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The Central Role of Entrepreneurial Identity in Shaping Opportunity Evaluation and Opportunity Development

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial opportunities drive both venture creation and business performance, yet research has mostly studied opportunity recognition and exploitation while placing less concentration on the ways that assess and advance business opportunities. Moreover, although entrepreneurial identity has been identified as a key psychological driver of entrepreneurial behavior, little is known about how its distinct dimensions shape opportunity-related outcomes, particularly within resource-constrained and emerging economy contexts. While entrepreneurial identity is inherently motivational, it does not in itself explain how entrepreneurs regulate emotion-laden judgments during opportunity evaluation and development. Entrepreneurial identity provides motivational direction, yet opportunity evaluation and development unfold in emotionally charged contexts characterised by uncertainty, risk, and ambiguity. Nevertheless, existing research has broadly conceptualized emotional intelligence as an immediate predictor of its antecedents, with less considering its theoretically significant role as a moderator of the way in which motivations grounded in identity are transformed into evaluative judgments and developmental actions. With the aim of addressing the identified gaps, this thesis explores the impact of entrepreneurial identity salience and centrality on opportunity evaluation and development, and the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on these relationships.

Drawing on role identity theory and the entrepreneurial identity literature, this research conceptualises entrepreneurial identity as a multidimensional construct and advances a process-oriented view of opportunity evaluation and development. The objective of this thesis is to shed light on how different aspects of entrepreneurial identity shape opportunity evaluation and development, as well as emotional intelligence as a moderating factor that shapes the expression of identity-driven motivation in challenging emotional contexts of entrepreneurship. A survey method is used to investigate 344 founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, where Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with confirmatory factor analysis is employed to verify the proposed models. For moderation effects, Z-standardized interaction terms in the SEM approach are used to ensure robustness and comparability of models.

The results indicate that entrepreneurial identity salience and entrepreneurial identity centrality have different and differential effects on opportunity evaluation and opportunity development. Entrepreneurial identity salience is found to positively affect opportunity evaluation

and opportunity development, and emotional intelligence plays a moderating role in these relationships in subtle ways. Emotional intelligence reduces the effect of identity salience on opportunity evaluation and increases its effect on opportunity development, implying that the effect of identity salience on opportunity development becomes less impulsive and more emotionally driven. Entrepreneurial identity centrality exhibits a strong positive relationship with opportunity evaluation, which is significantly reinforced by emotional intelligence. In contrast, emotional intelligence does not moderate the relationship between entrepreneurial identity centrality and opportunity development, suggesting that highly central identities may rely more on intrinsic commitment than on emotional regulation to sustain development activities.

This thesis makes several important contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the research on entrepreneurial identity by disentangling the concepts of salience and centrality and making an explicit connection to opportunity evaluation and development, rather than just opportunity recognition. Empirically, it provides evidence from an underexplored emerging economy context, highlighting the contingent role of emotional intelligence in identity–opportunity processes. Practically, the findings provide guidance for entrepreneurs, educators, and policymakers interested in promoting more reflective opportunity evaluations and continuous opportunity development to create programs that improve their decision-making skills through a better understanding of challenges in their institutional environment.

Keywords: entrepreneurial identity, opportunity evaluation, opportunity development, emotional intelligence, structural equation modelling

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List of Abbreviations

EI	Entrepreneurial identity
EIS	Entrepreneurial identity salience
EIC	Entrepreneurial identity centrality
OE	Opportunity evaluation
OD	Opportunity development
EmI	Emotional intelligence
AMOS	Analysis of moment structure
SPSS	Statistical package for the social sciences
CFA	Confirmatory factor analysis
EFA	Exploratory factor analysis
CFI	Comparative fit index
GFI	Goodness-of-fit index
IFI	Incremental fit index
NFI	Normed fit index
PNFI	Parsimony normed fit index
RMSEA	Root mean square error of approximation
SEM	Structural equation modeling
RII	Relative important index
CMV	Common method variance
CMIN	Chi-Square Minimum Discrepancy
DF	Degrees of Freedom
β (beta)	Standardized regression coefficient
KMO	Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy
AVE	Average variance extracted

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is receiving increasing academic attention as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and social transformation, particularly in resource-scarce and institutionally unstable environments (Dencker et al., 2021; Pulka et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the literature indicates that variations in entrepreneurial outcomes cannot only be explained by structural or situational factors (Pulka et al., 2021). For example, people in similar settings or environments can achieve remarkably dissimilar outcomes (Poblete et al., 2025). Rather, the underlying explanation for such variations can reside in the subjective characteristics of entrepreneurs, such as how they define or conceive their identity (Arend, 2023). In this context, entrepreneurial identity (EI) provides a pivotal analytical framework linking who an entrepreneur is, with how they think, act, develop, and evaluate opportunities (Poblete et al., 2025; Stets & Burke, 2025). As such, EI is viewed as a psychological and organizational foundation for entrepreneurial thinking, which influences entrepreneurial judgment, information interpretation, decision-making, and the conversion of ideas into feasible opportunities (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2014). Thus, it is necessary to adopt a theoretical and practical approach in understanding the role of EI in the fundamental processes of entrepreneurship, especially in the evaluation and development of opportunities, to explain the differences in entrepreneurial behavior and performance (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Wagenschwanz, 2021).

Developing the concept of EI will contribute to shaping an understanding of entrepreneurship and deepen knowledge of how entrepreneurs identify and capitalize on opportunities (Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). This is evidenced in Jordan's models of resource constraints, which view identity as a psychological anchor and guide for entrepreneurs operating in underdeveloped business environments and with limited market support (Alakaleek et al., 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024). By functioning in business environments that have low support, are very competitive, or uncertain, entrepreneurs may develop strength and confidence with "who I am" through their identity, such that they are able to stay committed and strive for a certain goal without necessarily getting any push from outside (Lin et al., 2023). Therefore, EI serves as a process that promotes resilience by enabling entrepreneurs to self-regulate and self-manage their work toward their respective goals (Pati et al., 2021; Rostamian et al., 2025). The Identity-Informed framework of Role Identity Theory explains how the intrapersonal meaning of a given business role shapes perceptions and behaviors towards various environments and the reactions of people around entrepreneurs (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Anglin et al., 2022). Researchers have found that EI has been effective in helping entrepreneurs make more positive choices, thereby affecting all the favorable conclusions drawn from their projects (Williams et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2022). As such, entrepreneurs who have developed a strong identity are more perceptive to direction change offered by their identity and are better able to sense environmental changes and to mobilize and allocate resources within stable, effective, readily available frameworks (Rostamian et al., 2025).

EI promotes relatively intangible skills that are supported by emotions, such as coping with emotional turmoil in projects, managing anxiety to stay motivated, and learning from failures (Yitshaki & Kropp, 2019). Entrepreneurs can build identity through exclusion or institutional barriers (Masika, 2017), for example, through creativity, a sense of purpose, and social contributions (Horst & Brouwers, 2022). These categories build on the core foundation that EI is beyond cognition, wherein EI is the foundation for developing a multitude of strategies, ranging from leadership (Hoang et al., 2023) and corporate social responsibility (Del Gesso, 2020) to self-presentation (Shaheer et al., 2024). This affects how entrepreneurs manage changes in their lives, such as venturing and shifting careers, which reflects the fixed and dynamic nature of entrepreneurs' thinking (Pauley, 2025).

Entrepreneurial identity is underpinned by two distinct and related factors: entrepreneurial identity salience (EIS), which refers to how present the entrepreneurial role is in the moment and how it affects thinking and/or action; and entrepreneurial identity centrality (EIC), which is how this role is incorporated into one's self-concept (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Wagenschwanz, 2021). These two factors unite self-definition with the ability to adapt to different contexts, thereby significantly contributing to understanding identity and its movements. EIS and EIC are often associated with consistent action, decision-making, and legitimacy (Cardon et al., 2020; Mathias & Williams, 2017), which is why they are essential for action motivated by opportunities. However, there is a central theoretical contradiction around how strong identity characteristics can coexist with identity work that is either fluid or static, as is often the case in entrepreneurship, and how the entrepreneur can transform their self-concept into tangible outcomes motivated by opportunities (Mei & Symaco, 2022).

This distinction also reflects different temporal properties of EI. Drawing on Role Identity Theory, EIS can be understood as the situational activation of the entrepreneurial role: the likelihood that this identity becomes cognitively prominent and guides judgement or behavior in a particular context (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Accordingly, EIS is relatively dynamic and context-sensitive, as the entrepreneurial role may become more or less salient depending on situational cues and competing role identities. In contrast, EIC reflects the more enduring structural importance of the entrepreneurial role within an individual's self-concept, indicating how deeply being an entrepreneur is integrated into who the individual understands themselves to be (Murnieks et al., 2020; Wagenschwanz, 2021). EIC is therefore relatively more stable across situations, although it may still evolve over longer periods as identities and life circumstances change. Thus, salience and centrality should not be treated as interchangeable: salience captures the situational prominence of the entrepreneurial role, whereas centrality captures its more enduring importance within the self-concept.

EIS shows a stronger association with the cognitive and evaluative aspects of opportunity processes, whereas EIC shows a stronger association with development-oriented activities. In the study of entrepreneurship, two main theories have been established. The first approach is called the "property perspective." Here, identity is perceived as a stable combination of traits, values, and commitments to lasting role-positions (Hayter et al., 2022; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). The second approach to identity perception is referred to as the "process perspective." Identity is conceived of as a variable construct and depends on a context in which a person finds himself (James et al., 2022). Although the two viewpoints have been essential for the understanding of the ways in which identities are developed and embodied, their coexistence has been claimed to result in conceptual fragmentation and limited theoretical integration (Gupta & Etzkowitz, 2021).

These aspects of identity are also reflected in the work of researchers studying entrepreneurship who have located opportunities along stages of existence that include exploration, recognition, evaluation, development, and exploitation stages (Evers & Andersson, 2021; Khanin et al., 2022). Each of these stages relies on its own mechanisms of cognition and behavior that have been shown to accurately sequence stages, which are more predictive of project success than other stages, such as evaluation stages being distinct from exploration stages and development stages being distinct from exploitation stages (Cockburn et al., 2022; Dimov, 2020). Nevertheless, these differences have not always been taken into consideration in previous research, with exploration being confused with evaluation or development with exploitation (Ten-Cate & Schumacher, 2022). Indeed, the blurring of these concepts has hindered the development of the concepts on a theoretical level. In the evolution of new ideas, sometimes a dynamic change occurs in which new ideas are initially considered inappropriate or exotic, but they may eventually be accepted in the environment as new or innovative (Cantner et al., 2021). These insights encouraged a more specific focus on the less-researched opportunities stages to better understand why some entrepreneurs seize opportunities while others ignore them.

Current studies focusing on identity and opportunity processes have been consistent with the literature (Farmer et al., 2011; Seibert et al., 2021; Roelandt et al., 2023), although these studies have typically considered EI in a general context due to their focus on nascent entrepreneurs. Still, this approach overlooks the different ways in which situational activation (which links to EIS) and enduring integration within the self-concept (which links to EIC) operate through different psychological mechanisms (Gur & Mathias, 2021). This emphasis currently has limited scholarly focus and understanding on how different identity configurations translate into concrete opportunity-related judgments and behaviors. Distinguishing between these entrepreneurial characteristics may explain the very important point regarding how identity shapes entrepreneurial thinking and how entrepreneurs interpret information, regulate emotions, and decide whether and how to pursue an opportunity (Kulshrestha et al., 2024). While some researchers have examined these two identity functions (EIS and EIC) with other concepts such as opportunity recognition or exploitation, they have given less attention to other opportunity stages like evaluation or development (Junker et al., 2021; Bataille & Vough, 2022; Iurkov & Benito, 2020). Therefore, the importance of opportunities lies not only in exploring or initially identifying them, but also in accurately assessing their viability and attractiveness, as well as developing ideas into viable projects or initiatives. In this context, it is important to integrate EIS functions and the associated realities of EIC identity perception by deepening understanding of how entrepreneurs act within opportunity processes, particularly in resource-limited settings such as Jordan.

Jordan provides a theoretically relevant context for examining these relationships because these entrepreneurs operate within an environment characterized by resource constraints and limitations in entrepreneurial support. Such conditions provide a rich context to examine and understand the psychological mechanisms through which these founders evaluate and develop opportunities - when external resources and institutional support are likely to be limited (Alakaleek et al., 2024; Mohammed et al., 2024). In this context, EI provides an important 'internal setting' through which founders interpret opportunities, sustain commitment, and guide entrepreneurial action. Examining these processes in Jordan, therefore, sets out to extend understanding on EI beyond the contexts in which much of the existing literature has been developed, by providing empirical evidence from an underrepresented non-Western setting (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Murnieks et al., 2020). It should be noted that Jordan is not treated as representative of all resource-constrained environments. Rather, findings from this context may provide theoretically relevant insights for other environments, where entrepreneurs similarly face limited resources, institutional constraints, and uncertainty. This enables the study to consider which identity-based opportunity mechanisms may extend beyond Jordan, while recognizing that these findings may remain context-dependent.

To address these gaps in the literature, this thesis focuses on two overlapping phases of opportunity: opportunity evaluation (OE), the process by which entrepreneurs evaluate the viability and desirability of an idea, and opportunity development (OD), the process by which they refine, reshape, and transform that idea into a viable business model (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Shepherd et al., 2021; Wagner et al., 2021). Both have received considerably less attention than opportunity recognition or exploitation from other scholars (Maran et al., 2021; Donbesuur et al., 2023). This thesis, therefore, seeks to better understand the role that an entrepreneur's personality plays in the process of opportunity outcome. Thus, the hypothesis that EI influences opportunity through identity-based interpretive frameworks is consistent with a symbolic-interpretive perspective on decision-making (Burke & Stets, 2022). Consequently, the present study is looking into the entrepreneurs' personalities at the stage of new business opportunities' assessment and development. The objective is to gain deeper insight into the entrepreneurs' self-perception and the influence on their actions and, eventually, their success. The research tries to delve into a vital notion in the work of Farmer et al. (2011), which conceptualizes EI as a dynamic self-meaning structure that shapes how individuals interpret entrepreneurial role expectations and align their behavior with opportunity pursuit. Their work emphasizes that identity not only influences motivational orientation but also guides strategic cognition and action in uncertain environments. Building on this foundational perspective, the present research delves into a vital notion in Farmer et al.'s (2011) framework by examining how EI dimensions shape OE and development processes. It adds to the discourse of Roelandt et al. (2023) and Seibert et al. (2021) by recognizing EIS and

EIC as prerequisites for OE and OD, rather than merely indicating behavioral intention or task commitment.

Although entrepreneurship research has traditionally focused on opportunity recognition and opportunity exploitation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Short et al., 2010), increasing attention has been directed toward the intermediate processes of OE and OD (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). The thesis focuses on these stages because they involve substantial cognitive interpretation, judgment, commitment, and behavioral engagement (Wood & Williams, 2014; Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). These processes are particularly relevant to entrepreneurial identity (EI) because entrepreneurs must determine whether opportunities align with their self-concepts, goals, and role expectations before committing resources and effort (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2014; Murnieks et al., 2020).

Furthermore, opportunity recognition and exploitation have received considerably greater empirical attention within entrepreneurship research (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Short et al., 2010). Comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding how EI influences OE and OD. Examining these processes therefore addresses an important gap in the literature while providing closer theoretical alignment with Role Identity Theory, which explains how the importance and activation of role identities can shape cognition and behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022).

Previous EI research has focused primarily on outcomes such as entrepreneurial intentions, passion, persistence, innovation, venture creation, and performance (Farmer et al., 2011; Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014; Powell & Baker, 2014). At the same time, opportunity research has concentrated heavily on opportunity recognition and exploitation (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Short et al., 2010). Comparatively few studies have examined how EI influences OE and OD, particularly among established founder entrepreneurs in non-Western contexts. This thesis addresses this gap by integrating EI and opportunity-process research through the lens of Role Identity Theory.

Founder entrepreneurs continuously evaluate whether opportunities are worth pursuing and determine how those opportunities should be developed (Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). These decisions involve uncertainty, risk, resource constraints, and personal commitment

(McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Wood & Williams, 2014). Because identity influences how entrepreneurs interpret situations and allocate effort (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2014; Stryker & Burke, 2000), OE and OD provide particularly appropriate contexts for examining EI among founders.

