

EFFECTS OF STRATEGIC *TA'AWUN* ON SUSTAINABLE, ENTREPRENEURIAL AND URBANISED SMART SOCIETY IN MUSLIM WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effects of strategic ta'awun on sustainable, entrepreneurial and urbanised smart society in Muslim world. Ta'awun is a Divine commandment to humanity for mutual cooperation in optimising benefits of human civilisation. It is a default for communities of practice with unified objectives in making the world a better place. The mutual cooperation driven by unified understanding provides synergy for sustainable development, entrepreneurial eco-system for economic growth and urbanised in human population, which leads to smart society. The study interviewed five key decision makers and three policy makers represented different geographical locations (Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East Asia, North America, and Europe). The informants argued that degree of strategic ta'awun determines the level of sustainability for entrepreneurial smart city. The dependency to major International aid such as from IMF, WHO, UNHCR, and UNESCO has reduced strategic cooperation among the society in the Muslim world. The study suggests the future research to employ case study method for more contextual insights.

Keywords: *Ta'awun*, Entrepreneurial mindset, Urbanised smart society, Muslim World.

INTRODUCTION

In the competitive world, competition has created conflicts, tensions and disorder. All participants in the competition are racing on similar outcomes and performance from the same pool of resources and targets (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Leonidou et al, 2015; Slater, 1994). The presence of highly stiff competition led to unhealthy and imbalance (Filatotchev, Su & Bruton, 2017; Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Leonidou et al, 2015). This situation has impact on the society, economic activities and human civilisation.

Every participant in any sector in this world aims for greatest benefits for the greatest number of people. This approach resembles consequentialism within the capitalism. A competitive advantage for an organisation is meant for the target and the organisation (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Filatotchev, Su & Bruton, 2017). When everyone is offering competitive advantage for the society and human civilisation, the outcome should have total benefit for all (Narver, Slater and MacLachlan, 2004; Hunt & Morgan, 1995). The kind of superior value required includes quick response and quick fix. This is not the case when the environment is facing climate change, the society is having disorder, and the human civilisation is under serious threat.

In any civilised society, cooperation and togetherness are the main drivers for the betterment of human civilisation. *Ta'awun* is a divine commandment for human to work together to achieve peace, harmony and civilised society (Sarif, 2016; Richardson, 2014; Hunter, 2012; Redzuan, Rahman & Aidid, 2009; Rosly & Affandi Abu Bakar, 2003). When there is no taawun, it created struggle on many parties (Sarif, 2016; Redzuan et al, 2009).

This study argues that strategic *ta'awun* has enabling effects on sustainable, entrepreneurial and smart society. The organisation of the discussion is divided into several parts. The first part provides critical literature review on the strategic *ta'awun* and its effects. In the second part is the research design and methodology. Then, the next parts are on the findings, discussion and recommendation for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study critically reviews literature that are related to the phenomenon, concept, idea, constructs and variables. Strategic *ta'awun* drives the market to be sustainable for entrepreneurial situation and highly engaging smart society. In return, it makes the world and human civilisation is more dynamic.

Competition

Competition is part of free market economic orientation. Every player offers superior value to the market by counter offer the value proposed by other players in the market. Sonenshein, Nault and Obodaru (2017) argued that the stiff competition in the market has shaped the nature of competition, from head to head direct competition, to strategic cooperation. This situation is interesting to make the landscape of competition dynamic and responsive.

Cooperation and competition are useful to create and sustain competitive advantage. Prior to serious cooperation, Song, Woo and Rao (2007) contended that there was inter-organizational information sharing as collective respond to the dynamism of the market. Being lonely in the competitive market is at serious disadvantages given there are opportunities for collaboration.

