications – In terms of implications of the current research, understanding the determinants of entrepreneurship in Morocco is of considerable theoretical and practical value, especially given that there is no research that looks into this issue in the Moroccan context.

Practical implications – Concerning practical implications, by identifying reasons why Moroccan young graduates, by large, show a weak entrepreneurial spirit and would rather be job seekers than potential job creators, adequate measures need to be put in place with aspirations that they will encourage the creation of more start-up businesses.

Originality/value – Studies that compared entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs are far from being consistent. Moreover, the current research is the first study that looked into differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in Morocco.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, SMEs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Entrepreneurship revolves around the creation of growth-oriented new ventures, and generating employment and self-employment by means of small and micro businesses (Bhide, 2000). Entrepreneurship also refers to business activities within existing organizations such as corporate venturing, strategic renewal and spin-offs (Zahra and Dess, 2001). However, entrepreneurial activity documented in Morocco demonstrates that young graduates prefer to work for the public service or other private businesses rather than start their own small business and work for themselves. To further understand the entrepreneurship phenomenon, several studies examined whether entrepreneurs differed from non-entrepreneurs (i.e. McGrath *et al.*, 1992; McGrath and



MacMillan, 1992; Stimpson *et al.*, 1990). It emerges from the existing literature on the subject that certain differences exist between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs across different national cultures as, for instance, the fact that entrepreneurs seem to share similar values and beliefs. Nonetheless, the results of studies that compared entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs are far from being consistent as some highlighted the interaction between entrepreneurial values and national cultures, whereas other studies identified characteristics and traits of entrepreneurs that differed from those of non-entrepreneurs across national cultures. Therefore, more research examining differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs is, to a large extent, needed in order to circumvent the nature and origin of their differences, particularly in emerging markets. Hence, a research was carried out in Morocco with a sample of 20 entrepreneurs, characterized as individuals who were operating their own business or who had unsuccessfully started a small business, and a contrast sample of 20 non-entrepreneurs, identified as career professionals working for other organizations such as the public service and/or employed in the private sector. The research question of the present study is pertinent and fundamental in entrepreneurship research as it addresses why, when and how some individuals and not others find and exploit business opportunities (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

Background and theoretical perspectives

The entrepreneurship literature distinguishes three main explanations in respect to the reason why entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs differ: personality-related differences, social network differences (Dyer *et al.*, 2008) and the institutional explanation (Djankov *et al.*, 2006).

The individual characteristics perspective places the emphasis on traits associated with entrepreneurial activity such as personal need for achievement, attitudes toward business risk and self-confidence (Fawcett and Gardner, 1994). It is argued that there are behavioral differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs within the same country that influence the incidence of entrepreneurship (Mitchell *et al.*, 2000). In fact, given that entrepreneurial activity requires working long hours and taking financial risks, it is plausible to argue that entrepreneurs demonstrate stronger tenacity and endurance than non-entrepreneurs (Dyer *et al.*, 2008). Further, entrepreneurs are likely to demonstrate the overconfidence bias which motivates them to persist in pursuing new business ideas and creating new ventures (Busenitz and Barney, 1997). However, there has been limited empirical support for personality differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs (Dyer *et al.*, 2008).

On another note, individuals' social relationships and connections determine the quantity and quality of information as well as the rapidity of acquiring it which are necessary in finding new business opportunities (Rodan and Galunic, 2004; Uzzi and Spiro, 2005). The premise according to which entrepreneurs have better pattern recognition abilities of business ideas than non-entrepreneurs is not supported by empirical research (Dyer *et al.*, 2008). Entrepreneurs have superior access to information thanks to their larger social networks which provide them with diverse information related to entrepreneurial activities; in this regard, entrepreneurs have extensive and diverse social networks (Stuart and Ding, 2006). Social networks enhance the creation of ventures as they enhance the mobilization of resources (Stuart and Sorenson, 2007). In short, social networks influence promoting or discouraging entrepreneurship by means of several channels such as family and friends (Djankov *et al.*, 2006).

The institutional perspective refers to the role of economic, political and legal institutions in overhauling or restricting entrepreneurship (Djankov *et al.*, 2006). In this respect, several institutional procedures and issues play a major role in entrepreneurial activities such as financial credit and loan which are crucial to set up businesses, property rights and regulatory procedures to startup businesses.

