

Do Personal Values Drive or Constrain Entrepreneurship? Schwartz's Value Domains and Entrepreneurial Attitudes among University Students in Algeria

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Received: 04/07/2026

Accepted: 08/07/2026

Abstract:

This article examines how basic human values shape entrepreneurial attitudes among university students in Algeria, a context in which cultural expectations of stability and secure employment often compete with national aspirations for innovation and economic diversification. Anchored in Schwartz's theory of basic human values and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study surveyed 300 students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret using the Schwartz Value Survey and an adapted Entrepreneurial Attitude Index. Correlational analyses show that the Conservation domain (security, conformity, tradition) is negatively associated with entrepreneurial attitudes ($r = -0.35$), whereas Openness to Change ($r = 0.42$) and Self-Enhancement ($r = 0.39$) operate as facilitators. Self-Transcendence values were unrelated to conventional entrepreneurial attitudes but correlated positively with social entrepreneurial attitudes ($r = 0.28$), suggesting that community-oriented values may find expression through socially driven ventures rather than commercial ones. The results indicate that value priorities function simultaneously as levers and brakes on students' entrepreneurial dispositions. The article concludes with implications for higher education institutions and policymakers seeking to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture that is compatible with the value structure of Algerian society.

Keywords: Personal values, Entrepreneurial attitudes, Schwartz's value theory, Social entrepreneurship, University students, Algeria.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is widely regarded as an engine of job creation and economic diversification, and this role is especially salient in Algeria, where a young population and a resource-dependent economy make the emergence of new ventures a policy priority. University students constitute the demographic most likely to feed the country's nascent startup ecosystem: they are educated, exposed to global trends, and increasingly targeted by public support programs. Yet whether students actually develop favorable attitudes toward entrepreneurship, understood here as dispositions toward risk-taking, innovation, and opportunity recognition, depends to a large degree on socio-cultural factors, and in particular on the value priorities they hold.

Prior work on the Algerian context documents a series of cultural constraints on venturing. Entrepreneurs tend to treat their businesses as personal property, a mindset that discourages risk-taking and; fear of failure and weak trust in formal institutions limit expansion (El Amine, 2024); and traditional gender norms, financial exclusion, and bureaucratic burdens weigh disproportionately on women (Cherif, 2025). Students, for their part, often experience tension between family expectations of stable salaried employment and the appeal of entrepreneurial careers (Norhene et al., 2024; Pittaway et al., 2018). What remains largely unexamined, however, is the individual-level mechanism through which such cultural forces operate, namely the basic values that students internalize and that orient their choices.

This study addresses that gap by applying Schwartz's (2006) theory of basic human values to entrepreneurial attitudes among Algerian students. Schwartz identifies ten universal values organized into four higher-order domains: Openness to Change (self-direction, stimulation, hedonism), Conservation (security, conformity, tradition), Self-Enhancement (achievement, power), and Self-Transcendence (benevolence, universalism). Because these domains encode motivational compatibilities and conflicts, they offer a parsimonious way of predicting which students will embrace, and which will resist, entrepreneurial pathways (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015). The central research question is therefore: how do the four value domains relate to entrepreneurial attitudes among Algerian university students?

Four hypotheses guide the analysis. H1: Conservation values correlate negatively with entrepreneurial attitudes. H2: Openness to Change values correlate positively with entrepreneurial attitudes. H3: Self-Enhancement values correlate positively with entrepreneurial attitudes. H4: Self-Transcendence values show little or no association with conventional entrepreneurial attitudes but a positive association with social entrepreneurial attitudes.

2. Theoretical Background

Schwartz's model arranges the ten basic values in a circular structure in which adjacent values share motivational goals while opposing values conflict: Openness to Change stands against Conservation, and Self-

Enhancement against Self-Transcendence (Schwartz, 2006, 2012). Values guide attitudes and behavior by prioritizing certain goals over others, which makes the framework directly relevant to entrepreneurship, an activity that demands autonomy, novelty-seeking, and tolerance of uncertainty. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), values operate upstream of attitudes, which in turn shape intentions and behavior; value priorities can thus be read as distal antecedents of entrepreneurial intention.