Within the field of entrepreneurship there is no universally accepted definition of who constitutes an entrepreneur. The literature has approached entrepreneurship from different perspectives, including venture creation, opportunity identification and exploitation, business ownership and management, and entrepreneurial activity within existing organizations (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Davidsson, 2015). Consequently, the term entrepreneur may encompass individuals who establish new ventures, self-employed owner-managers, individuals who acquire or inherit existing businesses, and corporate entrepreneurs who undertake entrepreneurial activities within established organizations. These different forms of entrepreneurship involve different relationships between the individual, the venture, and the entrepreneurial role, making it important to establish clear boundaries around who is considered an entrepreneur in the present study.

This thesis specifically focuses on founder entrepreneurs, defined as individuals who have personally established their ventures and continue to hold ownership and active strategic or managerial responsibility for those ventures (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022). This definition distinguishes founders from individuals who become business owners through purchase or inheritance, corporate entrepreneurs operating within organizations they did not establish, and nascent entrepreneurs who are still attempting to create a venture. The distinction is particularly relevant because the present study examines OE and OD as processes undertaken by individuals who have direct responsibility for transforming entrepreneurial ideas into established ventures.

The focus on founder entrepreneurs is also theoretically consistent with the study's emphasis on EI. Founders occupy a distinctive position because their entrepreneurial role is directly connected to the creation and ongoing development of the venture, making the relationship between self-definition and entrepreneurial action particularly relevant (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2020). They are directly involved in evaluating opportunities, committing resources, making strategic decisions, and developing opportunities over time (Dimov, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2021). Focusing on founders therefore provides a theoretically coherent population for examining how EIS and EIC influence OE and OD, as founders are directly involved in venture creation and in the development of an entrepreneurial role identity through their engagement with the venture (Farmer et al., 2011; Powell & Baker, 2014; Stappers & Andries, 2022). It also establishes clear boundaries for the study and avoids conflating founders with entrepreneurial populations whose identity formation and opportunity involvement may differ (Farmer et al., 2011; Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020). This distinction is also important when interpreting prior entrepreneurship research, as studies vary in how explicitly they define their entrepreneurial samples, and founder status is not always reported. Accordingly, where prior studies clearly identify founders, this distinction is acknowledged in the literature review; where founder status is not specified, the findings are interpreted as relating to the broader entrepreneurial population rather than being assumed to represent founders specifically.

EIS and EIC were selected because they capture two theoretically distinct role-based properties through which EI can be connected to cognition and behavior. Drawing on Role Identity Theory, EIS and EIC were selected not as substitutable dimensions of a higher-order EI construct, but rather as distinct properties that capture complementary aspects of entrepreneurial role identity: its situational activation and its enduring self-importance, respectively. This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study because OE involves judgments about the attractiveness and feasibility of potential opportunities, whereas OD requires more sustained engagement in refining and advancing an opportunity (Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). Examining EIS and EIC separately therefore provides a theoretically appropriate basis for investigating whether different properties of entrepreneurial identity are associated differently with these two stages of the opportunity process.

Role Identity Theory distinguishes between identity centrality and identity salience as related but conceptually distinct properties of identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). Centrality concerns the subjective importance of an identity to the individual's self-concept, whereas salience concerns the likelihood that an identity will be activated and guide behavior across or within relevant situations (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In the entrepreneurial context, centrality therefore addresses the question, “How important is entrepreneurship to who I am?”, whereas salience addresses, “How likely is my entrepreneurial identity to guide my behavior in this situation?” (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Murnieks et al., 2020).

Although EIC and EIS are expected to be positively related, this relationship does not imply conceptual equivalence. Identities that are more central to the self-concept may also be more likely to become salient, but identity activation remains responsive to situational cues and role-relevant contexts (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). Thus, treating EIC and EIS as separate constructs enables this thesis to examine whether identity importance and identity activation are differently associated with OE and OD, despite their expected positive relationship.

It is important to note that EI can provide an enduring sense of direction and purpose through its more stable structural elements, particularly EIC, while its situational expression may vary through EIS (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). Stability and situational variability are not contradictory characteristics of EI; rather, they represent different levels of identity functioning. An individual may consistently regard entrepreneurship as an important part of who they are while the degree to which that identity influences immediate decisions varies across situations. Therefore, EI does not operate in isolation from the emotional demands inherent in entrepreneurial work. Thus, an entrepreneur may consistently regard entrepreneurship as an important part of who they are while the degree to which that identity guides immediate judgement and behavior vary across situations. Stability and variability are therefore not contradictory characteristics of EI; rather, they operate at different levels of identity functioning.

Although EIS and EIC are conceptualized as related dimensions of EI, this thesis does not model EI as a higher-order latent construct that is either reflectively or formatively measured by these two dimensions. Rather, EIS and EIC are treated as theoretically distinct but related constructs, because they capture different properties of EI (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Murnieks et al., 2020). Each construct is, therefore, operationalized separately and measured reflectively through its respective indicators. This specification preserves the theoretical difference between salience and centrality and enables their potentially different relationships with OE and OD to be examined directly.

Interestingly, emotional intelligence (EmI) (the ability to perceive, understand, and effectively manage emotions) (Goleman, 2013; Fteiha & Awwad, 2020) receives little attention in the field of EI and practical models based on opportunity. Indeed, entrepreneurship is essentially an experience laden with emotions (indecision, risk of failure, and pursuit of social validation) (Sahoo et al., 2025). For example, entrepreneurs with high levels of EmI might be better able to manage the effects resulting from identity threat, attribute feedback well, and maintain engagement with opportunities under stress. This is due to EmI influencing the role that identity plays in perception and behavior, transforming the link between internal self-concepts and the activation of external opportunities. EmI offers a complementary explanatory lens by capturing individual differences in emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and the effective use of emotions in judgment and action (Mayer et al., 2024). Although evidence is growing for the role of emotion in entrepreneurship (Chien-Chi et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022), further research is needed to investigate how emotional motivation translates identity into opportunity-related processes.

EmI is particularly important in entrepreneurship since entrepreneurial activities frequently involve uncertainty, risk, emotional pressure, and interactions with multiple stakeholders. Entrepreneurs are therefore required not only to make cognitive judgments but also to recognize, understand, and regulate their emotions while responding effectively to the emotions of others (Goleman, 2013). These emotional capabilities can influence how entrepreneurs respond to challenging situations, maintain motivation, manage relationships, and make decisions under uncertainty. This is especially relevant to opportunity processes, where entrepreneurs must assess uncertain opportunities and subsequently commit effort and resources to their development (McMullen & Shepherd, 2006; Shepherd et al., 2021). In the context of EI, EmI is also important because identity-related judgments and actions may be accompanied by strong emotional attachment and commitment to the entrepreneurial role (Cardon et al., 2009; Murnieks et al., 2014). Accordingly, EmI provides an important emotional and self-regulatory capability that complements EI by helping entrepreneurs manage the emotional demands associated with evaluating and developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

Identity formation is rarely a totally cognitive process; rather, it unfolds in a context of anticipation and the risk of failure, within emotional turmoil, as underlined by Konnock (2023). Therefore, the introduction of EmI as a selection criterion is intended to provide additional theoretical insight into when and under what emotional conditions identity leads to opportunity-seeking activities. This approach offers a new perspective by demonstrating that identity, rather than experience or competence, may be sufficient to mobilize evaluative and developmental activities. The aim of this thesis is to further develop the theory by designing and testing an integrative model that suggests identity and emotions are two parallel forces that affect an entrepreneur's perseverance, adaptation, and effectiveness (Priyaa et al., 2025; Brownell et al., 2025). Finally, by focusing on Jordanian founder entrepreneurs, this thesis addresses the underrepresentation of non-Western and resource-constrained contexts in EI research. Jordan is therefore not treated merely as the geographical setting of the study, but as a theoretically relevant context in which resource and institutional constraints may increase the importance of internal psychological resources in opportunity-related processes. The findings can consequently provide contextually grounded insights into how EI operates under such conditions and establish a basis for examining whether similar mechanisms occur in other resource-constrained environments. Therefore, a question arises that the thesis intends to answer, offering a valuable track for entrepreneurs to follow:

- How do the dimensions of EI influence OE and OD among founder entrepreneurs, and how can EmI guide entrepreneurial behavior shape these relationships to explain entrepreneurial performance?

As such, it is relevant to recognize that EI is a fundamental psychological perspective through which founders interpret opportunities and manage their businesses. Therefore, this thesis aims to:

- Clarify the concept of EI by distinguishing between EIS and EIC and enhance understanding of their roles in OE and OD in resource-limited contexts, such as Jordan, while providing a basis for considering the theoretical relevance of these relationships in other similarly constrained environments.
- Provide valuable insights for entrepreneurs, business incubators, and policymakers by demonstrating how EmI manages the relationship between EIS, EIC, and opportunity processes, thereby improving a project's adaptability and outcomes.

Addressing these concerns not only connects identity theory to opportunity perception but also deepens our understanding of the psychological and economic foundations of entrepreneurship in emerging economies.

To enhance understanding of the role of EI in entrepreneurial opportunity processes, this thesis presents a theoretical model of EI. The theoretical development begins with a conceptual distinction between EIS and EIC, grounded in role identity theory, and identifying their distinct temporal, cognitive, and motivational characteristics (Anglin et al., 2020; Thoits, 2020). The thesis then models the relationships between the dimensions of identity, OE, and OD, considering EmI as a critical factor in these opportunity processes.

In addition, this thesis has attempted to clarify the relationship between identity and emotion. EmI, using Goleman's (2001) five-dimensional framework, is incorporated as a factor that moderates the intensity of the identity-opportunity relationship. EmI extends to the capability that the entrepreneur should carry out to recognize, decode, and process emotions, not only the ego-related ones but also the affective ones, in a way that it can affect the cognitive assessment and the behavioral adjustment (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Tee et al., 2023). Hence, it is believed that EmI can moderate the impacts of EIS and EIC on opportunity-related processes through emotional regulation, identity threats mitigation, and motivation maintenance in uncertain situations. On the other hand, low levels of EmI could weaken these effects, thereby enhancing anxiety, uncertainty, or negative affect. In addition, the integration above enables the thesis to address the need for understanding the cognitive and affective foundations of entrepreneurships in a more comprehensive way (Bolinger et al., 2025; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2023).

Established founders possess real entrepreneurial experience and are therefore better positioned to evaluate how identity influences opportunity-related decisions and actions. Some studies define entrepreneurs broadly as individuals who own and manage businesses. Others focus on self-employed individuals who generate income independently. Additional research examines corporate entrepreneurs, often referred to as intrapreneurs, who engage in entrepreneurial activities within existing organizations. Family business research may also classify successors who inherit and manage ventures, as entrepreneurs (Davidsson, 2015; Powell & Baker, 2014).

The present study focuses specifically on founder entrepreneurs. Founder entrepreneurs are individuals who establish and actively lead ventures that they personally initiated (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2020). This definition indicates that founders are directly involved in identifying opportunities, evaluating their feasibility, mobilizing resources, and developing ventures from inception (Shepherd et al., 2021; Scheaf et al., 2020). As a result, EI is likely to be particularly salient and consequential among founders compared with individuals who assume entrepreneurial roles after venture creation (Farmer et al., 2011; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

The focus on founders is also theoretically consistent with Role Identity Theory. The entrepreneurial role is most actively enacted during the creation and development of a venture, making founders especially suitable for investigating how EIS and EIC influence OE and OD (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Accordingly, founder entrepreneurs represent the most appropriate population for examining the identity-based mechanisms central to this thesis. Expanding the population to include all entrepreneurial actors would introduce substantial heterogeneity. The opportunity processes experienced by founders differ significantly from those experienced by successors, franchise operators, or corporate entrepreneurs (Farmer et al., 2011; Powell & Baker, 2014). By focusing on founders, this thesis was able to maintain conceptual consistency between EI, OE, and OD. This increased the internal validity of the study and aligned the sample with the theoretical foundations of Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Accordingly, this thesis has focused on founder entrepreneurs as they are directly responsible for creating, evaluating, and developing opportunities. These activities lie at the heart of the theoretical model in this study. Founder entrepreneurs actively enact the entrepreneurial role, making EI particularly relevant. Other entrepreneurial groups, such as successors, owner-managers, or intrapreneurs, may perform entrepreneurial functions; however, they often operate within structures that were created by others. Therefore, founders provide the clearest context for examining how EI influences OE and OD.

Consistent with the definition and theoretical rationale established earlier, the empirical study focuses exclusively on founder entrepreneurs, as they constitute the principal actors responsible for the initial evaluation and development of entrepreneurial opportunities (Dimov, 2021; Davidsson, 2015). Founders occupy a distinctive position in which personal identity is deeply embedded in venture creation, such that EI becomes both highly salient and central in shaping judgment, commitment, and opportunity-related decision-making (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2021). The empirical study to test the conceptual models involves the development of a questionnaire, data collection, and the validation of measurement scales. The data collected were further analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) via AMOS 29 software, enabling simultaneous testing of direct and indirect relationships between dimensions of EI, EmI, and opportunity processes. SEM was considered appropriate for this study because it enables the simultaneous examination of multiple latent constructs measured through multiple indicators and the estimation of complex relationships among these constructs (Kline, 2023; Hair et al., 2025). A further advantage of SEM is its explicit consideration of measurement error by separating the latent constructs from the error associated with their observed indicators, thereby providing more reliable estimates of the relationships among constructs (Kline, 2023). Importantly, SEM provides an integrated framework for assessing the adequacy of the measurement model, including construct reliability and validity, before evaluating the hypothesized structural relationships. This approach was particularly suitable for the present study because the proposed models involve multiple relationships among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI, including moderation effects. Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), ensuring the accuracy of the methodology and the suitability of the model.

In addition, this thesis aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the use of two forms of EI and their separate associated characteristics. This, in turn, is intended to enhance understanding of why new ideas and behaviors evolve differently among founder entrepreneurs, based on the distinct influence of each identity. Moreover, offering knowledge on the assessment and development of opportunity by entrepreneurs using EIS and EIC, which is an area to expand upon previous research knowledge (Mohammadi et al., 2025; Murnieks et al., 2020). This distinction can be used to reinterpret previous findings, allowing researchers to re-examine conflicting research results in the field of identity, considering the differences between these two concepts in their temporal properties and motivational significance, particularly the situational activation associated with EIS and the relatively enduring structural importance associated with EIC. Consequently, it reframes identity not only as a catalyst for seizing opportunities, but also as a filter and a continuous guide throughout the opportunity lifecycle. More specifically, the incorporation of entrepreneurship into the self-concept refers to the extent to which being an entrepreneur forms an important component of how individuals define and understand who they are, rather than merely describing an occupation or activity they perform (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Murnieks et al., 2020). This meaning establishes an important conceptual boundary around EIC. Role internalization refers to the process through which the meanings and expectations associated with the entrepreneurial role are adopted into the self, whereas EIC concerns the relative importance that the entrepreneurial role subsequently occupies within the broader self-concept. Similarly, identification reflects recognizing or defining oneself in relation to the entrepreneurial role, while centrality concerns how important that identity is to one's overall self-definition. Commitment, in turn, reflects attachment to and persistence in the entrepreneurial role and may be reinforced by high identity centrality, but it is not equivalent to centrality itself. Thus, EIC specifically captures the structural importance of being an entrepreneur within the self-concept, rather than role adoption, identification, or behavioral commitment.

Furthermore, this thesis develops a psychological framework for entrepreneurial theories by incorporating EmI as a boundary condition (Goleman et al., 2019; Pathak & Goltz, 2021). These meanings show how entrepreneurs define themselves and their skills in managing emotions, as well as in dealing with difficult emotional situations, which have an impact on the process of shaping entrepreneurial opportunities. As such, this thesis is intended to extend the identity-based entrepreneurial literature by explaining how and when the process of identity takes place in different social and cultural settings (Refai et al., 2025; Qawasmeh et al., 2024). In addition, this study provides the research landscape with a detailed understanding of how entrepreneurs' self-perceptions shape their ethics, plans, and ultimately, their business achievements.