From a cultural perspective, entrepreneurial activity has been found to be associated with cultures that are high in individualism and masculinity and low in uncertainty avoidance and power distance. In this respect, cultural values constitute a filter for the extent to which a society regards some entrepreneurial behaviors as desirable (Hayton *et al.*, 2002). On the other hand, many researchers looked into entrepreneurial traits and characteristics across various national cultures. In this regard, Scheinberg and MacMillan (1988) conclude that six dimensions summarized entrepreneurial motives in a study of entrepreneurs in 11 different countries. These motives were labeled as: need for approval, perceived instrumentality of wealth, communitarianism, need for personal development, need for independence and need for escape. While these dimensions were found in all the 11 countries, the emphasis placed on each dimension varied among the countries under study. In the same vein, Shane *et al.* (1991) found that the need for independence, recognition, learning and individual roles were factors that explained reasons why entrepreneurs started new business ventures in three different countries.

Regardless of the influence of national culture, several studies examined whether entrepreneurs differed from non-entrepreneurs. In this regard, it has been found that entrepreneurs were systematically higher in power distance, individualism and masculinity and lower in uncertainty avoidance than career professionals in a study carried out in 13 countries by McGrath *et al.* (1992). Along the same line, McGrath and MacMillan (1992) reported that, in comparison to non-entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs believed in taking initiatives, controlling their own destiny, were willing to take charge and direct others and were positively oriented toward adaptation and change. Lastly, Stimpson *et al.* (1990) examined innovation, achievement, self-esteem and personal control of both entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in the USA, Korea, Thailand and China and concluded that significant differences existed between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in the USA but not in the other three countries. It emerges from these studies that certain differences exist between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs across different national cultures as, for instance, the fact that entrepreneurs seem to share similar values and beliefs.

In a nutshell, it seems that results of studies that compared entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs are far from being consistent as some highlighted the interaction between entrepreneurial values and national cultures, whereas other studies identified characteristics and traits of entrepreneurs that differed from those of non-entrepreneurs across national cultures. Therefore, more research examining differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs are to a greater extent needed in order to circumvent the nature and origin of their differences.

Methodology

The current research targeted a sample of 20 entrepreneurs, characterized as individuals who were operating their own business or who had unsuccessfully started a small business. The contrast sample consisted of 20 non-entrepreneurs, identified as career professionals working for other public or private organizations in Morocco who wanted to start their own business but failed in doing so.

While quantitative research aims at generalizing research findings through the selection of a large number of respondents, qualitative research, nonetheless, aims at deeply investigating the research problem under study through the selection a few respondents who would assist with this process. In this respect, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) recommend that the number of respondents in qualitative research range between five and 25 individuals.

Morocco was selected for the study presumably due to a purported lack of entrepreneurial spirit within the country in general and in particular among young Moroccan graduates who prefer to work for the public service and, in a lesser extent, with private businesses rather than start their own small business venture. In this respect, only 28,609 new businesses were created in the entire country of over 32 million individuals in 2011 (Binkkour, 2012). Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has witnessed the emergence of a class of entrepreneurs who heavily invested in textile and clothing, and the food processing industries. However, these industries seem to fall short in advancing and creating a strong and modern economy which may presumably be due to the Moroccan entrepreneurial mentality which tends to remain cautious and prefers a rent-based economy without any risk taking (Amara *et al.*, 2010). In addition, categorization of entrepreneurship activity in Morocco does not seem to go beyond two general categories: informal entrepreneurship which appears to be a sort of forced entrepreneurship partly due to necessity such as in the cases of individuals without jobs, and in some instances, for those who have extremely limited employment options except for starting their own small business; conversely, the essence of formal entrepreneurship is the motivation to seek and take advantage of business opportunities (Ferhane, 2008). Along the same line, Affaya and Guerraoui (2009) stated that 39 percent of the respondents (entrepreneurs) in their study chose to start their own business in pursuit of independence and freedom.