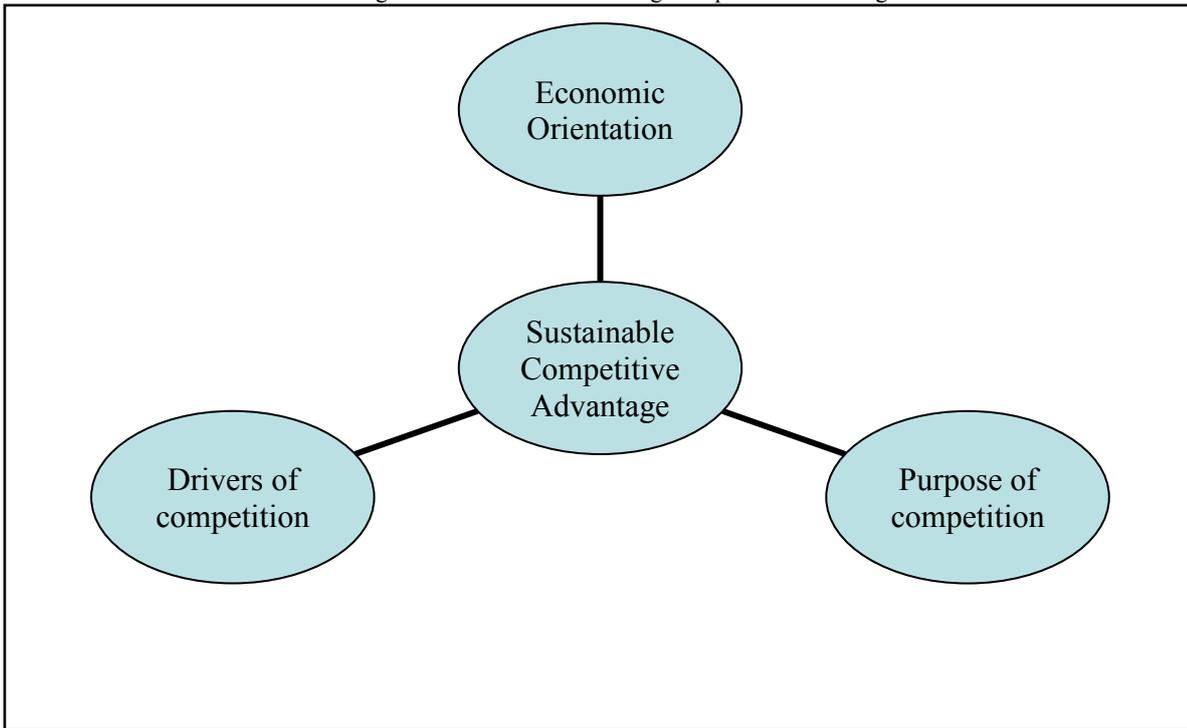
Competitive market is phenomenal for every participant regardless of differences in various aspects. In fact, according to Whelan (2017), the main concern in the competitive market is how to manage, coordinate and secure the dynamism of competition for

mutual benefit. In such situation, the free market competition has created sub-culture trend of cooperating and competing for sustainable competitive advantage.

Cooperation while competing is a sustainable way of driving the market economy with more social responsibility and accountability. Lazano (2015) argued that competitive nature of the market should not neglect the basic responsibility of people to work on their business with holistic, comprehensive and balanced view. Being charitable to the market and the stakeholders is part of the social responsibility for betterment of the society (Godfrey, 2005). Indeed, sustainability has been always perpetual interest of the market participants.

Based on the discussion, this study postulates that sustainability in gaining competitive advantage influenced by economic orientation, purpose of competition, nature of competition, and the drivers for competition. Figure 1 depicts factors in sustaining competitive advantage.