By identifying the ways in which EmI can strengthen or weaken the role of identity in opportunity processes, the thesis emphasizes the importance of enabling entrepreneurs not only to build their cognitive skills but also their emotional skills. These meanings can be achieved through training aimed at promoting self-awareness, structuring, and empathy, thereby enabling the targeted group of entrepreneurs to make the most out of opportunities despite uncertainties. Policymakers and ecosystem builders can apply these findings to develop policies that support entrepreneurial communities.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background and literature review underpinning the study. It first examines identity and entrepreneurial identity (EI), including its definitions, theoretical foundations, antecedents, and dimensions, before focusing specifically on entrepreneurial identity salience (EIS) and entrepreneurial identity centrality (EIC). The chapter then develops the theoretical relationships between EIS and EIC and the two opportunity processes examined in this thesis: opportunity evaluation (OE) and opportunity development (OD). Finally, emotional intelligence (EmI) is introduced as a moderating factor in these relationships, leading to the development of the research hypotheses and conceptual models.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach adopted to test the proposed relationships. It defines the population of founder entrepreneurs and establishes Jordan as the resource-constrained context of the study, including its socio-economic, institutional, cultural, and entrepreneurial characteristics. The chapter then presents the research design and paradigm, sampling and data collection procedures, instrument development and pre-testing, ethical considerations, data analysis procedures, and measures adopted to ensure methodological rigour. It concludes by explaining the measurement and operationalization of the study constructs and the analytical procedures used to test the conceptual models.

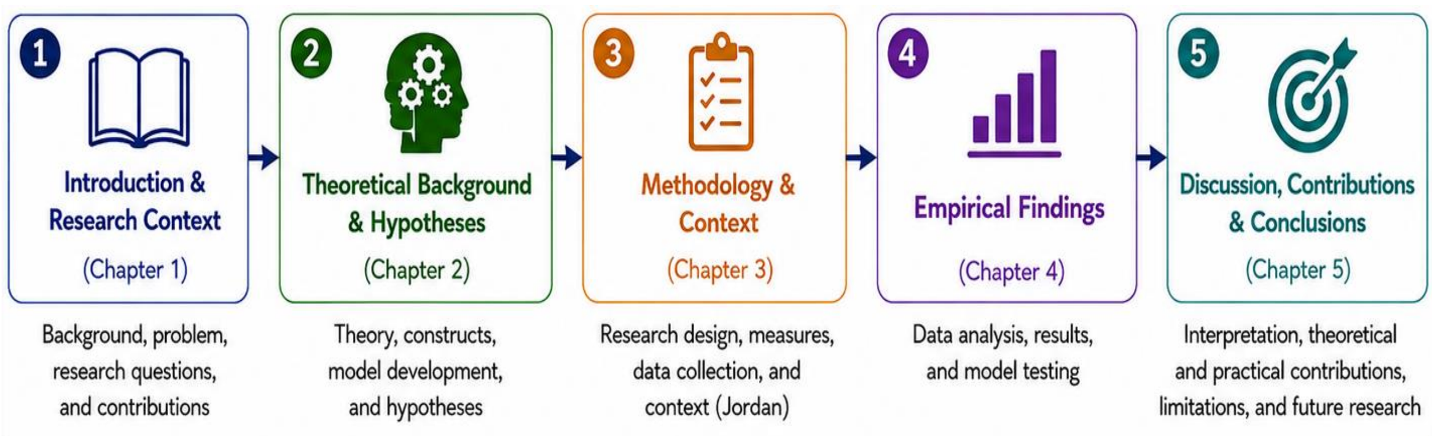
Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings. It first reports the measurement and structural results for Model 1, which examines the direct relationships between EIS and EIC and OE and development. It then presents Model 2, which examines the moderating role of EmI in these identity–opportunity relationships. The chapter reports the relevant reliability and validity assessments, model-fit statistics, correlations, structural relationships, and hypothesis-testing results.

Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the findings in relation to the theoretical arguments and prior literature developed in Chapter 2. It considers the theoretical implications of distinguishing between EIS and EIC and the contingent role of EmI in opportunity processes, while also examining the implications of the findings within the Jordanian entrepreneurial context. The chapter then develops the practical implications for entrepreneurs and relevant entrepreneurship-support stakeholders, acknowledges the limitations of the research, identifies directions for future research, and concludes the thesis by summarizing its principal contributions.

Together, these chapters develop from the theoretical foundations of EI and opportunity processes, through their empirical examination among founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, to the interpretation and implications of the findings. This structure provides an integrated account of how different dimensions of EI shape OE and development and how these relationships may vary according to EmI.

Figure 1.1 provides an overarching visual representation of the thesis. It integrates the progression of the five chapters with the conceptual logic guiding the empirical investigation. The thesis moves from establishing the research context and theoretical foundations to the empirical examination of how EIS and EIC relate to OE and OD, with EmI examined as a moderator of these relationships. These relationships are investigated among founder entrepreneurs within the resource-constrained Jordanian context.

Figure 1.1: *Overall structure of the thesis*



2. Theoretical Background

A careful review of prior studies has served to identify gaps and under-researched areas. As such, the literature review demonstrates an understanding of the field and reinforces the research objectives and theoretical foundation supporting the empirical studies in this thesis (Fernandez, 2019). This guideline has led to the emergence of key themes, including how to define EI (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021), how it influences behavior (Seibert et al., 2021), and its place within identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2024).

This chapter reviews the relevant identity theories and their formulation within the context of entrepreneurship studies. It begins with a general discussion of identity. Second, it offers an in-depth study of EI, including its definition, theoretical significance, conceptual foundations, antecedents, and key dimensions. Third, it pays particular attention to the concepts of EIS and EIC, as well as their importance in the broader EI literature. Fourth, it explores the complex and dual nature of their influence. Finally, the chapter concludes by formulating the thesis hypotheses.

2.1 Identity

Individual identity refers to the meanings individuals attach to themselves and to their positions and relationships within the social world. It encompasses an individual's self-concept, the meanings associated with particular roles, and the sense of belonging derived from membership in social groups and communities (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Identity therefore reflects both how individuals understand who they are and how this understanding is shaped and reinforced through their roles, social relationships, and interactions with others (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). From a developmental perspective, individual identity is defined as the internal sense that is formed through the dynamic interaction between individual agency and social structure, revealing both continuity and evolution over time (Tibbetts et al., 2021). The concept has been ideologically mixed up, where it has often led to some analytical ambiguity (Cheek & Cheek, 2020). This situation has arisen as the distinctions between the ideas of cohesion, categorization, and personal self-concept have become obscured. In clarifying these ambiguities, Morris and Webb (2022) made a distinction between personal identity, which is built on individual distinctive traits, and social identity, which is a result of belonging to a group. This view aligns with Stets and Burke (2014), who assert that identity is underpinned by the social role an individual performs. Even though these roles are situated in larger societal contexts, the performance is up to the individual who integrates their personal traits into the role they are playing. Therefore, identity gains greater importance, demonstrating its flexibility and its formation through social interactions (Paré, 2024; Tibbetts et al., 2021). It is reasonable to pay attention to self-esteem and group membership simultaneously, because a person's identity does not undergo great changes once it is established; rather, it is influenced by society but continues to be associated with the roles that people play (Ybema, 2020).

Although there is a general understanding of what identity means, the focus shifts; sometimes it's about an individual, sometimes a group. The objectives also vary: some focus on critique, while others concentrate on measuring things in real life. Some see roles as fixed, while others see them as fluid and changing over time (Paré, 2024; Tibbetts et al., 2021; Stets & Burke, 2014). As more research focuses on personal identity in business, there is a need to understand how entrepreneurs behave when challenges arise, such as during setbacks or chaos, and discover how they adapt. Over time, this subject has become its own research area centered on EI. It studies how entrepreneurs confront and address problems in rapidly changing environments and exploit high-stakes situations in line with their identity.

Identity has been widely applied across the social sciences to explain how individuals define themselves in relation to social roles, groups, and institutional contexts. Rather than functioning solely as an abstract description of the self, identity provides a framework through which individuals interpret expectations, assign meaning to their experiences, and orient their behavior within particular social settings (Stets & Burke, 2014; Morris & Webb, 2022). From a role-based perspective, individuals occupy multiple social positions and develop meanings associated with these roles, which may vary in their relative importance and activation across situations (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Ashforth & Johnson, 2014). Consequently, identity research provides a means of connecting the individual self-concept with the broader social structures within which behavior occurs.

This perspective has been increasingly applied within management and organizational research. Identity has been used to explain how individuals understand and enact professional and organizational roles and how the relative importance of different identities influences workplace behavior (Anglin et al., 2022). For example, career identity salience has been examined in relation to work and performance outcomes (Lobel & Clair, 1992), while leadership research has considered how individuals develop and enact identities associated with becoming and functioning as leaders (London & Sherman, 2021). Organizational research has also recognized that individuals may hold several identities simultaneously and that particular identities can become more or less salient depending on contextual demands (Ashforth & Johnson, 2014). These applications demonstrate the relevance of identity for understanding behavior in business settings because organizational actions are influenced not only by formal roles and external incentives but also by how individuals understand themselves in relation to those roles.

At the same time, identity and identity work in management research are not without conceptual challenges. A central issue concerns the tension between treating identity as relatively stable and treating it as continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interaction and changing circumstances (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Grimes, 2018). Identity work may therefore involve ongoing efforts to maintain, revise, or reconcile self-meanings when individuals encounter changing role expectations, feedback, or identity threats (Bataille & Vough, 2022). This has generated conceptual diversity because identity may be approached as an enduring property of the individual, a socially constructed process, or a combination of both. Such perspectives are valuable but can create ambiguity concerning what aspect of identity is being examined and how identity should be operationalized. Distinguishing between relatively enduring and situational aspects of identity is therefore important for achieving greater conceptual precision.

These developments in social science and management research provide an important foundation for examining identity in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship represents a particularly relevant context because founders simultaneously interpret, enact, and negotiate a role that is closely connected with their personal self-concept and business activities. Accordingly, the broader identity literature provides the conceptual bridge for understanding EI as a specific form of role-based identity and for examining how identification with the entrepreneurial role can subsequently influence entrepreneurial judgement and behavior.

To address the conceptual ambiguity surrounding identity, it is important to distinguish between the principal forms through which identity has been conceptualized in the literature. Although these forms are related in explaining how individuals define themselves, they operate at different levels of self-definition. Personal identity refers primarily to the individual characteristics and meanings that distinguish a person from others. Social identity concerns the part of the self that is derived from membership in, and identification with, social groups or categories. Role identity, in contrast, refers to the meanings individuals attach to the social roles they occupy and enact, such as being an entrepreneur. These distinctions are particularly important for the present study because its focus is not primarily on entrepreneurs' unique personal characteristics or their membership in an entrepreneurial social group, but on how the entrepreneurial role is incorporated into the self-concept and influences cognition and behavior. Table 2.1 provides a summary of the distinctions between these core identity theories.

Table 2.1: *Conceptual Distinctions Between Personal, Social, and Role Identity*

Form of identity	Primary basis of self-definition	Key characteristics	Relevance to the present study	Key theoretical references
Personal identity	Individual characteristics and self-meanings	Emphasizes characteristics and meanings that distinguish the individual from others and contribute to a sense of personal uniqueness and continuity.	Provides a broader understanding of individual self-definition but does not specifically explain the activation and importance of the entrepreneurial role.	Burke & Stets (2022)
Social identity	Membership in social groups or categories	Emphasizes collective identification, group membership, and defining oneself in relation to social categories and other groups.	Relevant to understanding entrepreneurs as members of an entrepreneurial group or community, but this is not the primary level of analysis in the present study.	Tajfel & Turner; Stryker & Burke (2000)
Role identity	Social roles occupied and enacted by the individual	Emphasizes role meanings, expectations, identity salience, identity centrality, and the behavioral consequences associated with particular roles.	Provides the primary theoretical foundation because the study examines the entrepreneurial role and how its salience and centrality influence OE and OD.	Stryker & Serpe (1994); Stryker & Burke (2000); Burke & Stets (2022)

Accordingly, this thesis adopts a role identity perspective as its primary conceptualization of EI. This choice establishes a clear boundary around the identity construct examined in the thesis. EI is therefore understood primarily in terms of the individual's identification with and enactment of the entrepreneurial role rather than merely as a collection of personal characteristics or membership in a broader entrepreneurial social category. This concept provides the theoretical basis for subsequently distinguishing EIS and EIC and examining their relationships with OE and OD. The following section defines EI and discusses its key aspects, including its importance, dimensions, and forms.

2.2 Entrepreneurial Identity (EI)

2.2.1 Conceptualizing Entrepreneurial Identity EI

EI is a substantial part of self; it encompasses the situations and perceptions associated with the roles and identities that shape an entrepreneur's character (Hayter et al., 2022; Żur, 2021). Therefore, EI reflects how entrepreneurs divide their duties based on the feedback they receive from people around them in specific situations (Teyi et al., 2023). Moreover, this links personal values, such as core values, with practical matters, such as choosing a path or managing a team. Consequently, EI shows a person's self-image in the context of the project and how this image associates with such choices as resource distribution, effort increase, or dealing with uncertainty (Arend, 2023; Ekinci et al., 2020). EI is a self-portrait that covers the whole life cycle of the entrepreneur and includes the beliefs, values, and motives that determine the behavioral patterns that direct the entrepreneur's activities (Hayter et al., 2022; Teyi et al., 2023). For example, it is a self-contained cognitive structure that integrates the symbolic meanings and normative expectations inherent in the role of entrepreneurship (Luhmann, 2020). Beyond individual perception, this concept highlights how entrepreneurs interpret their roles, create meaning, and interact within their positions in social and institutional contexts (Brieger et al., 2021).

Although there is considerable research work on EI, opinions on its foundations can vary. These opinions are influenced by the given theory and the researcher's background, resulting in different conceptualizations of its origin, parts, and functions. For instance, what role does EI play as a fundamental idea that describes the behavior, motivation, and strategies of entrepreneurs? (Amit et al., 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020). As such, EI is more akin to a process of absorbing the personal meanings associated with the traits most important for entrepreneurial performance. This means it is very much a context- and time-related phenomenon, yet still an individual one (Stevenson et al., 2024). According to Solbreux et al. (2024) and Turner et al. (2025), EI is the product of an interaction through storytelling and daily socializing. It goes through a gradual, complex process of evolution rather than remaining constant or straightforward, and this is true of personal experiences, relationships, and the changing environment. Some researchers interpret it in different ways: some see it as a trait, stable characteristics that affect and control the behavior of people at the launch moment of the enterprise, while others view it as a path with no end, where feelings, surroundings, and timing are the determinants of one's growth. Therefore, EI is a perpetual force that guides actions toward goals. These considerations highlight how EI shapes an entrepreneur's self-understanding as they navigate internal values and external norms.

To illustrate, Murnieks et al. (2014) characterize EI as the "individuals' meanings and behaviors that are specific to them during the whole entrepreneurial role" (p. 5). The idea behind this concept is that one can understand a role's expectations by interacting with others and considering personal finances. Similarly, Larsen (2022) describes EI as a set of ideas, beliefs, and feelings that individuals adopt as entrepreneurs, a self-generated but socially integrated cognitive construct. Nevertheless, Wagenschwanz (2021) criticizes the inconsistencies in these definitions from a theoretical perspective, especially regarding the scope that should be given to the role of agency and structuration in the development of EI. On the other hand, such definitions demonstrate that EI is a person's own (e.g., self-thoughts and feelings), communicated to others, and at the same time recognized by others (e.g., actions that solidify the role expectations).

Ever since the inception of EI, researchers have addressed the topic from three main perspectives: the psychological, constructivist narrative, and practice-based perspectives. To start with, the psychological perspective views EI as a determinant factor, influenced by feelings of acceptance and worthiness and by the mental habits that constantly operate and, in turn, direct entrepreneurs (Suvanto et al., 2020; Rossi et al., 2023). A second is a narrative perspective that investigates the sociological changes and movements in EI that unfold through dialogues, bonds, and choices as the founders, in this case, figure out their character (Cesaroni et al., 2021). A third perspective is practice-based, where the daily, ordinary actions that make up the business world, where engagement, cultural hurdles, and operational rules are examined, in determining and influencing who an entrepreneur is and what they do (Smith et al., 2023). In other words, all these areas consider EI to be a cognitive quality, a product of modern social narratives, and an outcome of people's daily activities. Hence, the multiplicity of its manifestations makes it challenging to grasp the complete picture of EI when only one point of view is employed.