The present study was carried out with entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs adopting a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews due to the exploratory nature of the subject. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in French as the latter is the medium of communication used in the workplace in the country (Benzakour, 2007). In qualitative research, a few respondents are selected to assist in investigating the research problem under study. In this respect, Leedy and Ormrod (2001) recommend that their number vary between five and 25 individuals. Thus, the initial preset number of participants was established at 20 granting some latitude in order to reach saturation or continuation until no new insights would surface in both samples. The criteria guiding the initial selection of participants included are entrepreneurs who graduated in business administration within the last five years and who chose to establish their own business, as well as, non-entrepreneurs who graduated in business administration within the last five years and who decided to work for other organizations such as private businesses or the public service. Due to access issues, the identification of respondents will not be systematic in both cases. Nonetheless, two comparable samples in terms of age, gender, education level, area of specialization and entrepreneurial status (entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs) were selected. Consequently, the samples are similar in regards to every aspect, except for their entrepreneurial activity; this allows controlling for alternative explanations; in fact, when the sampling strategy is not probabilistic, resorting to comparable samples constitutes a necessity.

The in-depth interview as established by the grounded theory approach begins with open-ended questions with each informant (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). For the purpose

of the present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a loose structure in order to explore perceptions, cognitions and experiences about entrepreneurial activity. The duration of each interview was estimated at one hour and was not predetermined in order to leave room to a logical conclusion of the interaction between the researchers and the respondents. The tradition of grounded theory, adopted in the present research, advocates starting the theory building process with no theory or research propositions to test (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). One of the most important requirements is to get closely connected to the data with expectations to conceptualize the information into a valid and testable theory. It should be mentioned that the authors have worked extensively in the Moroccan business environment which consequently has provided them with a rich foundation of the subject area, especially given that it is unavoidable that researchers resort to prior experiences in efforts to construct theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). We hence rely on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) which aims at developing a theory embedded within collected field data to examine what is considered pivotal and relevant information (Robson, 2002). The use of this strategy allows for the discovery of new phenomena as they emerge in the data (Hallberg, 2006).

The interview guide comprised three main sections. The first question was broad in nature and sought to obtain general background information on the respondents' expectations of their professional life before graduating and their motivation to start a new business (Questions 1 and 2). The second section mostly consisting of the interview questions noted in the questionnaire aims at identifying factors that facilitate or inhibit entrepreneurship of the respondents. The last section gathered demographic data about the respondents such as age, education level and the number of entrepreneurs among family members and friends. The main interview questions in the questionnaire were as follows:

- (1) What were your expectations regarding your professional life after completing your educational studies?
- (2) • After your studies, why did you decide to start your own business rather than work for an employer? (question for entrepreneurs only).
• Upon completion of your studies, why did you decide to work for an employer rather than start your own? (question for non-entrepreneurs only).
- (3) Do you think that you had the required skills and competencies to start your own business?
- (4) Were there any obstacles to start your own business? If yes, describe them.
- (5) How did you manage to overcome these obstacles?
- (6) Do you believe that you had the necessary abilities and resources to overcome these challenges?
- (7) Were there business opportunities in your area of interest? How did you come to know about them?
- (8) Were you ready to work long hours and have a more considerable workload with extensive working hours?
- (9) Were you inclined to take risks in starting a new business?

Additional questions were asked as the initial responses provided by the participants influenced the direction on how the interviews unfolded.

Each interview covered the same sections using the same wording and in the same general order to ensure comparability with other respondents. The time allotted varied slightly to ensure an in-depth and thorough discussion of the sections and to obtain optimum contribution from interviewees. Flexibility on the emphasis of sections was encouraged in order to provide respondents with the opportunity to share the most important aspects of their insights.

The interviews were summarized with key points highlighted and aggregated by means of content analysis; common themes were regrouped in accordance with the objective of the study. The results of each interview were analyzed using a qualitative method.

Saturation was reflected as of the 16th interviewee in the entrepreneur sample and as of 17th interviewee in the non-entrepreneur sample with no new data identified as considerable contribution.

Dependability, which relates to the positivist concept of reliability, refers to the assurance that the research can consistently be repeated under comparable circumstances (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To ensure the latter in the present study, we standardized the interview questions and followed a systematic process of conducting research. Due to the sampling nature, no claims are made to transferability/external validity of the findings to the entire population of entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in Morocco. However, considering the thoroughness of the research process, the results propose insightful observations about both categories.