The empirical literature broadly supports this reading. Morales et al. (2019) integrated Schwartz's values into an entrepreneurship framework and found that self-direction predicts entrepreneurial behavior most strongly in cultures that reward personal achievement, while Liñán and Fayolle (2015) concluded from their systematic review that conservation-oriented values tend to inhibit entrepreneurial intentions. At the national level, Calza et al. (2020) showed through a behavioral reasoning approach that conservation-oriented cultural values reduce the propensity for business creation, a pattern consistent with Hofstede's (2001) observation that uncertainty avoidance and collectivism, both prevalent in Arab societies, dampen entrepreneurial activity (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014).

Algerian evidence points in the same direction. describes firm growth as embedded in a socio-cultural environment that privileges caution, and Ghat (2013) shows how conformity and security expectations compound gender disparities in venturing. Among students specifically, Norhene et al. (2024) identify family expectations and traditional mindsets as key obstacles, Ben Omar and Ben Zaoui (2021) report a significant effect of Islamic values and attitudes on entrepreneurial intention within a planned-behavior framework, and Bekai and Sba (2020) find a negative correlation between perceived cultural obstacles and entrepreneurial orientation among management students. What these studies have not yet done is to map students' attitudes onto Schwartz's full value structure; the present study takes that step, and extends the question to social entrepreneurship, where self-transcendent values are theorized to matter most (Akar & Doğan, 2018).

3. Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

The study adopted a quantitative correlational design. Data were collected in 2025 over a three-month period from 300 students at Ibn Khaldoun University of Tiaret. A stratified random sampling procedure was used, with strata defined by academic discipline (business, engineering, humanities) and gender; the sample size satisfies a power analysis for detecting moderate effects ($f^2 = 0.15$) at $\alpha = .05$ with power of .80. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms and distributed through student groups; informed consent was embedded in the form and ethical approval was obtained from the university.

3.2 Instruments

Values were measured with the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS), a 57-item instrument covering the ten basic values grouped into the four higher-order domains, rated on a 9-point scale from -1 (opposed to my values) to 7 (of supreme importance); the SVS shows high reliability across cultures ($\alpha=.85-.92$; Schwartz, 2006). Entrepreneurial attitudes were assessed with a 20-item Entrepreneurial Attitude Index adapted from Liñán and Chen (2009), capturing risk-taking propensity, innovation orientation, and opportunity recognition on a 7-point Likert scale ($\alpha = .89$), with items distinguishing conventional (TEA) from social (SEA) entrepreneurial attitudes. Demographic data (Gender, socioeconomic indicators, academic field) were also collected.

3.3 Analysis

Data were analyzed with SPSS 26. After verifying assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity, and checking multicollinearity (all VIF < 2.0), Pearson correlations were computed between each value sub-dimension, each higher-order domain, and entrepreneurial attitudes.

4. Results

Table 1 summarizes the correlations. All three Conservation sub-dimensions were negatively related to conventional entrepreneurial attitudes, with security showing the strongest inverse association ($r = -0.38$, $p < .01$) and the domain as a whole correlating at $r = -0.35$ ($p < .05$), supporting H1. The Openness to Change domain correlated positively with entrepreneurial attitudes ($r = 0.42$, $p < .01$), driven chiefly by self-direction ($r = 0.45$), which supports H2. Self-Enhancement likewise showed a positive domain-level association ($r = 0.39$, $p < .01$), led by achievement ($r = 0.41$), supporting H3.

Self-Transcendence values were not significantly related to conventional entrepreneurial attitudes (domain $r = 0.12$, $p = .14$), but both benevolence ($r = 0.26$, $p < .05$) and universalism ($r = 0.29$, $p < .05$) correlated positively with social entrepreneurial attitudes, yielding a significant domain-level association with SEA ($r = 0.28$, $p < .05$). H4 is therefore supported: community-oriented values appear irrelevant to commercial venturing yet conducive to socially oriented venturing.

Table 1.