Clarifying the terminology surrounding EI is especially important as related concepts are often used interchangeably despite referring to different levels of self-definition. Wagenschwanz (2021) distinguishes among the founder’s identity, founder identity, and EI, thereby providing greater conceptual precision regarding whose identity is being examined and which aspect of that identity is theoretically relevant. These distinctions are particularly important for the present thesis because the empirical population consists specifically of founder entrepreneurs, while the theoretical construct of interest is EI.

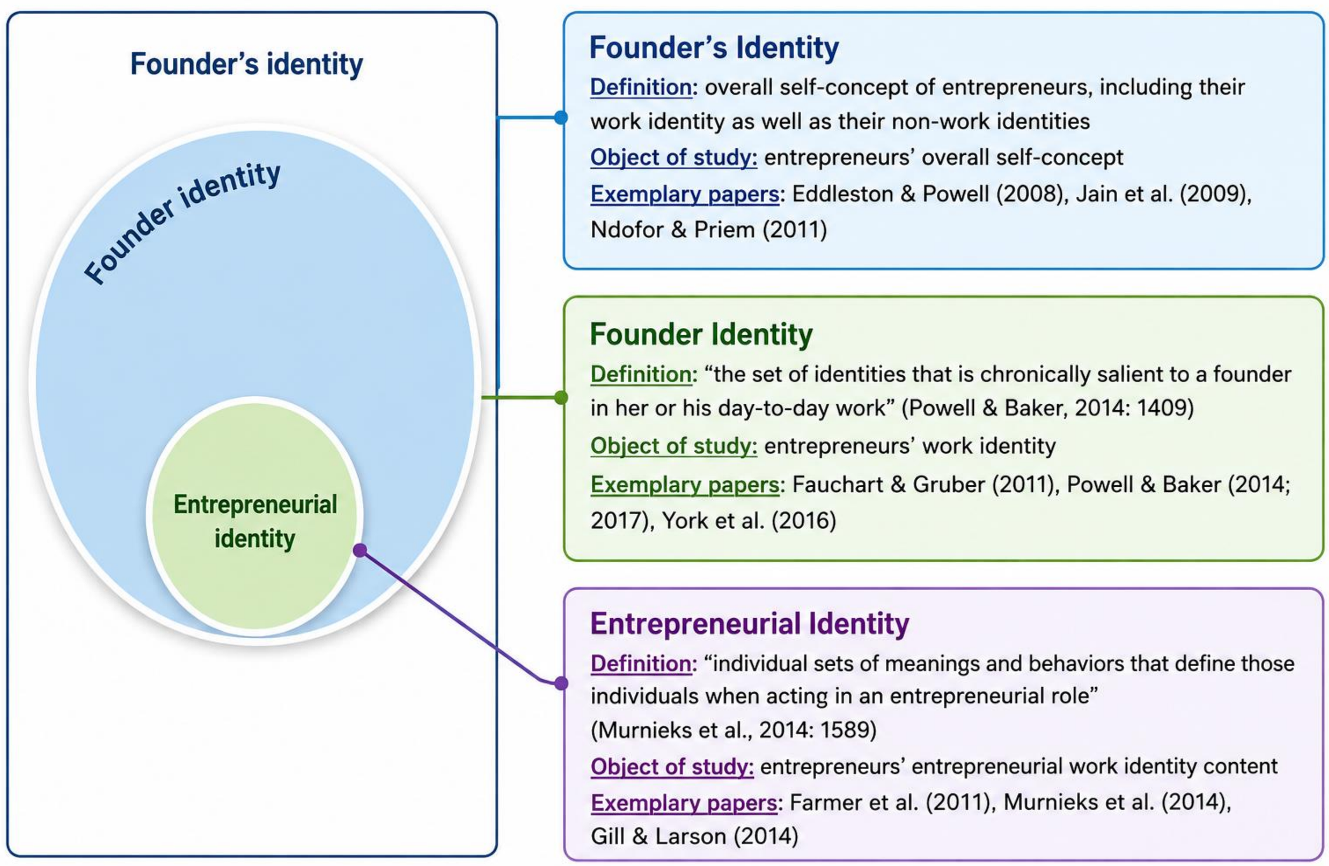
The founder’s identity refers broadly to the total configuration of identities held by an individual who happens to be a founder. It may therefore include entrepreneurial, family, professional, social, religious, or other identities that together constitute the founder’s broader self-concept. The possessive formulation, “the founder’s identity”, does not necessarily imply that the entrepreneurial role is dominant or even central; rather, it refers to the wider identity structure of a person who occupies a founder position. This distinction is consistent with the view that individuals simultaneously hold multiple identities that vary in their salience and importance across situations (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Ashforth & Johnson, 2014).

Founder identity, by contrast, refers more specifically to the meanings, expectations, and behavioral orientations associated with occupying and enacting the role of a venture founder. Founder identity therefore reflects a particular work and social role related to originating, shaping, and exercising responsibility for a venture. Research on founder identity has demonstrated that founders may enact different role orientations and respond differently to strategic challenges depending on how they understand themselves in relation to the venture (Powell & Baker, 2014; Baker & Powell, 2020). Founder identity is therefore narrower than the founder’s overall identity, but it remains specifically tied to the role of creating and leading a venture.

EI is conceptually broader than founder identity because it concerns self-meanings associated with being and acting in an entrepreneurial manner, including opportunity seeking, innovation, value creation, and the enactment of entrepreneurial roles. An individual may develop an EI in different settings, including venture creation, organizational entrepreneurship, academic entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, or other contexts in which entrepreneurial behavior becomes part of the self-concept (Hayter et al., 2022; Żur, 2021). Thus, not every individual with an EI must necessarily be a founder, and not every business owner or manager necessarily possesses a strongly salient or central EI.

By distinguishing between the founder's identity, founder identity, and EI, Wagenschwanz (2021) complements understanding of ways those identity categories feature at one-of-a-kind degree of abstraction and behavioral relevance (Fig. 2.1). This clarification of the underlying ideology is key for addressing inconsistencies, not just in studies themselves, but also with a view towards building theory with regards to identity and its influence on entrepreneurship, behaviors, and performances.

Figure 2.1: *Overview of terminology around the identity of entrepreneurs. Adapted from Wagenschwanz (2021)*



Building on the conceptual clarity provided by Wagenschwanz (2021), it is essential for the thesis to provide a distinction between the founder's identity, the founder identity, and EI. The concept of the founder's identity, to begin with, finds its foundation in the idea of the founder's personal self-concept, which encompasses work and non-work identities and, in this regard, carries the connotation of personal possession, which is reflective of the concept of personal authorship itself. Whereas founder identity is defined as both work identity and social role, entrepreneurs personify the expectations, norms, and behaviors associated with the founder role in entrepreneurial ecosystems. The entrepreneurial part of founder identity is an extended self-definition that emphasizes entrepreneurial behaviors, opportunity-seeking, and value creation, regardless of whether one is currently a founder. This difference in definition highlights the complexity of entrepreneurial self-identity, in which personal meaning is entwined with social roles and action unfolds within an entrepreneurial context. Thus, founder entrepreneurs incorporate a comprehensive understanding of the individual while acting out the entrepreneurial role and their work identity. To sum up, although researchers define EI differently, there is common ground on certain aspects. EI is often seen as a powerful motivator of entrepreneurial action; this idea is linked to social processes and changes over time and encompasses multiple components. For example, connecting EI to different personality traits and self-regulation was one of the research areas focusing on the individual (Murnieks et al., 2014; Larsen, 2022; Rossi et al., 2023; Wagenschwanz, 2021; Suvanto et al., 2020), while another area of research stressed the team's sharing of an identity and unity (Siivonen et al., 2020; Redhead & Bika, 2022; Jones et al., 2019). A third aspect focuses on systems in which organizations' roles are defined, along with the cultural influence on the expression of emotions (Cesaroni et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023). Each perspective has its own strengths, but they all lean toward either a personal or a societal interpretation. What is missing, and is becoming more pressing, is a more profound integration that links these components into a consistent handling of the issue, thus opening a more precise comprehension of EI in different entrepreneurial settings. Based on this, the next part will examine the upside of EI in both practical application and academic thought, showing that it is not only an analytical tool for startups but also a method for improving results that is both practical and effective.

For the purposes of this thesis, EI is defined as the set of self-meanings that individuals attach to the entrepreneurial role and through which they understand themselves as entrepreneurs, interpret role expectations, and orient their entrepreneurial judgments and actions (Murnieks et al., 2014; Farmer et al., 2011). This role-based definition is adopted because it is consistent with Role Identity Theory and with the thesis's focus on how the entrepreneurial role operates within the founder's self-concept. Accordingly, EI is not treated simply as a personality trait, social category, or occupational label, but as a role-based self-meaning structure that can influence how founders interpret and respond to entrepreneurial situations.

The definition of EI adopted in this thesis also provides the basis for integrating the theoretical perspectives reviewed in the following section. These perspectives are not treated as competing definitions of EI, but as explanations of different aspects of the same entrepreneurial self-meaning system. Role Identity Theory provides the primary explanatory framework because it specifies how the entrepreneurial role is positioned and activated within the self through salience and centrality (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Social identity perspectives complement this explanation by locating entrepreneurial self-definition within broader social groups and categories, while narrative and process perspectives explain how entrepreneurial self-meanings are constructed, negotiated, and may change through experience and interaction over time (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Gregori et al., 2021). Accordingly, the thesis integrates these perspectives hierarchically rather than treating them as parallel theoretical foundations: Role Identity Theory explains the specific EIS and EIC mechanisms tested empirically, whereas the other perspectives provide complementary social, developmental, and contextual explanations of how EI is formed and enacted. Having established what EI means and how it is defined in the present study, the next section considers why EI is theoretically and practically relevant to understanding entrepreneurial cognition and behavior.

2.2.2 Relevance of Entrepreneurial Identity to Opportunity Processes

EI influences the way firms behave strategically, especially regarding innovation and societal responsibility. Scholars have investigated the way that, when entrepreneurs regard innovation as part of their identity, they have a greater likelihood of embedding the idea within the overall strategic plans of their business entities (Çera et al., 2024). This is why EI provides a lens, enabling business entity owners to make sense of their broader responsibilities. It not only influences the way of being competitive but also ethical in direction.

Moreover, EI research allows for a crucial point of consideration to reflect on the experience of marginalized entrepreneurial groups, such as ethnic minorities and people in lower socioeconomic classes. These groups of people face the barriers of identity exclusion and symbolic boundary imposition in the typical entrepreneurial arena, with a focus on normalized identities (Van Merriënboer et al., 2025). In focusing on the role of EI, researchers can examine more broadly how systemic inequalities impact access to, recognition of, and legitimacy in entrepreneurial ventures.

EI is crucial in many areas, as it impacts social behavior. In the field of business and management, EI acts as an aid in shaping strategic decisions, fueling innovative ideas, and shaping leadership style, which in turn helps the entrepreneur perceive opportunities more effectively as well as overcome challenges (Liszka, 2024). In sociology, EI assists the entrepreneur in understanding the mechanisms of how individuals in general deal with social situations, as well as gain acceptance in different kinds of environments in organizations, especially in situations where business meets social variables like class, gender, and ethnicity (Schachter, 2022; Floris & Palmas, 2025). While in organizational behavior, EI explains the mechanism of founders' identity in shaping their acts in the competitive context of business, as in the technological and creative sectors (Koch et al., 2023).

Combining research from different fields demonstrates that EI is a relevant concept for analyzing how personal identity is integrated with social environments in entrepreneurial activities. In short, EI acts as a bridge connecting individual traits to company needs, thought patterns to systems, and mental states to actions within business organizations. Given this interdependence, it is important to understand these dynamics as a way of contributing towards a startup's or a new idea's success. Therefore, EI has an important part to play when it comes to assisting an entrepreneur in dealing with challenges along the way.

Philosophically, ideas about EI stem from different traditions and manifest in two main perspectives: viewing it as a feature or as something that unfolds over time (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). These perspectives are based on separate assumptions about reality and knowledge. They can be compared with identity theory (Stets & Serpe, 2013), which is linked with role-based identity thinking (Anglin et al., 2022), fitting with a definition for social identity (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019), to identity itself, which is a set of meaning-based roles that regulate behavior along a guideline in a stable way. According to this approach, identity is a property of a person that could be quantified and generally connected with outcomes, for example, with business success and project initiation (Howard et al., 2021; Newbery et al., 2018). The philosophical base here is essentialism, with the view that EI is a categorical and essential construct.

On the other hand, the process perspective aligns with social constructivism, which is informed by theories of narrative identity (Solbreux et al., 2024) and identity work (Grimes, 2018; Gkargkavouzi et al., 2019). This approach conceives EI as dynamic and incrementally socially constructed, which contrasts with a fixed or internal trait definition of EI. This is because identity cannot be seen as a fixed, internal characteristic but is constantly in the making through communication and action (Poblete et al., 2025). From an existentially informed viewpoint applied to the field of philosophical thoughts and those applying relational sociology in their studies, a significant point is related to recognizing that what is significant is not just identity but the way in which it is constructed or reconstructed socially (Grimes, 2018), focusing on aspects of time and speech in doing so and referencing feeling in its ongoing processes and events (Gkargkavouzi et al., 2019). As such, EI is enacted and experienced in encounters, where it is not a characteristic; rather, it is uncovered in specific contexts and situations, in particular ways.

The importance of EI in research and practice is rapidly increasing. Because it helps to explore the links between self-awareness, mental processes, and entrepreneurial initiation, it deepens our understanding of identity concepts and their place in startup studies and the broader field (Ekinci et al., 2020; Murnieks et al., 2020). Entrepreneurial identity influences company stability, decision-making, and success, especially in rapidly changing or resource-constrained environments. Given the need for greater adaptability, complexity, and interconnectedness to successfully establish new companies, it is essential to understand how entrepreneurs shape, engage with, and use their self-perception. Given this theoretical and practical relevance, a clear theoretical foundation is required to explain how EI is formed, structured, and translated into entrepreneurial cognition and behavior. As such, the next section reviews the principal theoretical perspectives on EI and establishes Role Identity Theory which is the primary theoretical lens adopted in this thesis.

2.2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Entrepreneurial Identity

EI has been examined through several theoretical perspectives that illuminate different aspects of its formation, meaning, and enactment. These perspectives include Role Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, Narrative Identity Theory, and broader identity/process perspectives (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Rather than treating these perspectives as competing or equally weighted foundations, the present thesis integrates them around Role Identity Theory as its primary theoretical lens.

Within role identity theory, people are thought to assimilate to and adopt roles that align with certain societal expectations. Entrepreneurs do “identity work”, which is the reconciliation of perceived identity and work role, to fulfill and balance the contradictory roles (i.e., manager and parent) and accommodate the external expectations that have a bearing on the well-being and outcome of the business (Shir & Ryff, 2022; Chen et al., 2021). This process is motivated by the individual social context and feedback to forge a particular social identity within entrepreneurship (Mei & Symaco, 2022). This work posits that, in rapidly evolving contexts where role demands are unclear and constantly redefined, the explanatory power of this framework is likely to be overly static; thus, the need for additional perspectives is warranted.

EI can also be viewed as a construct of society when taking a Social Identity Theory lens (Stets & Burke, 2000). This surrounds how people construct a good portion of their self-concept based on their membership in various social groups (Morris & Webb, 2022; Stets & Burke, 2025; Gaffney & Hogg, 2023). In relation to this theory, EI results from assimilating the norms, values, and behaviors of a particular community and aligning one's goals and activities with those values (Brownell et al., 2025). Such an enclosure around a community, apart from guiding how one accepts (or rejects) an entrepreneurial role/identity and how one perceives their legitimacy (or otherwise), may also guide strategic behaviors regarding select opportunities, ethics, and risks (Zamantili-Nayir & Shinnar, 2020). Therefore, EI is not only an embodiment of a specific cognitive structure, but also entails alignment of its execution with a broader social dynamic.