Figure 1: Factors for Sustaining Competitive Advantage

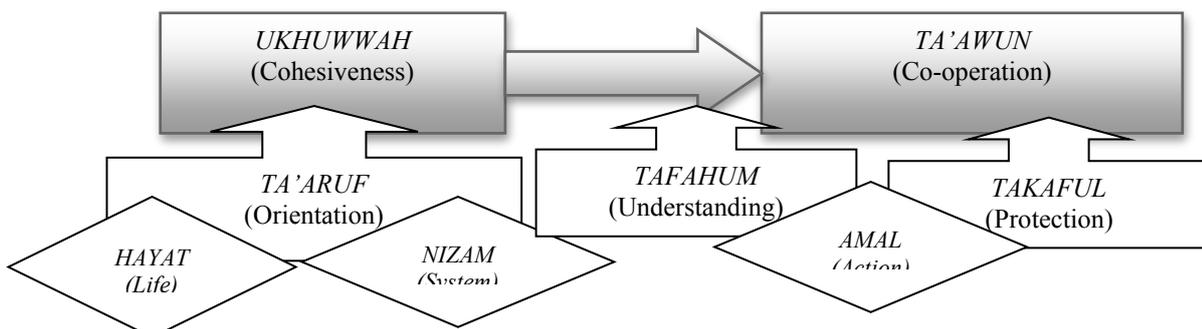


Strategic Ta’awun

Strategic *ta’awun* or high performing cooperation among firms enables them to drive value for the market. Rosly and Affandi Abu Bakar (2003) argued that in the context of for profit entities, *ta’awun* or mutual cooperation drives strong and sustainable relationship. Indeed, there are various factors contribute to strategic *ta’awun*, namely the strong bond among the participants (*ukhuwwah*), the concern of driving value in competitive manner (*fastabiquil khairat*) and the dynamic capability (Sarif, 2016; Sarif, 2015a; Sarif, 2015b; Slater & Nerver, 1994).

Cohesiveness in relationship (*ukhuwwah*) allows for sharing and collaborating perpetually. Prior to building the cohesiveness (*ukhuwwah*), there is a requirement to break the barriers or getting to know through an orientation (*ta’aruf*). Sarif (2016) contended that the process of orientation (*ta’aruf*) is guided with purpose in life (*al-ghayat al-hayat*) and system (*al-nizam al-hayat*). When both life (*al-hayat*) and system (*al-nizam*) integrated into action (*amal*), it reinforces into religious action (*’ibadah*). Building from the orientation (*ta’aruf*), the next phase is understanding (*tafahum*) about life (*hayat*), system (*nizam*) and action (*amal*). The understanding or *tafahum* demonstrates mutual cooperation (*ta’awun*) and protection (*takaful*).

Figure 21: Factors for Strategic Ta’awun



Entrepreneurial Setting

A competitive business environment offers dynamism that can be beneficial to stakeholders. Indeed, competition moderates business performance (Martin & Javalgi, 2016; Leonidou et al, 2015; Slater, 1994) into higher level of achievement. Thus, the market needs innovation for growth and survival (Filatotchev, Su & Bruton, 2017; Hurley & Hult, 1998).

An innovative market with dynamic orientation requires more integration of various functional areas. The market needs new model and orientation (Slater, Mohr & Sengupta, 1995). In a competition seeking superior value (Hunt & Morgan, 1995) and need quick response and fix (Narver, Slater and MacLachlan, 2004). In any situation, innovation and quick respond to the market is unavoidable.

Innovation has entrepreneurial element to trigger for improvement, modification and new products or services. Newness is necessary (Atuahene-Gima, 1996) for sustainability. In any degree of innovation, it requires entrepreneurial mind reorienting the market and product for better performance (Matsuno, Mentzer & Ozsomer, 2002). The reinforcement of entrepreneurial mindset contributes to the reorientation of the market and product with social responsibility, ethical and sustainability (Matsuno, Mentzer & Ozsomer, 2002). With the market dynamic capability, competitive advantage, market positioning enable for enhancement of capabilities and dynamism (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001).