Findings and discussion

We compared two comparable samples of entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs while controlling for age, gender, education and professional experience. It is noteworthy to mention that the first category of respondents includes two subcategories: entrepreneurs by opportunity and entrepreneurs by necessity. Entrepreneurs by opportunity became entrepreneurs when they spotted a business opportunity while entrepreneurs by necessity became entrepreneurs because they were not able to find a job. The second category includes individuals who thought of becoming entrepreneurs and those who attempted to set up their venture but failed in doing so.

When analyzing data from both samples of respondents in regards to social relationships and institutional context, two consistent categories emerged as relevant to the incidence of entrepreneurship in the Moroccan context: access to the required financial resources as well as business networks and connections as determinants in the decision to set up a business venture. Therefore, social networks constitute an explanation for the incidence of entrepreneurial activities in Morocco.

In terms of individual characteristics, no differences were highlighted by the interviewees from both samples. In fact, when asked about risk-taking in hypothetical situations and scenarios, entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs provided similar responses. Further, both samples demonstrated similar motivation and financial ambition patterns. When all the respondents were asked whether they would consider retiring if they received an income of 100 times the annual gross domestic product of Morocco (~US\$500,000), all the entrepreneurs and majority of the non-entrepreneurs (90 percent) responded negatively. Respondents in both categories want to earn more money and achieve self-realization in their professional life. While entrepreneurs have the opportunity to do so, non-entrepreneurs still yearn for the opportunity and chance

that someday they could get into a profitable small business despite the fact that they are currently engaged in salaried activities for a source of income. Surprisingly, the majority of respondents indicated that the traits of individuals and their personality such as motivation or attitudes are not determinants in engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

In terms of family and social relationships, all the respondents highlighted the importance of social networks and individual affiliations as a determinant factor in setting up businesses. In this regard, entrepreneurs have nearly four times more entrepreneurs in their immediate and extended family circles than non-entrepreneurs. Similarly, interviewees were asked to name ten friends from their childhood and adolescences and report how many of these friends had become entrepreneurs. Among the entrepreneurs, respondents stated three from their childhood and four from their adolescences friends while the figures were one and one and a half for non-entrepreneurs, respectively.

In the Moroccan culture, family and friendship ties are strong as people have a wide range of relatives and friends to whom they feel compelling obligations. Hence, the importance of social networks in entrepreneurship as noted by almost all the participants appeared in the following excerpt:

Setting up a business in Morocco seems like the hen and the egg dilemma. Before starting a business you need purchasing orders, but to bid for these contracts and requisitions from potential clients you first need to have an established business. The issue with engaging in entrepreneurship is that you need to gain the trust of the customers beforehand. To do so, excellent references, decent contacts and reputable connections in the business milieu are required. It is the same case with money; it takes money to make money.

Another respondent added:

If you want to be successful as a start-up you need to be initiated and inducted into the marketplace. Without strong relationships, the chances to turn your business idea into a reality are worth next to nothing.

Family economic situations and status reflected in wealth is a critical factor in entrepreneurship as it enhances the creation of business ventures. In fact, capital is needed to set up a business. When asked if family was able to help them to start their ventures, all the entrepreneurs reported that they would not have been able to go into business without the financial backing and support of their families. Conversely, most of the non-entrepreneurs declared that they were not able to start a business due to a lack of financial help from their families as remarked in the citation below:

From my own experience, financing business ventures is the most serious challenge that I faced when I started planning to go into business. I knocked, in vain, on many doors, to get start-up money: banks, investors, government, and at the end, all that effort was and useless and despairing. Unfortunately, my family didn't have the financial means to help me and at the time we didn't own our house, otherwise I would have gone as far as mortgaging it or even getting an equity loan with it just to get a small business loan to get my small venture started.

Another respondent quoted:

Without your own initial capital and financial resources, you will definitely miss out on numerous rewarding business opportunities in Morocco. Potential investors would not invest their money to finance your business endeavor unless there is substantial financial commitment from your end first. It is an acrimonious and jarring circle that doesn't encourage individuals to even think about starting their own businesses.

There is striking divergence of opinion between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in terms of their perception about the institutional environment of business in Morocco. While 70 percent of entrepreneurs view the business climate more favorably, non-entrepreneurs perceive the latter as hostile to doing business and setting up ventures.