Researchers may also take a narrative identity theory lens (Ergün, 2020; Elam et al., 2024) in examining EI, where entrepreneurs, by their very nature, link and assess the opportunities available in the business world to their personal stories, morals, and vision. These narratives serve as frameworks to anchor how these entrepreneurs engage in sense-making to determine which opportunities are valuable, worth pursuing, and legitimate (Shantz et al., 2018; Ajay et al., 2024). This serves as a robust approach, as it emphasizes identity as performative and relational, in constant revision and interaction with the audience, in an effort to resolve issues. These are, but are not limited to, scarcity of resources, organizational logic, and structural elements of the entrepreneurial stories to be investigated.

Finally, identity theory more generally becomes an overall framework that can combine these varying perspectives, focusing on the role of EI in highlighting the significance of self, status, and structural behavior in society (Burke, 2023; Stets & Burke, 2024). In this way, identity theory helps explain the field of entrepreneurship by examining its impact on different identities through their links to structural social behavior. While the conceptual scope of identity theory remains valuable for research, its abstract nature and the empirical measurement methods employed in entrepreneurship studies have been criticized. Therefore, EI is broad in nature, necessitating an examination of its theoretical and practical mechanisms and its impact on entrepreneurship from different perspectives.

Among the theoretical perspectives discussed above, Role Identity Theory provides the primary theoretical foundation for this thesis. Role Identity Theory conceptualizes the self as comprising multiple role identities associated with the social positions individuals occupy, with each role carrying meanings and behavioral expectations that individuals internalize and enact (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022; Anglin et al., 2022). Individuals may therefore simultaneously identify with several roles, but these roles do not necessarily exert equal influence on cognition and behavior. Their influence depends partly on their position within the self and on the likelihood that a particular identity will be activated in a given situation (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Thoits, 2020). This makes Role Identity Theory particularly appropriate for entrepreneurship, where founders continually interpret and enact the entrepreneurial role while simultaneously occupying other personal, social, and professional roles.

This theoretical perspective is especially relevant to the present thesis because it provides a basis for distinguishing between EIS and EIC. Role Identity Theory allows EI to be understood as both context-responsive and relatively enduring without treating these characteristics as theoretically contradictory. This distinction is particularly important for opportunity processes. A founder's EI may become highly salient when evaluating an uncertain opportunity, directing attention and interpretation toward entrepreneurial cues, while a highly central EI may provide the sustained commitment required to continue developing an opportunity over time. Role Identity Theory therefore offers a more precise theoretical explanation of why EIS and EIC may influence different stages of entrepreneurial action.

Despite these advantages, EI research remains fragmented at the theoretical level. In this thesis, theoretical fragmentation refers to the use of different assumptions about what EI is and how it operates, without sufficient integration between them. Some studies adopt a property perspective and conceptualize identity as a relatively stable configuration of role meanings, values, and commitments, whereas others adopt a process perspective and emphasize identity as continuously negotiated and reconstructed through interaction and changing circumstances (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; James et al., 2022). Other approaches emphasize social categories, founder types, narratives, or identity work. These perspectives are not necessarily incompatible, but their use can produce different conceptualizations and operationalization of EI, making it difficult to compare findings and specify the mechanisms through which identity influences entrepreneurial behavior (Wagenschwanz, 2021; Gupta & Etzkowitz, 2021). The present thesis addresses part of this fragmentation by using Role Identity Theory to distinguish the situational activation of the entrepreneurial role through EIS from its more enduring importance within the self-concept through EIC. Rather than treating stable and dynamic understandings of identity as mutually exclusive, this approach positions them as complementary properties of role identity.

A further limitation concerns the cultural and contextual scope within which EI has been theorized and examined. Role identities do not develop or operate independently of their social environment; their meanings and enactment are influenced by social expectations, institutional conditions, and the extent to which particular roles receive social validation (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Poblete et al., 2025). Existing EI research illustrates this contextual dependence across settings such as farmers' entrepreneurial identities and cultivation choices (Suvanto et al., 2020), informal-economy entrepreneurs (Teyi et al., 2023), and contexts of poverty where entrepreneurial activity is embedded within distinctive occupational and social conditions (Shantz et al., 2017). Research also demonstrates that societal culture and gender-role expectations can influence entrepreneurial identities and the environment within which those identities are enacted (Bullough et al., 2022). These examples indicate that the meaning and behavioral consequences of an entrepreneurial role cannot automatically be assumed to operate identically across cultural and institutional settings.

This contextual issue is particularly relevant to Jordan. The Jordanian entrepreneurial environment combines resource constraints with distinctive institutional and cultural conditions, meaning that the entrepreneurial role may be enacted under different expectations and pressures from those assumed in more established entrepreneurial environments. The broader institutional and cultural environment can facilitate identity development where entrepreneurship receives support and legitimacy, while restrictive employment structures or low tolerance for failure may constrain its development and enactment (Ogunsade et al., 2021; Kimmitt et al., 2024; Fahinde et al., 2024). Examining founder-entrepreneurs in Jordan, therefore, provides an important setting in which to assess whether role-based identity mechanisms remain meaningful under resource-constrained and non-Western conditions. Accordingly, the Jordanian context is not treated merely as the geographical location of the study, but as a theoretically informative context for examining how EIS and EIC relate to OE and development. In doing so, the thesis applies Role Identity Theory to an underexplored setting while providing a more context-sensitive understanding of EI and its behavioral consequences.

The EI literature reviewed in this thesis reflects considerable diversity in terms of the research context and the methodological approaches used. However, this diversity is uneven. A substantial part of the empirical based literature has examined EI through quantitative designs that seek to identify relationships between identity constructs and entrepreneurial attitudes, motivation, or behavior. For example, Murnieks et al. (2014) employed a quantitative structural modelling approach to examine identity centrality, passion, and entrepreneurial behavior, while Murnieks et al. (2020) used a lagged quantitative design to examine identity centrality and entrepreneurial passion. More recently, using a within-person field design involving 201 entrepreneurs, Stevenson et al. (2024) adopted a within-person field design to investigate the relationship between EI and entrepreneurial action over time. These studies have provided important empirical support for identity-based explanations of entrepreneurial behavior, but they predominantly examine individual-level mechanisms through structured quantitative designs.

Alongside this quantitative tradition, a growing stream of qualitative research has examined how EI is constructed and enacted within specific cultural and institutional contexts. Using semi-structured interviews with women founders in an Indian high-tech incubator, Gupta and Etzkowitz (2021) examined women founders in the Indian socio-cultural context through semi-structured interviews, while Ozasir Kacar et al. (2023) used life-story interviews to explore the entrepreneurial identities of women in Turkey. Similarly, based on in-depth interviews with 14 women founders operating digital businesses in Amman, Jordan, Alakaleek et al. (2024) employed in-depth interviews with women founders in Jordanian digital businesses to investigate the interaction between gender, culture, and entrepreneurial networking. Such studies demonstrate that EI cannot be fully understood independently of the social and institutional contexts within which it is enacted.

Taken together, the literature reviewed suggests an important methodological and contextual pattern. Quantitative research has contributed substantially to testing relationships among identity-related constructs, whereas qualitative research has been particularly useful in revealing how entrepreneurial identities are negotiated, interpreted, and reconstructed within specific contexts. Nevertheless, comparatively fewer studies combine a clearly differentiated role-identity framework with quantitative testing in resource-constrained, non-Western entrepreneurial settings. This distinction is important for the present thesis. By quantitatively examining EIS and EIC among founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, the study complements context-rich qualitative work while testing theoretically specified identity–opportunity relationships in an under examined empirical setting. Non-Western EI research exists, but it remains comparatively limited and is often qualitative, context-specific, or focused on particular groups, while quantitative tests that distinguish EIS and EIC and connect them to OE and development remain limited. Table 2.2. shows the contextual and methodological characteristics of selected EI studies.

Table 2.2: *Characteristics of selected EI studies*

Study	Context / Location	Participants / Focus	Methodological approach	Main relevance to this thesis
Farmer et al. (2011)	Multiple samples	Entrepreneur identity aspiration and prior experience	Quantitative; three empirical samples	Establishes identity as a motivational basis for entrepreneurial behavior
Murnieks et al. (2014)	Entrepreneur sample	Identity centrality, passion and behavior	Quantitative; SEM, 221 entrepreneurs	Supports identity centrality as a measurable role-identity mechanism
Murnieks et al. (2020)	United States	Entrepreneurs	Quantitative; lagged design	Examines identity centrality, gender, and entrepreneurial passion
Stevenson et al. (2024)	Field-based entrepreneurial sample	201 entrepreneurs	Quantitative; within-person field experiment	Demonstrates that EI and action can vary within individuals over time
Gupta & Etzkowitz (2021)	India	Women founders in a high-tech incubator	Qualitative; semi-structured interviews	Demonstrates the importance of socio-cultural context in EI
Ozasir Kacar et al. (2023)	Turkey	11 women entrepreneurs	Qualitative; life-story interviews	Shows how social, political, and institutional conditions shape EI
Teyi et al. (2023)	Informal economy context	Entrepreneurs operating under adversity	Qualitative/contextual	Demonstrates identity enactment under institutional and resource constraints
Alakaleek et al. (2024)	Amman, Jordan	14 women founders in digital businesses	Qualitative; in-depth interviews	Provides direct evidence of gender and cultural influences on entrepreneurship in Jordan

2.2.4 Role-Based Properties of Entrepreneurial Identity

Building on the conceptualization of EI developed in Section 2.2.1 and the theoretical perspectives reviewed above, this thesis does not treat EI as a higher-order latent construct composed of multiple dimensions. Rather, EI provides the broader conceptual domain within which two theoretically distinct role-identity properties, EIS and EIC, are examined. Thus, EIS and EIC are related through their common grounding in entrepreneurial role identity but represent distinct mechanisms rather than interchangeable indicators or dimensions of a single higher-order EI construct. This distinction provides the conceptual basis for examining their potentially different relationships with OE and OD. The literature identifies the main forms of EI, including role, personal, social, and contextual. Next, the EI's properties, forms, or shapes are reviewed.

1. Role Identity properties

The theoretically distinct role-identity properties of role identity within the larger EI construct describe how people absorb and perform the different roles assigned to entrepreneurship. These dimensions are based on Role Identity Theory (Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020). Role identity promotes professional commitment, especially in situations that require change (Huang et al., 2021). This requires entrepreneurs to redefine their self-perception and how they believe others perceive them, shifting from a focus on personal experience and task performance to one of guiding, inspiring, and empowering others (London & Sherman, 2021). Entrepreneurs internalize roles related to entrepreneurship, such as the founder identity, which focuses on creating and building new ventures from scratch; the inventor identity, which focuses on innovation or the product; the developer identity, which focuses on growing and scaling the business; and the operator identity, which focuses on managing and running operations (Anglin et al., 2022). This aspect highlights role-type identities and makes clear the process by which entrepreneurs create their self-image through performing particular functions to thereby, lay the groundwork for understanding the impact of identity on loyalty and project continuation.

2. Personal properties

Personal properties reveal how individuals understand specific roles, such as leader, innovator, or adventurer. Moreover, these focus on the self-concept and personal motivations that are held. Entrepreneurs often adopt these roles, which in turn shape their behaviors and judgments (Hueso et al., 2021). These include the adoption of behaviors, values, and norms associated with entrepreneurship, such as salience and centrality (which will be defined later in this thesis), self-efficacy, and alignment with personal values (Billingsley et al., 2023; Palmer et al., 2021; Howard & Boudreaux, 2024). Roles specifically define the actions that an entrepreneur perceives as valuable and their right to perform (Llados-Masllorens & Ruiz-Dotras, 2022). Personal identity is a complicated notion that is based on memory, awareness, and our link with ourselves in the past and future (Liu et al., 2021). No single theory fully addresses all the challenges; however, developing psychological continuity remains the most coherent perspective to take. By aligning entrepreneurs' self-concept with core values and the role of entrepreneurship, individuals develop a consistent understanding of purpose that inspires and guides their behavior. Thus, a sound understanding of these personal dimensions strengthens both theoretical models of identity and practical approaches to developing entrepreneurship.

3. Social properties

The social properties of EI reveal how external perceptions, connections, and social narratives are formed, and how entrepreneurs define, express, and maintain their identities (Estrada-Cruz et al., 2020). These socially related dimensions of identity are closely linked to the general and social environment. Examples include impression-managed identity (Żur, 2021), network-integrated identity (Zhao et al., 2024), and activist identity (Vesan et al., 2021). Dimensions such as these enable the focus on identity construction as part of an entrepreneurial group and community, and the value on which people base their self-identity. Entrepreneurs also have traits of being highly inquisitive and eager to learn and discover new things (Bagherian et al., 2025). Levels of peer association in the organization have a positive relationship with entrepreneurial preferences and behaviors, which have significance in terms of understanding the authenticity of environments and opportunities associated with entrepreneurial culture and settings. The social aspects of entrepreneurs highlight the importance of relations and group memberships regarding the development of EI, as discussed by De-Bruin et al. (2023). Including group membership/cooperation, social validation, social expectations, and feelings of belongingness among an entrepreneurial group of people are identified, and a perception of belonging within an entrepreneurial community (Ko & Kim, 2020; Younger et al., 2025; Avci & Ardiç, 2024; Kwon & Lee, 2021).

4. Contextual properties

Also important are the support of institutions, such as educational institutions, through mentorship, support, and entrepreneurship systems, which are key to EI (Mehta, 2025). Therefore, highlight the significance of EI being context-dependent, showing how institutional settings shape entrepreneurs' awareness of their identity. Moreover, regional cultural norms and economic conditions form how entrepreneurial processes are evaluated and practiced, thus focusing on the development of EI (Eniola, 2020). As such, the related integrative principle suggests that the dimensions of identity are not isolated but constantly interact with institutional, economic, and social structures (Amini-Sedeh et al., 2022). It helps to understand how entrepreneurs identify and fulfill their roles in distinct settings. Moreover, structural theory (Deng et al., 2025), institutional theory (Guerreiro et al., 2021), and entrepreneurial behavior alike are also in focus. Emerging research on identity factors is highlighting the relationship between the self-identity of an entrepreneur and their environment. For example, institutionally legitimate identity (Woods et al., 2025), culturally restricted identity (Bullough et al., 2022), and EI based on necessity (Prasastyoga et al., 2021). Besides, crises or displacement are what drive them (Kutsenko, 2025).

In sum, the four theoretically distinct properties of EI (role, personal, social, and contextual) complement rather than oppose each other to underscore the multidimensional nature of entrepreneurial self-construction. They address the surrounding conditions and individual characteristics, and how they interact with each other. For example, a founder (role identity dimensions) may have personal traits, social traits, and related functions. These dimensions illustrate the malleable, interpersonal, and contextual nature of identity. Still, there is a point in developing an operational definition for the activation and control of identity over the short and long term. This thesis examines two main structures: EIS and EIC. These two structures serve as tools that connect different dimensions. The role and personality properties influence salience by the extent of power and access management roles have. In contrast, the social and contextual properties support centrality by integrating entrepreneurship within broader identity hierarchies and systems of social validation. In this way, EIS and EIC can be considered high-level operational processes that intersect with the four dimensions of EI. Focusing on the potential for activating EI in perception and behavior and highlighting its structural focus within the individual identity approach. The following section, building on the preceding dimensional framework, defines and describes both concepts to clarify their theoretical differences and empirical value. The preceding literature demonstrates that EI has been conceptualized at different theoretical and analytical levels, which can create ambiguity regarding the relationship between EI, its broader dimensions, and the specific constructs examined empirically. Table 2.3 therefore synthesizes these perspectives within a single conceptual structure. Rather than treating the different perspectives as competing definitions, the table positions EI as the overarching conceptual domain, Role Identity Theory as the primary theoretical lens, and social, narrative, and process perspectives as complementary explanations of its social and developmental foundations. Within this structure, EIS and EIC represent the two distinct role-identity constructs examined empirically in the present thesis.