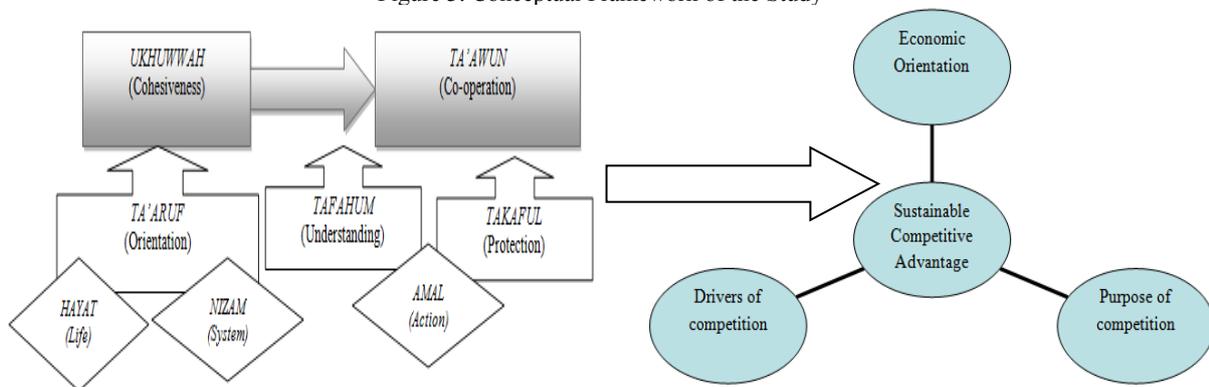
Urbanised Smart Society

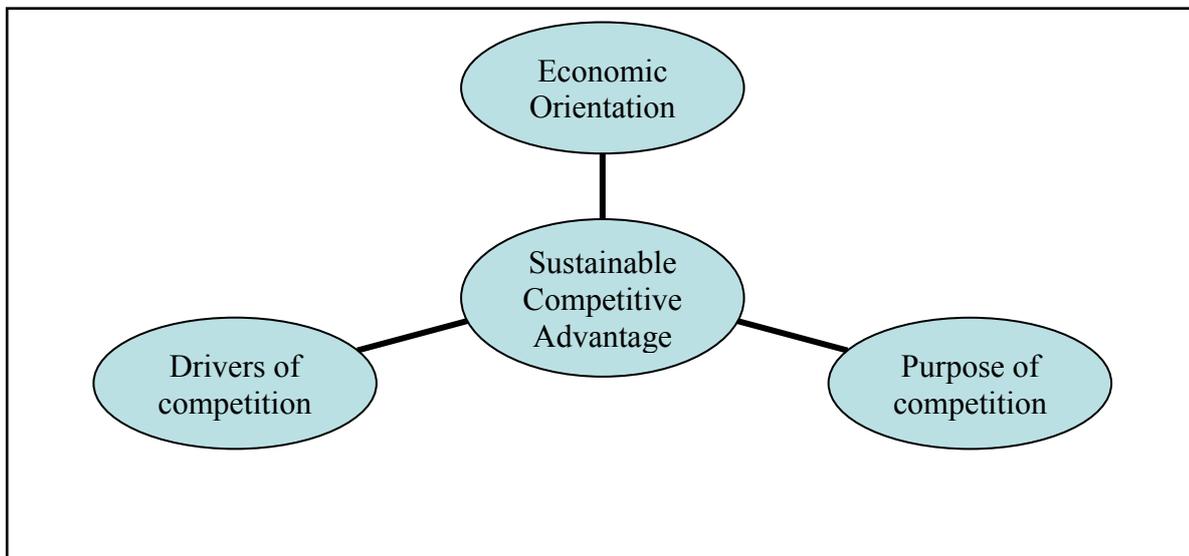
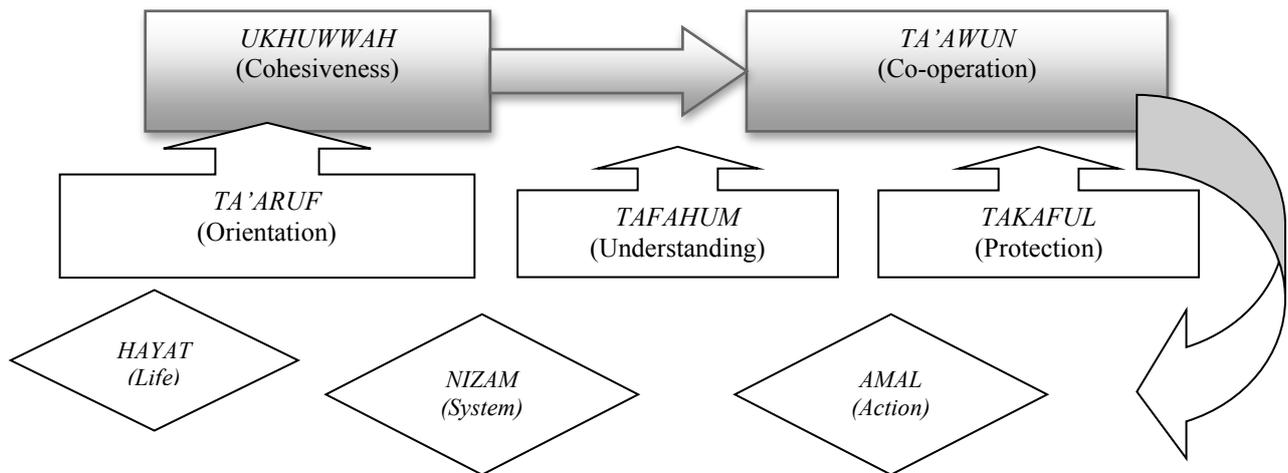
Urbanisation enables geographical relocation with purpose and systematic planning in providing eco-system for human civilisation. Urbanisation without values, system, purpose and mindset can be disadvantageous. As for urbanised smart society, it needs dedication and commitment (Rinaldi et al, 2018). Smart and sustainable cities are essential (Ahvenniemi et al, 2017).