The findings of the present study are aligned with results of other studies conducted in a unicultural context. In this respect, Brockhaus (1982) found that college-trained managers shared the same values as college-trained start-up entrepreneurs in the USA as both groups favored only moderate risk taking. Similarly, March and Shapira (1987) concluded that successful entrepreneurs seemed to be no different from successful managers in terms of need for achievement.

Conversely, the results are not consistent with a recent study conducted in the Malaysian context by Raman *et al.* (2013). The latter looked into differences between women entrepreneurs and women non-entrepreneurs. They found that environmental factors, personality and motivation variables contribute significantly to the entrepreneurial intention of the respondents. Factors such as psychological support, benefit from environment and previous work condition play a key role in this regard. In addition, the entrepreneurs seemed to have a lower psychological support than the non-entrepreneurs. Similarly, Baron and Markam (1999) identified certain cognitive factors that distinguish entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs. In this respect, they found that entrepreneurs tend to be more alert (a bias to collect and process extensive information), are less biased by the planning fallacy (a tendency to assume that one can accomplish more in a given period of time than is actually justified), rely less on heuristic thinking (rather than relying on systematic processing), are less susceptible to be overconfident (a failure to know the limits of our knowledge) and have higher self-efficacy (cognitive conviction in one's capabilities to perform) than non-entrepreneurs do.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify differences between Moroccan entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs. The study yielded some unexpected and counterintuitive results, which diverge from past research as they illustrate the importance of social relationships and access to financial resources in the incidence of entrepreneurship. Establishing an entrepreneurship culture is a long-term undertaking by society through which individuals and institutions should promote the emergence of entrepreneurs that are passionate about creating new business ventures and motivated to be innovative in the global marketplace. However, entrepreneurship faces several serious challenges, namely access to financial resources and access to established social business networks.

Does entrepreneurship deserve some consideration in Moroccan public policies? This point can be argued based on the contribution of entrepreneurial activity in creating jobs for entrepreneurs and others in Morocco, particularly the youth. The debate about differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs has probably been inhibited by a lack of data on the subject. Given the economic downturn and the high rate of youth unemployment, the time seems opportune for granting special consideration to the challenges faced by entrepreneurship in Morocco with particular attention to the issue of access to financial resources and establishing business networks. Two main recommendations seem to naturally emerge on the basis of the current study as logical measures that could lead the efforts in dealing with the

above-mentioned challenges: establishing a national investment fund for start-up businesses, and creating networks for aspiring entrepreneurs to facilitate their penetration to the marketplace.

One contribution of the present study is the fact that the samples included successful entrepreneurs as well as aspiring entrepreneurs and failed entrepreneurs as several entrepreneurship studies are biased in as much as they over-select successful participants (McGrath, 1999). As for the limitations of the current study, two major categories of entrepreneurs and two of non-entrepreneurs were broadly opposed. Further, the sampling technique was not random due to the lack of data and information and access to respondents. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study makes theoretical and practical contributions.

In terms of implications of the current research, entrepreneurial activities constitute a vital source of technological innovation (Schumpeter, 1968) and economic growth (Birley, 1987). Therefore, understanding differences between entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs in Morocco is of considerable theoretical and practical value, especially that there is no research that looked into this issue in the Moroccan context. Regarding theoretical implications, the current study is intended to contribute to theory through the identification of factors that facilitate or inhibit entrepreneurship in Morocco.

Concerning practical implications, the research findings will assist in identifying reasons why Moroccan young graduates, by large, show weak entrepreneurial spirit and would rather be job seekers than potential job creators. Public authorities will be able to use these insights in their efforts to nurture and foster an entrepreneurial culture in Morocco, particularly that entrepreneurship is considered as one of the main axes of development in the country and a priority for the Moroccan government as reflected by incentives put in place by public authorities in order to encourage start-up businesses (Binkkour, 2012).

Future research should investigate in detail factors that influenced the incidence of entrepreneurship of the four categories (entrepreneurs by opportunity and entrepreneurs by necessity; non-entrepreneurs who thought of becoming entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs who attempted to set up their venture but failed in doing so). Future research ought also to seek for explanations on whether the institutional environment influences the incidence of entrepreneurship.

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