Table 2.3: *Integrated Conceptual Framework of EI*

Concept / Theoretical Perspective	Conceptualization of EI	Primary Focus	Relationship to EIS and EIC	Position in This Thesis	Key References
Entrepreneurial Identity (EI)	The meanings through which individuals define themselves in relation to being and acting as entrepreneurs.	Entrepreneurial self-definition and incorporation of entrepreneurship into the self-concept.	Provides the overarching conceptual domain within which EIS and EIC are examined.	**Overarching conceptual domain; not modelled as a separate higher-order latent construct.**	Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021); Murnieks et al. (2020)
Role Identity Perspective	EI reflects the meanings attached to occupying and enacting the entrepreneurial role.	Role meanings, role enactment, salience, centrality, and behavioral implications.	Provides the direct theoretical basis for distinguishing EIS from EIC.	**Primary theoretical lens.**	Stryker & Serpe (1994); Stryker & Burke (2000); Burke & Stets (2022)
Social Identity Perspective	EI can involve identification with entrepreneurs as a social group or category.	Group membership, belonging, social categorization, and collective identification.	Provides broader social understanding but does not directly explain EIS/EIC as role-based constructs.	**Complementary social perspective.**	Tajfel & Turner (2004); Stryker & Burke (2000)
Narrative Identity Perspective	EI develops through the narratives entrepreneurs construct about themselves and their entrepreneurial experiences.	Self-narratives, meaning-making, continuity, and identity construction over time.	Explains how entrepreneurial self-meanings may develop and be reconstructed rather than directly specifying EIS/EIC.	**Complementary developmental perspective.**	Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021); Gregori et al. (2021)

Process Perspective	EI is constructed and reconstructed through entrepreneurial experiences and interactions.	Identity formation, development, change, and contextual responsiveness.	Helps explain the dynamic development and contextual activation of EI.	**Complementary process perspective.**	Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021); Gregori et al. (2021)
Founder Identity	EI is considered within the specific context of individuals who establish and continue to lead their ventures.	Founder role, venture creation, ownership, and role enactment.	Establishes the empirical population within which EIS and EIC are examined.	**Empirical/contextual boundary of the study.**	Powell & Baker (2014); Farmer et al. (2011)
EI Salience (EIS)	The likelihood that the entrepreneurial role becomes prominent or activated across situations.	Situational/context-sensitive activation of entrepreneurial role identity.	Captures the more dynamic and context-sensitive property of EI.	**Core explanatory construct.**	Stryker & Serpe (1994); Stryker & Burke (2000)
EIC (EIC)	The enduring importance of the entrepreneurial role within an individual's self-concept.	Structural and relatively enduring importance of entrepreneurial role identity.	Captures the more enduring importance of entrepreneurship to self-definition.	**Core explanatory construct.**	Burke & Stets (2022); Murnieks et al. (2020)

The role, personal, social, and contextual dimensions discussed in the broader EI literature represent complementary analytical aspects of EI rather than measurement dimensions of a higher-order EI construct in the present study. The empirical model focuses specifically on EIS and EIC as distinct role-identity constructs grounded in Role Identity Theory.

The perspectives presented above should not be regarded as competing definitions of EI, but as theoretical approaches that emphasize different aspects and levels of the construct. Social identity perspectives emphasize identification with broader social groups and categories, whereas narrative and process perspectives provide insight into how entrepreneurial self-meanings are constructed and may develop over time. Founder identity further establishes the specific entrepreneurial context examined in the present study. Role Identity Theory, however, provides the primary theoretical foundation because the study is concerned specifically with the entrepreneurial role and the extent to which this role is activated and occupies an important position within the individual's self-concept. Accordingly, EIS and EIC are positioned as distinct but related role-based dimensions through which EI is examined in this study. The other perspectives therefore complement, rather than replace, the role identity explanation by providing broader social, developmental, and contextual understanding of EI.

2.2.5 Antecedents of Entrepreneurial Identity: Sources of Identity Formation

The antecedents of EI serve a different conceptual purpose from the theoretical perspectives reviewed above. Whereas Role Identity Theory and the complementary social, narrative, and process perspectives explain how EI is conceptualized and operates, antecedents concern the personal, social, educational, professional, and contextual conditions that contribute to its formation and development over time (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Gregori et al., 2021). They are, therefore, reviewed as sources of variation in EI rather than as additional theoretical foundations of the present study. Although these antecedents are not included as variables in the empirical model, they provide important conceptual context for understanding why entrepreneurship may acquire different levels of salience and centrality across individuals and situations.

An individual's psychological readiness is one of the most important factors influencing EI. Traits such as effectiveness, self-confidence, and internal control contribute especially to the development of EI. Besides, entrepreneurs can integrate entrepreneurship into their self-concept, with a firm belief in their ability to manipulate outcomes (Ko & Kim, 2020). Consequently, individual motivations, such as independence, achievement, and originality, drive individuals to grow into entrepreneurs (Chen et al., 2020; Lin Yi, 2025). These motivations enable an initial claim to and maintenance of identity through continued participation in entrepreneurial activities.

However, social reference is also critical in EI development. The influence of family, friends, role models, and entrepreneurs on entrepreneurs is an important factor that enhances and reinforces an individual's capacity for entrepreneurial decision-making (Poblete et al., 2025). On the same side, social validation and reinforcement of power are important; when social circumstances support such roles, people are likely to employ the power of EI (Viswanath et al., 2024).

The educational and professional backgrounds also play a role in shaping EI. Sharing one's education and training in entrepreneurship can enhance self-awareness, as well as to provide a set of tools for personal branding (Paray & Kumar, 2020). Moreover, performing a particular job in the past can lead to identity transformation, especially in relation to management or innovation, and this can occur through exposure to entrepreneurial circumstances (Sokhanvar et al., 2021). In addition, the development of EI is influenced by the broader institutional and cultural contexts. In societies where entrepreneurship is valued and supportive institutions are in place, individuals see the process of building and enhancing EI as straightforward (Ogunsade et al., 2021; Kimmitt et al., 2024). On the other hand, development may be blocked by strict employment systems or a low tolerance for failure (Fahinde et al., 2024).

Overall, the literature suggests that EI emerges through the interaction of individual predispositions, social relationships, educational and professional experiences, and broader institutional and cultural conditions. These antecedents help explain why individuals may differ in the extent to which entrepreneurship becomes incorporated into their self-concept. In the context of the present study, this literature provides background for understanding variation in EI, while the analytical focus remains on how EIS and EIC relate to OE and OD. Accordingly, the antecedents reviewed here explain potential sources of variation in EI, while the empirical focus of this thesis remains on the consequences of that variation through EIS and EIC for OE and OD. Overall, table 2.4 clarifies the conceptual overview of the antecedents of EI and the specific identity constructs examined in this thesis. While EI may be shaped by a range of personal, social, educational, professional, institutional, and cultural influences, these antecedents provide the conceptual background rather than the empirical focus of this thesis (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Gregori et al., 2021). Accordingly, the antecedents of EI are relevant to both EIC and EIS, as they help explain variation in the enduring importance and situational activation of the entrepreneurial role (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Gregori et al., 2021). However, this thesis does not empirically examine these antecedents; rather, they are included to establish the broader conceptual context within which EIS and EIC are positioned.

Table 2.4: *Conceptual Overview of the Antecedents of EI*

Concept / Perspective	Conceptualization / Definition	Primary Focus	Relationship to EI, EIS and EIC	Position in the Present Study	Key References
Antecedents of EI	Personal, social, educational, professional, institutional, and cultural influences that contribute to the	Sources and conditions shaping entrepreneurial self-meanings.	Help explain why entrepreneurship may acquire different levels of importance and activation across individuals.	**Conceptual background** explaining potential variation in EI; these antecedents are	Radu-Lefebvre et al. (2021); Gregori et al. (2021)

	construction and development of EI.			**not directly tested** in the empirical model.	

2.2.6 The Constructs of Entrepreneurial Identity Salience and Centrality

Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) assist in understanding the thinking and behavior processes of an entrepreneur (Murnieks et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2022; Baker & Powell, 2020). Within the overarching conceptualization of EI adopted in this thesis, EIS represents the context-sensitive prominence and activation of the entrepreneurial role within the individual's role hierarchy (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). EIS is the extent to which an individual is likely to view themselves as an entrepreneur in a given situation (Stryker & Burke, 2000). So, the person places their EI identity first, rather than others, such as 'engineer' or 'father,' when taking an action or making a decision (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This points out how EI contributes to an individual's management of their various roles and tasks in accordance with their self-concepts (Prasastyoga et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2022). Consequently, EIS refers to the degree to which an individual's entrepreneurial self-concept is cognitively accessible and prioritized in each context, guiding perception, judgment, and behavior. It captures the relative prominence of EI among multiple possible identities within an individual's self-schema, particularly under decision-making or role conflict, which is the degree to which the entrepreneurial role is cognitively accessible and emotionally prominent (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2014). Accordingly, we can view salience as identity 'on standby'. It is about how often and easily a person thinks of themselves as an entrepreneur, and how easily the category can be accessed. In addressing the question of whether the person immediately thinks of the decision in the way an entrepreneur would, the answer is yes, which translates into high salience. These meanings can be essential for maintaining the commitment to entrepreneurship by anchoring the person's motivations and actions in a steady identity history. It also conveys how entrepreneurs cover the requirements for a competitive role, interacting their cognitive and emotional resources with entrepreneurial drive (Seibert et al., 2021; Murnieks et al., 2020). Therefore, EIS comprises an evolving process that is closely linked to the context, during which the emergence of the entrepreneurial role is valued over alternative self-conceptions when confronted with environmental cues and internal motivations.

Complementing EIS, EIC represents the more enduring importance of the entrepreneurial role to an individual's self-definition and indicates the extent to which being an entrepreneur is regarded as central to who the individual is (Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020). EIC highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in fostering an individual's sense of self and its significance to identity and purpose (Foreman & Whetten, 2021; Hayter et al., 2022). The consideration examines the degree of importance individual's places on their EI compared to other aspects of their personality. The implication of this is evident in their entrepreneurial intentions and behaviors (Wang et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2022). The relationship between EIC and performing entrepreneurial activities suggests that EIC results in an increase in performing entrepreneurial activities (Stevenson et al., 2024). This centrality may also increase when entrepreneurship is linked to social status or duty (Stephan, 2018). Centrality refers to the significance or meaning related to the individual's personal identity in terms of a general perspective related to the individual's identity. Therefore, EIC represents "the extent to which entrepreneurship is an integral part of an individual's concept of themselves" (Ashforth et al., 2024; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Accordingly, it is placing entrepreneurship at the heart of self-definition. It is not just about what entrepreneurs do; it is about who entrepreneurs are. Thus, EIC fosters long-term commitment, passion, and motivation. Moreover, EIC contributes to consistency, reinforcing an individual's internal sense of self and external behavior, thereby promoting authenticity and goal-oriented action (Tripathi et al., 2020). In a sense, EIC is a stabilizing influence, and it is involved in processes of emotion, motivation, and perception, in that entrepreneurial action remains congruent with a lasting sense of self despite insecurity and stress.

Centrality reflects the relative importance of entrepreneurship among these competing identities and the extent to which entrepreneurship contributes to an individual's understanding of who they are (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). The notion of entrepreneurship being incorporated into the self-concept therefore means that entrepreneurial role meanings become an important component of self-definition (Burke & Stets, 2022). Individuals with high EIC do not simply perform entrepreneurial activities; they view entrepreneurship as a fundamental aspect of their identity (Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Consequently, entrepreneurial success, failure, opportunities, and challenges become personally meaningful because they directly relate to the individual's sense of self (Farmer et al., 2011; Powell & Baker, 2014). Therefore, incorporation into the self-concept means that entrepreneurship becomes part of how individuals define themselves. It is no longer merely an activity they perform but a component of their identity (Burke & Stets, 2022). Therefore, EIC reflects the importance of entrepreneurship within an individual's hierarchy of identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). The key issue is not whether they engage in entrepreneurial behavior, but whether being an entrepreneur is central to their understanding of who they are (Murnieks et al., 2020).

Importantly, EIC differs from several related constructs. First, role commitment refers to the strength of attachment to a role and the social relationships associated with that role (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). Commitment concerns what an individual may lose if the role is abandoned, whereas centrality concerns how important the role is for defining the self (Burke & Stets, 2022). Second, role identification refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as belonging to or being represented by a particular role (Ashforth et al., 2008). Third, role internalization concerns the adoption of role-related norms and values (Burke & Stets, 2022). While these concepts may contribute to identity development, EIC specifically captures the prominence of entrepreneurship within the hierarchy of self-definitions (Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Thus, EIC addresses a distinct theoretical question: not whether entrepreneurs perform entrepreneurial activities, identify with entrepreneurial values, or remain committed to entrepreneurial networks, but rather whether being an entrepreneur constitutes a core part of who they believe themselves to be (Murnieks et al., 2020; Burke & Stets, 2022). Commitment focuses on attachment to the role and the social relationships connected to it. Centrality focuses on identity importance. An entrepreneur may be highly committed because they have invested substantial time, resources, and relationships in a venture, yet entrepreneurship may not be the most important aspect of their self-definition. Conversely, entrepreneurship may be highly central to someone's identity even before significant investments or commitments have been made. Therefore, the constructs are related but conceptually distinct.

As subdivisions of EI, both EIS and EIC reflect the extent to which the entrepreneurial role is cognitively active and emotionally rooted in the entrepreneur's self-concept. Although EIS is relevant to elastic and external stimuli, EIC is grounded in the internal architecture of self-recognition. EI is not just about who you think you are. It is about how you act, persist, and perform, especially when things get hard (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Thus, EIS and EIC can be viewed as two forces within the self, one activating and sustaining the other. Moreover, they may remind us that entrepreneurship is not just a journey of strategy and markets. It is a journey of becoming (Sergeeva et al., 2021).

Collectively, imagine two business founders. One individual wakes up every morning with their first thought being their business. This refers to salience. Another individual finds their business part of who they are, and regardless of winning or losing, their identity is linked to their business, reflecting centrality. At a moment when being an entrepreneur is not only necessary but also an ambiguous occupation in instruction, salience could be linked to cultural perceptions of risk, status, and gender (Bosak et al., 2023). The contextual nature of identity salience is particularly important because the activation of the entrepreneurial role does not occur independently of the social and cultural environment. Cultural understandings of risk, social status, and gender can influence the situations in which entrepreneurship becomes personally and socially meaningful and, consequently, the likelihood that the EI is activated. Although existing studies do not always examine EIS explicitly as a distinct construct, entrepreneurship research provides evidence that each of these contextual factors influences EI formation, enactment, and behavior.

First, risk is important because entrepreneurship frequently requires individuals to act under uncertainty, yet the social acceptability of risk-taking differs across institutional and cultural environments. Strong entrepreneurial identification can encourage risk-taking and opportunity pursuit, while excessive identity involvement may also contribute to less reflective decisions (Murnieks et al., 2020). At the contextual level, cultural norms and institutional environments can influence attitudes toward entrepreneurial activity and uncertainty (Ogunsade et al., 2021). This is particularly relevant in Jordan, where limited access to venture capital and a risk-averse culture have been identified as continuing constraints on entrepreneurial activity (Mirkovski et al., 2024; Khan, 2022). Under such conditions, situations involving uncertainty, resource commitment, or potential failure may make the entrepreneurial role particularly salient because founders are required to interpret and respond to risk through their role as entrepreneurs.

Second, social status matters because entrepreneurial roles acquire meaning partly through social recognition and validation. Identity Theory suggests that identities are reinforced through interaction and through the meanings attached to particular social roles. Entrepreneurship can therefore become more important when entrepreneurial achievement is associated with recognition, legitimacy, or social standing. Previous research indicates that the centrality of entrepreneurship may increase when the entrepreneurial role relates to social status or social obligation (Stephan, 2018). This issue is especially relevant within the Jordanian context, where social relationships and collective evaluations can influence entrepreneurial motivation. Tauber (2020), for example, notes that business achievement in Jordan can enhance an individual's standing among peers and social status. Consequently, social recognition may not only strengthen the longer-term importance of EI but may also provide situational cues that activate that identity when founders interact with customers, family members, investors, or their wider communities.

Third, gender can shape EI because social expectations concerning who is considered an appropriate or legitimate entrepreneur are not necessarily gender neutral. Research on women's entrepreneurship demonstrates that societal culture and gender-role expectations influence entrepreneurial identities and the environments in which these identities are enacted (Bullough et al., 2022). Similar contextual effects have been identified among women entrepreneurs in Turkey (Ozasir Kacar et al., 2023) and women founders operating within the Indian socio-cultural context (Gupta & Etzkowitz, 2021). More importantly for the present thesis, Alakaleek et al. (2024) show that women founders in Jordanian digital businesses navigate the interaction between gender, culture, and entrepreneurial networking. Such social expectations may affect when the entrepreneurial role becomes particularly salient, for example, when founders must establish legitimacy, negotiate business relationships, or respond to gendered expectations concerning their entrepreneurial role.