Urbanised society allows for continuous civilizational development. It is comprehensive, balanced and holistic approach (Trindade et al, 2017). It is comprehensive to provide facilities, amenities, and devices for civilisation to grow, expand and prosperous. In the meantime, it has to strike a balance between physical (*ghayr ruhiyyah*) and spiritual (*ruhiyyah*) aspects of life. It is holistic when it leaves no one in the society to be part of the civilizational enhancement. When all the drivers for civilised urbanisation incorporate into society, it will lead to smart, urbanised and entrepreneurial society. A civilisation with entrepreneurial smart city (Huxtable-Thomas & Hannon, 2018; Longworth, 2018) continues to gain sustainability.

Since this study argues that there are effects of strategic *ta'awun* on sustainable, entrepreneurial and urbanised smart society, the conceptual framework of the study postulates the key elements, drivers, and constructs of strategic *ta'awun* into the sustainability forces and drivers. Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

Figure 3: Conceptual Framework of the Study



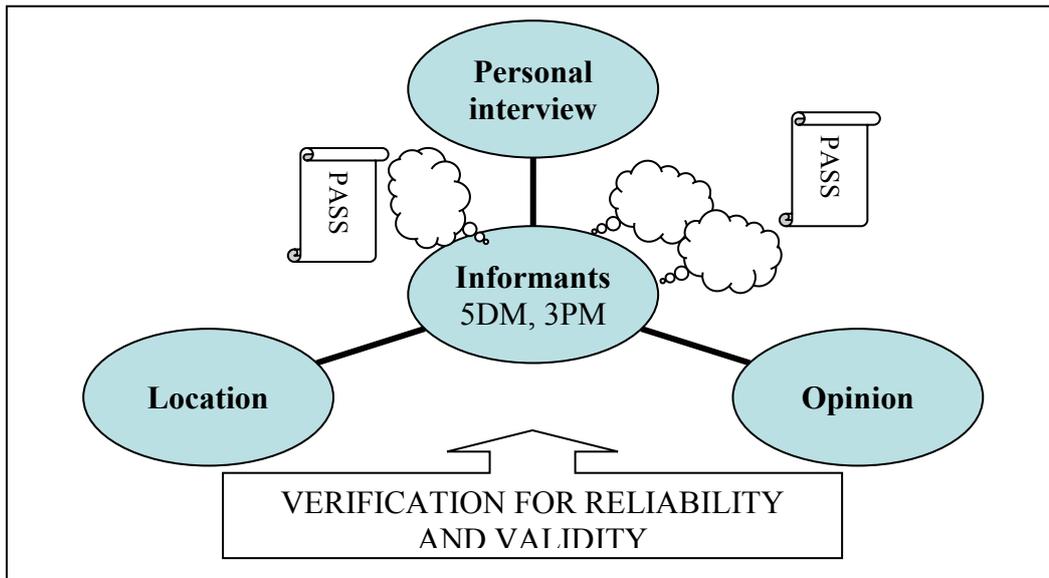


METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative research due to the objective of the study to explore the effects of strategic *ta'awun* into sustainability. The effects of strategic *ta'awun* require contextual understanding (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001; Symon, Cassell & Johnson, 2018). Nevertheless, qualitative researching has its approach to assure reliability, validity, trustworthiness, and transferability of the results (Whittemore, Chase & Mandle, 2001).