Correlations between value domains and entrepreneurial attitudes (N = 300)

Value domain	Sub-dimension	r (EA)	p
Conservation	Security	-0.38	< .01
	Conformity	-0.33	< .05

	Tradition	-0.30	< .05
	Domain overall	-0.35	< .05
Openness to Change	Self-direction	0.45	< .01
	Stimulation	0.40	< .01
	Hedonism	0.32	< .05
	Domain overall	0.42	< .01
Self-Enhancement	Achievement	0.41	< .01
	Power	0.36	< .05
	Domain overall	0.39	< .01
Self-Transcendence	Benevolence	0.10	.18
	Universalism	0.13	.12
	Domain overall (TEA)	0.12	.14
	Domain overall (SEA)	0.28	< .05

Note. EA = entrepreneurial attitudes ; TEA = conventional entrepreneurial attitudes ; SEA = social entrepreneurial attitudes ; r = Pearson coefficient.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conservation values as cultural brakes

The negative association between Conservation values and entrepreneurial attitudes indicates that students who prioritize safety, social approval, and respect for custom are the least inclined toward venturing. This pattern mirrors Algeria's collectivist and risk-averse environment, in which stable employment carries strong social legitimacy, and it converges with regional evidence that tradition-oriented value systems restrain innovation (Sidani & Al Ariss, 2014; Calza et al., 2020) as well as with Algerian findings on socio-cultural constraints (Ghiat, 2013). In value-theoretical terms, the result illustrates the motivational conflict at the heart of Schwartz's circle: the same priorities that protect social cohesion suppress the uncertainty tolerance that entrepreneurship requires.

5.2 Openness to Change and Self-Enhancement as levers

Conversely, students who value autonomy, novelty, and personal success report markedly more favorable entrepreneurial attitudes. The prominence of self-direction ($r = 0.45$) and achievement ($r = 0.41$) replicates Morales et al. (2019) and Liñán and Fayolle (2015) and suggests that, in a higher education system often criticized as overly theoretical, cultivating independent thinking may be among the most effective levers for entrepreneurial development. The positive role of power and achievement also carries a contextual nuance:

where bureaucratic hierarchies limit career progression, entrepreneurship may be perceived as an alternative route to status and autonomy, consistent with Bekai and Sba (2020).

5.3 Self-Transcendence and the social entrepreneurship pathway

The most policy-relevant finding may be the differentiated role of Self-Transcendence. Benevolence and universalism neither help nor hinder conventional venturing, but they align positively with social entrepreneurial attitudes, echoing Akar and Doğan (2018). In a society with a strong communal ethos, social entrepreneurship thus appears as a culturally compatible entry point: rather than asking tradition-minded students to abandon their values, institutions can offer venture models in which those values are an asset.

5.4 Limitations

Three limitations qualify these conclusions. The design is cross-sectional and correlational, so causal claims about values producing attitudes cannot be made. The sample is drawn from a single university, which limits generalizability across Algeria's regionally diverse student population. Finally, all measures are self-reported, and the social entrepreneurship measure would benefit from fuller validation in the Algerian context. Longitudinal and multi-site replications are needed.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Basic human values act simultaneously as brakes and levers on entrepreneurial attitudes among Algerian university students: Conservation values inhibit them, Openness to Change and Self-Enhancement values foster them, and Self-Transcendence values channel entrepreneurial energy toward socially oriented ventures. The contribution of the study is to ground familiar socio-cultural explanations of weak entrepreneurship in an individual-level, theoretically structured value framework.

Several practical implications follow. Universities should embed value-sensitive content in entrepreneurship curricula, emphasizing problem-solving, autonomy, and locally relevant role models so that students high in openness and achievement find their dispositions validated. Experiential formats such as incubators, bootcamps, and mentorship can help students who score high on conservation values reframe risk as manageable opportunity rather than social transgression. Because self-transcendent values map onto social entrepreneurship, embedding social enterprise tracks in university incubators and linking students with community projects would extend the entrepreneurial pipeline to students whom conventional programs fail to reach. Finally, policy incentives that reward innovative and socially valuable projects would signal institutional support for the value profiles that drive venturing, while future research should test these relationships longitudinally and across regions of Algeria and the wider MENA area.

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