Taken together, these studies suggest that risk, status, and gender should not be viewed as components of EIS itself, but as contextual conditions that may influence the cues through which an EI becomes activated. This distinction is important to the present study. EIS remains an individual-level role-identity construct, while the Jordanian cultural and institutional environment provides the setting in which that identity is enacted. Examining EIS among Jordanian founder entrepreneurs therefore provides an opportunity to investigate identity-driven opportunity processes within a context where risk perceptions, social recognition, and gender-role expectations may make the entrepreneurial role particularly consequential.

Although EIS and EIC are frequently discussed together, they represent conceptually distinct dimensions of EI. Drawing upon Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The distinction can be understood through their temporal orientation. EIS is relatively dynamic because it reflects situational activation. EI may become highly salient when an entrepreneur is evaluating a business opportunity, negotiating with investors, or responding to market uncertainty. However, this activation may vary across contexts and over time. EIC, by comparison, is relatively stable because it reflects the significance of entrepreneurship to the individual's sense of self (Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). It answers the question of whether being an entrepreneur is perceived as a core part of who the individual is.

The two constructs may therefore coexist at different levels. An entrepreneur may possess a highly central EI because entrepreneurship constitutes an important aspect of self-definition, yet that identity may not always be the most salient identity in every situation. Conversely, EI may become temporarily salient in response to specific opportunity-related circumstances even when it is not the individual's most central identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022). This distinction highlights the importance of examining both constructs simultaneously because they capture different psychological mechanisms through which identity influences entrepreneurial behavior (Burke & Stets, 2022; Farmer et al., 2011). From a cognitive perspective, salience influences which role meanings are activated during judgment and decision-making processes, whereas centrality influences the strength of commitment attached to the entrepreneurial role. From a motivational perspective, salience shapes immediate behavioral attention and action tendencies, whereas centrality shapes long-term persistence, consistency, and commitment to entrepreneurial goals. Consequently, EIS and EIC are expected to exert distinct influences on OE and OD (Farmer et al., 2011; Shepherd et al., 2021).

A common misunderstanding in identity research is to assume that identity must be either stable or dynamic. Role Identity Theory suggests that both characteristics can coexist within the same identity system (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). The stability of EI refers to the enduring role meanings and self-definitions that individuals associate with entrepreneurship over time. These meanings provide continuity, coherence, and direction for entrepreneurial behavior. However, the activation of those role meanings is not constant (Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020). As a result, EI can remain stable as part of the self-concept while varying in its moment-to-moment influence on cognition and behavior. This distinction can be illustrated through an entrepreneur whose self-concept strongly incorporates entrepreneurship as a core identity. Such an individual may consistently view themselves as an entrepreneur over many years, reflecting high identity centrality.

Nevertheless, the degree to which that identity guides immediate judgments and actions may fluctuate across contexts (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). EI may become highly salient during OE, resource acquisition, or venture development activities, while other identities may become more salient in family, community, or non-business settings (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Therefore, stability and dynamism should not be viewed as contradictory. Rather, they represent different dimensions of identity functioning. Together, these dimensions provide a more comprehensive understanding of how EI influences opportunity-related processes. Consider a founder who has built a business over many years. Entrepreneurship may be central to who they are, meaning they consistently see themselves as an entrepreneur. However, when attending a family event, their parental identity may become more salient than their EI. When evaluating a new business opportunity, EI becomes highly salient again. The centrality remains relatively stable, but salience changes across situations (Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020). This distinction is precisely why this thesis treats EIC and EIS as separate constructs. Therefore, this thesis does not treat EIS as entirely dynamic or EIC as completely fixed. Both can change over time. However, EIS is more sensitive to immediate situational cues, while EIC generally changes more slowly because it reflects the enduring importance assigned to entrepreneurship within the broader self-concept.

2.2.7 The Relevance of EIS and EIC to EI

EI is frequently discussed as a broad multidimensional phenomenon encompassing various role meanings, self-definitions, and identity processes. Within this broader domain, EIS and EIC represent two theoretically important dimensions derived primarily from Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022). However, the present thesis does not conceptualize EI as a higher-order latent construct composed of EIS and EIC. Instead, EIS and EIC are treated as theoretically distinct identity mechanisms. This decision is consistent with prior research suggesting that salience and centrality capture different psychological processes, namely situational activation and enduring self-definition (Murnieks et al., 2014; Mathias & Williams, 2017; Wagenschwanz, 2021). The objective of the thesis is therefore not to estimate the overall influence of EI as a single construct, but rather to examine how these two dimensions independently shape OE and OD. Accordingly, EIS and EIC are modelled as separate first-order constructs. This approach permits a more precise examination of their potentially different effects and avoids obscuring theoretically meaningful variation that could arise from combining both dimensions into a single aggregate measure. The novelty of this research is precisely that EIS and EIC are not assumed to operate identically. Therefore, modelling them separately is both theoretically and empirically justified.

As noted in the entrepreneurship literature, identity salience and centrality are cross-cutting concepts that apply to both personal and social identity dimensions. Over time, identity salience and centrality may shift in response to changes in roles, venture growth, or external crises (Thoits, 2020). As such, salience and centrality are co-constructed by macro and micro level factors, which comprise access to finance, human capital, expertise, as well as levels of institutional and policy-driven support provided for entrepreneurs (Mackey & Rios, 2023). The preference for cognizance of EIS and EIC in this thesis has theoretical and empirical underpinnings. First, these dimensions have extensively influenced entrepreneurial cognition and conduct. For example, Shijaku et al. (2020) demonstrate that centrality strongly predicts entrepreneurial commitment, endurance, and willingness to overcome barriers. Given this, entrepreneurs for whom identification is relevant are much more likely to interact constantly with their ventures. Likewise, salience determines whether the identification will guide unique conduct in a selected context (Stets et al., 2020).

Second, salient identities are activated in uncertain environments, which are often present in entrepreneurial contexts (Ng et al., 2021; Hay et al., 2021). It is the intent of this thesis to examine the impact of identity salience on opportunities, precisely because opportunities often entail uncertain outcomes. As such, EIS prompts individuals to interpret situations through an entrepreneurial lens, increasing their sensitivity to opportunities and readiness to evaluate. For example, Farmer et al. (2011) observed that identification aspiration and salience affect the popularity and movement of entrepreneurial opportunities. While Baker and Powell (2021) found that the centrality of the founder identity is correlated with entrepreneurial staying power and role obligation. Entrepreneurs often merge their personal dreams with commercial enterprise aspirations, making their EI imperative to test their endurance and decision-making (Russell & Reimer, 2019; Bolis et al., 2020). In the initial stage of helpful assistance guidance settings, where institutional assistance can be restricted, the emotional and cognitive self-control captured through salience and centrality is critical for coping with stressful circumstances.

Third, salience and centrality offer a broad lens for examining the combination of roles of identity: its immediate effect within a specific case (salience) and its deeper motivational force (centrality). Examining the effects of those constructs is relevant, as sociological expectations can shape the position of entrepreneurship (Quinn et al., 2014; Halu et al., 2013), in addition to its visibility, upsurges, and character significance. When entrepreneurship becomes important to how individuals define themselves, they are much more likely to emerge stronger from mistakes. For example, Diamond (2020) argues that identity salience influences higher levels of emotion and behavior. Furthermore, Kakarika et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of a strong emotional connection to EI (i.e., centrality), as well as passion and resilience.

Fourth, salience and centrality explain how EI can be continually triggered and assimilated into the self-concept (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Gur & Mathias, 2021). Whereas most studies note what entrepreneurs identify with, for instance, being an innovator or social agent, these two properties review in greater detail how everyday identification affects thoughts, emotions, and actions. This distinction permits a nuanced evaluation of why some entrepreneurs can thrive under pressure, adapt effectively, or succeed, while others struggle or fail. Namely, salience and centrality account for variation in conduct amongst entrepreneurs with comparable identity content material. Two individuals may additionally view themselves as “founders.” Still, if that identity is more salient or central to one of them, their behavior might be more driven by it, especially under challenging conditions.

With the assessment of salience and centrality, the intention is to conduct an in-depth investigation of the EI strength-consequence relationship, including the likelihood of undertaking an entrepreneurial role and behavioral consequences. These constructs are of fundamental importance as indicators of the effects of identification. In addition, both constructs have been well established in the literature and have been used in entrepreneurship research, with average signs (e.g., scales adapted from Serpe et al., 2020; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Farmer et al., 2011), making them suited for quantitative studies.

Moving beyond descriptive identification labels into the motivational and structural center of entrepreneurial motion makes them especially valuable for investigating how founder entrepreneurs compare and deal with opportunities. By drawing on identity theory and integrating insights from multi-disciplinary studies (such as Leitch & Harrison, 2016), exploring EIS and EIC notably gives an extra multi-dimensional, context-touchy, and behaviorally predictive knowledge of how identity shapes entrepreneurship. This framework enhances the practical relevance of the findings for identification-driven entrepreneurship improvement in underexplored areas, including Jordan.

Among the available identity perspectives, Role Identity Theory provides the most appropriate theoretical foundation for the present study. The reason is that this lens explains how individuals internalize, prioritize, and enact social roles as part of their self-concept (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). According to the theory, identities differ in both their salience and centrality (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022). These assumptions align directly with the study's focal constructs, EIS and EIC, both of which are grounded in the role identity tradition (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

Using the Role Identity Theory perspective provided this study with a foundation to explain how entrepreneurs prioritize and enact the entrepreneurial role and how this influences opportunity-related decision-making. Specifically, the study examines whether variations in the salience and centrality of the entrepreneurial role influence OE and OD which are behavioral and cognitive processes central to entrepreneurial action (Farmer et al., 2011; Shepherd et al., 2021; Scheaf et al., 2020). Consequently, the theory provides a coherent explanation of the mechanisms linking EI to opportunity-related behavior.

Although Social Identity Theory offers valuable insights into how individuals define themselves through membership in social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), its primary level of analysis is collective identity and group-based self-categorization. In contrast, the present study is not concerned with entrepreneurs' identification with entrepreneurial communities or professional groups. Rather, it focuses on how the entrepreneurial role becomes integrated into an individual's self-concept and guides behavior across different situations. Therefore, Role Identity Theory provides a more direct explanation of the mechanisms investigated in this research. This theoretical choice also ensures strong alignment between the study's theoretical foundation, constructs, hypotheses, and methodology. EIS and EIC are conceptualized as role-based identity constructs, while the dependent variables, OE and OD, represent behavioral manifestations of entrepreneurial role enactment. Accordingly, Role Identity Theory offers a coherent framework linking EI, opportunity-related cognition, and entrepreneurial action (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022; Shepherd et al., 2021).

2.2.8 The Nature of a Double-Edged Sword Between EIS and EIC in EI

Although EIS and EIC represent important properties of EI, their influence on entrepreneurial cognition and behavior should not be assumed to be uniformly beneficial. Identity theory suggests that the salience and centrality of a role can increase its capacity to organize attention, meaning, and behavior (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In entrepreneurship, this can be advantageous because EIS can activate entrepreneurial role meanings in relevant situations, while EIC can provide a more enduring basis for commitment and persistence (Murnieks et al., 2020). However, these same properties may also create constraints when identification becomes particularly strong. A strongly activated or central entrepreneurial identity may narrow the entrepreneur's interpretation of information, reinforce identity-consistent choices, or make adaptation and disengagement from existing courses of action more difficult. Indeed, Zuzul and Tripsas (2020) demonstrate that founder identity can contribute to both flexibility and inertia, with strong identity affirmation potentially encouraging continued commitment to existing venture concepts despite changing environmental conditions. Therefore, EIS and EIC can be understood as having a double-edged nature: they may facilitate entrepreneurial cognition and action while, under certain conditions, simultaneously creating cognitive and behavioral rigidity.

High salience can lead to some impulsive selections that forget about non-entrepreneurial roles (including one's own family), which may additionally increase the risk of burnout. Similarly, high identity centrality can subject entrepreneurs to mentally stressful situations in the event of poor or even deteriorating business performance (Maharaj, 2023). This preference can also lead to prolonged engagements in poorly performing initiatives (Powell & Baker, 2014), poor decision-making abilities (Amalia, 2025), and negative attitudes towards strategic alignment (Mathias, 2023). Furthermore, entrepreneurs with rigid identity narratives may struggle with identity inconsistency when faced with role conflicts, such as resolving tensions between being a risk-taker and a responsible leader, and between social mission and business feasibility (Bruder, 2021; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). For instance, Uy et al. (2024) argue that the mechanisms that make EI a resource, including explanatory coherence and emotional investment, can become obligations, while feedback from the conditions instructs attitudes that challenge the viability of the idea of self.

In this context, EI functions as a resource that helps entrepreneurs develop their adaptive abilities. However, it can also become a burden if it is not aligned with the nature of the situation, the multiplicity of roles the individual occupies, and their capacity for reflection (Norena-Chavez & Romani-Torres, 2024; López-Núñez et al., 2020). Sometimes, high identification with EIS or EIC can lead to an irrational escalation of commitment, with entrepreneurs persisting with failing projects for fear of backing down or abandoning them, as this threatens their self-image (Baker & Powell, 2020). Furthermore, rigid adherence to a fixed identity image can restrict the ability to make flexible strategic decisions and impair adaptation to a changing environment (Mmbaga et al., 2020).

The identity-related pressure intensifies when the entrepreneur is required to perform multiple and conflicting roles, such as founder, parent, or community member, resulting in an identity conflict that is incompatible or clashes at the level of values (Binder, 2024; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). Furthermore, societal expectancies and normative pressures inside entrepreneurial ecosystems can exacerbate entrepreneurs' emotions of incongruity, mainly amongst based companies that are on occasion compelled to grapple with an identification that clashes with their cultural context (Knox et al., 2021; Van Merriënboer et al., 2025). For this motive, it will become essential to view EI as a capability that combines flexibility with a degree of rigidity (Uy et al., 2024). In quick, salience and centrality dimensions need to be approached with caution when analyzing EI within the entrepreneurial international. EIS and EIC are helpful to entrepreneurs who aim to achieve their goals and run businesses effectively; however, there are emotional challenges with EIS and EIC since they make it challenging to change organizational strategies without proper management.

2.2.9 Opportunity Evaluation and Opportunity Development

Opportunity evaluation (OE) and opportunity development (OD) represent two related but conceptually distinct opportunity processes examined in this thesis. Entrepreneurship research has traditionally devoted considerable attention to the recognition and exploitation of opportunities; however, recognizing a potential opportunity does not determine whether an entrepreneur considers it sufficiently desirable or feasible to pursue, nor does it explain how that initial possibility is subsequently refined into a more developed opportunity (Davidsson, 2015; Dimov, 2021). Distinguishing evaluation from development therefore provides a more process-oriented understanding of what occurs between the initial perception of a potential opportunity and its subsequent entrepreneurial enactment.

In this thesis, OE refers to the cognitive and affective process through which an entrepreneur judges the desirability, feasibility, risk, and potential value of a perceived opportunity (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Healey et al., 2021; Scheaf et al., 2020). Evaluation is not simply an objective assessment of market information. Entrepreneurs interpret potential opportunities through their prior experiences, beliefs, motivations, and self-perceptions, meaning that the same external information may be evaluated differently by different individuals (Mathias & Williams, 2017; Maran et al., 2021). OE therefore represents an important judgment stage in which entrepreneurs determine whether an opportunity is personally and strategically meaningful enough to warrant further attention and action. Consistent with this conceptualization, the present thesis captures OE through entrepreneurs' perceptions of potential gains, desire to learn more about an opportunity, perceived risk, and anticipated enjoyment in working to make the opportunity a reality (Scheaf et al., 2020).