The study interviews five key decision makers and three policy makers represent different geographical locations (Southeast Asia, South Asia, Middle East Asia, North America, and Europe). Each interview consumed between 30 minutes to 50 minutes with note-taking. Figure 4 illustrates the process of personal interview.

Figure 4: Personal interview process



The study transcribed all interview notes into transcript for the verification of the informants. Then, the study approached independent researchers who familiar with the subject matter to validate the findings. This is done to ensure validity of interpretation, credibility of the feedback, the trustworthiness of the feedback and interpretation, and transferability of the study in the future.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study together with discussion. The feedback is from the views of informants obtained through personal interview. All the informants have direction involvement in various countries through various mechanisms arranged by international non-governmental bodies, particularly the dealing in Muslim world. The study analysed the feedback of informants with content analysis manually and verified by experts for validity, reliability, consistency and trustworthiness.

The code of the informants is based on the official role of the informants whether as decision makers (DM) or policy makers (PM). Each informant also carries code of regional representation.

Key players in the market of Muslim world are under control. According to DM1 (South East Asia), Muslim industrialists, capitalists, and entrepreneurs are venturing into low end activities. DM 1 said:

“Venturing needs a focus and planning. Every venture has a code, which reflects upon us into our personal detail. Another thing is to collaborate for mutual benefit. There are always energy and synergy.”

DM1’s approach of strategic cooperation is based on decision making control and governance (Diefenbach, Wald & Gleich, 2018). According to Stolper & Walter (2017), control and governance are still relevant and acceptable within the education mode and advisory. Indeed, trust consolidates control and discretion with more mutual understanding and undertaking.

In a different mode, DM2 (South Asia) contended that strategic cooperation sounds easy on paper but not on implementation. DM 2 uttered:

“Cooperation is not a joke. In case you want cooperation from others, you must observe the rule of thumb. On paper or in practice, cooperation carries high weightage, as for me.”

DM 2’s emphasised on “the rule of thumb” refers to the good practice of organisation in enhancing performance. Human’s discretion is soul and mind connected in the form of wisdom. According to Sen (2017), “the rule of thumb” resembles intelligence and logic in process of making decision. Likewise, trust, literacy and control elements are essential for strategic cooperation with purpose (Sen, 2017; Schaveling & Bryan, 2018).

As for informant DM3 (Middle East), strategic cooperation beyond economic and legal responsibilities requires more commitment and sacrifices. DM 3 said:

“Commitment is powerful force in any work. If you are really committed in your work, you would not have reservation and resistance to cooperate with others.”

Informant DM4 (North America) argued that the presence of advanced devices without solid guideline. In indifferent responses, informant DM5 (EU) stated the direction of the organisation is customised to individual. Indeed, guidelines, procedure and wisdom are decision making good practice (Diefenbach, Wald & Gleich, 2018) as mean to enhance transparency and harmony (Stolper & Walter, 2017).

Informants among Policy Makers (PM) in the community of Muslim world work together.

PM 1 argued that the Muslim World is stable under the new order of vehicle registration into smart valley. As for PM2 who represents his ASEAN trading block, PM1 (UN) contended that the representative possess dynamic capabilities. Likewise PM 2 (ASEAN) argued that more work to be conducted, solved and engaged so as to avoid being silo and isolated. However, PM3 has no significant at all as regional economic block among members steered the cooperation in economics, social, politics and culture. Bilateral relationships reinforce the commitment.

In a nutshell, the informants emphasised that in any cooperation, there is a need to study many factors until it reaches mutual benefit.

CONCLUSION

The informants argued that degree of strategic *ta'awun* determines the level of sustainability for entrepreneurial smart city. The degree of strategic *ta'awun* is at 'surface' instead of deep level. Mutual trust and accountability remains essential driver for *ta'awun*. In sustainability it requires advisory assistance with trust basis The dependency to major International aid such as from IMF, WHO, UNHCR, and UNESCO has reduced strategic cooperation among the society in the Muslim world. The study suggests the future research to employ case study method for more contextual insights.

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