As a cognitive process OE is deliberative, where entrepreneurs consider desirable, feasible, and of strategic value for a perceived entrepreneurial idea or business growth path (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Healy et al., 2021). This construct represents a rational model of the future, which involves inference and resource management to exploit the opportunities that arise (Li et al., 2025). However, OE is not an objective activity of market vetting and scanning. Instead, it is an objective activity shaped through the entrepreneur's self-belief system and identity (Theodoraki et al., 2025; Wihler et al., 2017). Although OE is subjective and may be influenced by an entrepreneur's identity and beliefs, subjectivity does not imply conceptual equivalence between EI and OE. The two constructs have different theoretical referents. EIS and EIC are self-referential constructs concerned with the prominence and enduring importance of the entrepreneurial role within the individual's self-concept (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2020). OE, in contrast, is opportunity-referential: it concerns the entrepreneur's judgment of the desirability, feasibility, attractiveness, risk, and potential value of a particular opportunity (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Scheaf et al., 2020). Thus, EI provides one interpretive lens through which opportunity information may acquire meaning, whereas OE represents the resulting judgment about the opportunity rather than a measure of the entrepreneur's identity.

This distinction is important for avoiding conceptual inflation in the proposed model. The thesis does not assume that all subjectivity in OE originates from EI; opportunity judgments may also reflect information, prior experience, environmental conditions, and other individual influences. Instead, the hypotheses isolate EI as one theoretically relevant antecedent of OE. Conceptual distinctiveness is therefore established theoretically through the different referents and content domains of the constructs and is subsequently assessed empirically through the measurement model and discriminant validity analysis. Accordingly, the definition of OE was linked to the subjective, iterative processes of judging whether a perceived opportunity was personally desirable and strategically viable (Ivanova et al., 2018). OE is thus a cognitive and affective process, based on previous experience, inner motivations, and, more importantly, identity (Mathias & Williams, 2017; Maran et al., 2021).

The entrepreneurial opportunity system has evolved with how potential opportunities are noticed, interpreted, and evaluated. Thus, OE constitutes an important underpinning phase (Chandra, 2017; Adel-Rastkhiz et al., 2019). Entrepreneurs need to pay much attention to the evaluation that occurs midway in the opportunity process, in which entrepreneurs are required to evaluate the viability and private alignment of emerging ideas (Clausen, 2020). However, entrepreneurs ought to decide whether the opportunity aligns with their dreams, resources, and identity (Jarvis, 2016; Mathias & Williams, 2017). Thus, OE forms an important aspect in entrepreneurship literature and serves as a huge cognitive procedure via which entrepreneurs compare the viability, desirability, and feasibility of capacity business opportunities (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Canavati et al., 2021). The importance of OE rather, comes from influencing opportunities through transforming ideas to entrepreneurial action, helping a person filter, prioritize, and manage resources allocated to ideas that have the greatest value-creating potential (Altman et al., 2022; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2021).

Unlike opportunity recognition, which commonly identifies new opportunities, OE employs a more comprehensive evaluation and decision-making strategy that integrates private goals, market dynamics, and resource structure to determine what an opportunity is pursuing (Wood, 2021). Therefore, insufficient attention to OE may lead to the misallocation of time, resources, and capital. Either in pursuing nonviable possibilities that fail to generate cost or overlooking promising opportunities that could have yielded substantial blessings if properly assessed. Moreover, through assessment processes, entrepreneurs can improve their ability to respond to a changing environment in a more beneficial manner, speed up the rate or process of their entrepreneurial activities while achieving positive results, as well as improve their strategic thinking while running an entrepreneurial action (Ramoglou & McMullen, 2024; Dimov, 2021). Furthermore, recent theoretical works highlight the factor of identity in the formation of OE strategies by integrating the idea that the method through which entrepreneurs compare the accessed opportunities can be seen as an important part of their self-concept perception (Madjdi & Zolfaghari, 2023; Diaz-Portugal et al., 2022). As such, further understanding of OE is required in entrepreneurship to explain how entrepreneurs transform abstract ideas into action to prosper.

OD extends beyond the evaluative judgment of OE and concerns the activities through which an initially perceived opportunity is progressively elaborated, refined, and advanced (Shepherd et al., 2021; Dimov, 2021). Opportunities are not necessarily complete or objectively given at the moment they are perceived; rather, their form and potential can develop through entrepreneurial action, learning, interaction, and feedback. Accordingly, OD involves sustained engagement with an opportunity, including consulting others, interacting with team members, improving features or functions, and mobilizing relational and network resources to advance the opportunity (Shepherd et al., 2021). Whereas OE primarily concerns the entrepreneur's judgment of whether an opportunity merits pursuit, OD captures the subsequent effort through which that opportunity is shaped and moved forward.

Opportunities that are identified may also be socially constructed and enhanced through the deliberate actions of the entrepreneurs and their interactions and negotiations with their surroundings (Clausen, 2020). Continuing with this discussion, it is argued that while OD is an enactment mode where opportunities emerge, evolve, and materialize through active experimentation and mutual engagement with contextual forces (Teece, 2016). Moreover, this evolutionary explanation is further supplemented with a discussion on OD, whereby learning, attention, and constant recombination of prior knowledge are used to develop and alter opportunities arising from existing gaps within the market, according to Davidsson (2015).

According to the behavioral approach of viewing the concept of entrepreneurship, OD might be conceived of from the behavioral approach as an evolving pressure in which entrepreneurs undergo iterative thinking and mutual sharing of information and utilize strategic resources to develop and enhance initial perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities (Dhahri et al., 2021). Thus, OD is a set of learning-based processes in which entrepreneurs test ideas, adapt venture concepts, and progressively reduce doubt about the exploitation of opportunities (Wood & McKelvie, 2015). Therefore, development is closely associated with learning mechanisms and knowledge accumulation (Marvel et al., 2020), in which entrepreneurs track opportunities through experience with customers, markets, and technologies.

OD is conceptualized as an ongoing opportunity-development process that is operationalized through reported developmental activities and intentions, not as a final venture outcome (Surya et al., 2021). So, in this perspective, OD proposes an ongoing process in terms of senses of identification, highlighting an enhancement strategy in terms of legitimacy, especially in a context of newly founded enterprises in an unregulated environment (Magistriti et al., 2023). The picture fits in with the idea of the social situated scene in which opportunities are facilitated through building entrepreneurial agency alongside social capital (Davidsson, 2015; Korsgaard et al., 2021). As a result, while opportunity discovery presupposes objective gaps in the market ready to be identified (Schlichte & Junge, 2024), OD highlights the formed and evolving nature of opportunities, with an emphasis on entrepreneurial creativity (Pennetta et al., 2024).

In this thesis, OD is conceptualized primarily as an ongoing developmental process rather than as a final entrepreneurial outcome. This process is enacted through observable and reportable developmental activities, including consulting others, interacting with team members, refining features or functions, and mobilizing relational resources to advance an opportunity (Shepherd et al., 2021; Dimov, 2021). Thus, although OD has behavioral manifestations, the construct does not refer to a single discrete behavior or to the eventual success of an opportunity. Instead, it captures the continuing process through which an initially perceived opportunity is elaborated, tested, adapted, and advanced through action, learning, and interaction (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Marvel et al., 2020).

This distinction is important for linking OD to EI. EIS and EIC are not proposed to determine the final commercial outcome of an opportunity directly; rather, they are expected to influence founders' engagement with the developmental process. A salient EI may make role-consistent developmental activities more immediately relevant, while a central EI may provide a more enduring basis for sustained involvement and commitment. The proposed relationships therefore concern identity-based engagement in OD, rather than identity directly producing successful opportunity outcomes (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Murnieks et al., 2020).

The scholarly argument presents OD as an identity process that combines entrepreneurial agency with learning and stakeholder engagement to develop new market offerings from initial ideas. As such, perspectives on behavioral (Wood & McKelvie, 2015), socio-cognitive (Clausen, 2020), and identity-based (Mathias & Williams, 2017; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021) provide a picture of OD, as entrepreneurs experience their cognitive plans and relationships within their context. The intricate nature of OD necessitates that current research in entrepreneurship is conducted across diverse social, economic, and cultural environments. In doing so, understanding OD through the lens of EI permits will encourage greater understanding of the motives that drive entrepreneurs, where researchers can offer a theoretically integrated approach that links identity systems with opportunity. Therefore, the following section examines the relationships between OD and two dimensions of EI, specifically EIS and EIC.

The distinction between OE and OD is theoretically important to this thesis because each represents different demands within the opportunity process. Evaluation requires interpretation and judgment under uncertainty, whereas development requires continued engagement, adaptation, and commitment over time. This distinction provides a particularly relevant basis for examining EI. EIS reflects the situational activation of the entrepreneurial role and may therefore be especially relevant when founders encounter and interpret opportunity-related information. EIC, by contrast, reflects the more enduring importance of entrepreneurship within the self-concept and may provide a persistent identity-based foundation for continued involvement in OD (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Murnieks et al., 2014; Murnieks et al., 2020). Examining OE and OD separately therefore allows this thesis to investigate whether different properties of EI are associated with different opportunity-related processes rather than treating entrepreneurial opportunity pursuit as a single undifferentiated outcome.

The selection of OE and OD is also particularly relevant to the empirical context of this thesis. Founder entrepreneurs are directly involved in both assessing potential opportunities and committing resources and effort to their subsequent development (Dimov, 2021; Davidsson, 2015). In a resource-constrained environment such as Jordan, these processes may be especially consequential because entrepreneurs operate in conditions characterized by financial limitations, institutional uncertainty, and restricted access to venture capital (Mirkovski et al., 2024; Khan, 2022). Under such conditions, deciding whether an opportunity is sufficiently valuable and feasible to pursue becomes consequential because poor evaluations can impose substantial costs when resources are limited. Similarly, developing an opportunity requires founders to sustain effort, adapt, interact with others, and mobilize scarce resources despite environmental constraints. OE and OD consequently provide two theoretically and contextually meaningful processes through which the role of EI among Jordanian founders can be examined.

Taken together, in this study OE and OD are treated as distinct but connected components of the broader entrepreneurial opportunity process: OE concerns judging the potential opportunity, whereas OD concerns actively refining and advancing it. This distinction enables the thesis to move beyond whether entrepreneurs merely recognize opportunities and instead examine how identity influences what founders think about an opportunity and what they subsequently do to develop it. Having established the conceptual foundations of EIS, EIC, OE, and OD, the following section develops the hypothesized relationships among these constructs.

In summary, the literature reviewed in Section 2.2 establishes EI as a multidimensional, role-based self-meaning structure through which entrepreneurs understand and enact the entrepreneurial role. Drawing primarily on Role Identity Theory, this thesis distinguishes between EIS and EIC (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2014). The literature also demonstrates that EI is shaped by personal, social, institutional, and cultural influences and that its expression may vary across contexts (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Anglin et al., 2022). This contextual sensitivity is particularly relevant in resource-constrained environments such as Jordan, where institutional uncertainty, limited resources, social expectations, and cultural norms may increase the importance of identity-based judgment and action. At the same time, the literature review conceptualizes OE and OD as distinct but interconnected opportunity processes: OE concerns how entrepreneurs assess the desirability, feasibility, risk, and value of a potential opportunity, whereas OD concerns the subsequent refinement and advancement of that opportunity through continued action and interaction (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). Taken together, these theoretical and empirical insights provide the foundation for examining whether EIS and EIC operate differently across OE and OD and for specifying the relationships tested in the hypotheses developed in the following section.

2.3 Hypothesis Development

2.3.1 EI and Opportunity Processes

An opportunity can be defined as when the new products, raw materials, and methods of planning become available and are sold at prices higher than their cost of production (Ramoglu & McMullen, 2024). This definition encompasses resource acquisition and market entry or creation (Seibert et al., 2021). More recently, researchers have concefntrated on the intersection between EI and opportunities in examining how to make the best use of it (Alsos et al., 2020; Gruber & Tal, 2024). Thus, EI highlights the importance of personal identities as within entrepreneurial goals that provides for different framings of situations as entrepreneurial opportunities, to become expressions of their entrepreneurial identification (Madjdi et al., 2024; Murnieks et al., 2014).

EI, in short, begins from resources at hand, involves thinking through possible actions or results, and selects the conditions in which loss is minimal to an acceptable degree. Entrepreneurs are seen as not creating an aspiration or aim, and then identifying resources to help them attain it, but as proceeding cautiously, incrementally, and experimentally (Newbery et al., 2018; Foss & Klein, 2020). For this reason, EI serves as a cognitive foundation that underpins communication, where it is expected to motivate understanding of how to assemble opportunities. This thesis examines the impact of EI on opportunity processes, with a particular focus on how founding entrepreneurs evaluate and develop opportunities in the context of Jordan.

In this thesis, EI is conceptualised not as a purely cognitive foundation or as a direct behavioral trigger, but as a cognitive–motivational framework through which entrepreneurs interpret opportunity-related situations and orient their subsequent engagement. From an identity theory perspective, role identities provide self-meanings that guide how individuals interpret situations and select behaviors that are consistent with their understanding of who they are (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Accordingly, the cognitive role of EI concerns the way entrepreneurial self-meanings provide a frame of reference for attending to, interpreting, and assessing potential opportunities. This function is particularly relevant to OE, which involves subjective judgments concerning the attractiveness, feasibility, risks, and potential value of an opportunity (Scheaf et al., 2020). However, EI also has a motivational function because the importance attached to the entrepreneurial role can encourage commitment, persistence, and the investment of effort in identity-consistent activities (Murnieks et al., 2020). This motivational function is particularly relevant to OD, which requires sustained engagement in activities directed towards refining and advancing an opportunity (Shepherd et al., 2021).

This cognitive–motivational distinction is further reflected in the two dimensions of EI examined in this thesis. EIS can direct attention and interpretation towards opportunity-related information, providing the theoretical basis for expecting a particularly strong relationship with OE (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Phinney, 1992). EIC, in contrast, can provide a stronger motivational basis for commitment and sustained engagement, supporting the expected stronger relationship between EIC and OD (Murnieks et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the distinction is one of relative theoretical emphasis rather than an absolute separation: EIS may also motivate opportunity-development activities, while EIC may influence how opportunities are interpreted and evaluated.

2.3.2 Linking Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) to Opportunity Evaluation (OE)

Among the identifying characteristics that are relevant in an entrepreneurship development perspective, EIS manifests itself as a dynamic construct that reflects the opportunity within the invoked entrepreneurial identification (Crezee & Boogers, 2025; Murnieks et al., 2014). Salience accordingly displays the situational accessibility of a position identity and is formed by internal hierarchies of self and outside cues (Burke & Stets, 2021). Hence, if EI is quite salient in nature, there is a higher chance of judging even ambiguous or inadequate marketplace signals as being relevant to them; this would invoke both cognitive and emotional engagement in the process of evaluating an opportunity (Jarvis, 2016). In this sense, EIS capabilities provide a novel insight into the structure of identities, the role of conflicting identities in guiding behavior, and the implications of surrounding environments for entrepreneurs (Chattaraman et al., 2010).

Based on identity theory (Burke & Stets, 2024), the current thesis argues that individuals are motivated to evaluate opportunities in ways that confirm their core identity. Therefore, if EIS is active in the self-concept, entrepreneurs are more likely to appraise external situations through an opportunity-oriented lens, initiating OE. Furthermore, cognitive-entrepreneurial research supports this announcement. For instance, Mathias and Williams (2017) found that identity strongly influences how individuals frame opportunity-associated decisions. Likewise, Zhou et al. (2020) found that individuals with stronger EI develop more effective heuristics for evaluating challenge ideas. Nevertheless, these studies did not empirically separate EIS as an identity construct that prompts evaluation. Accordingly, clarifying how entrepreneurs' readiness to enact the identity links directly to the evaluation phase needs further attention.

This is further justified in this thesis by addressing calls for the nuances of EI to be better understood. Researchers such as Wagenschwanz (2021) and Newberry et al. (2018), among others, have criticized previous research for not treating EI in a disparate way, calling for studies to differentiate between definitional systems, including salience, and their implications for prediction. While OE has traditionally been framed as a rational judgment about merit and desire (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2021), there is a very real developing body of work recognizing this construct as intrinsically subjective and identity-based (Dimov, 2021; Wood & McKelvie, 2015). Therefore, OE is not really a response to the indicators of the target market; rather, it is, to some extent, determined by the entrepreneur's beliefs, values, and identity, which influence their hobbies and behavior (Oliver & Vough, 2020; McMullen et al., 2021).

The primary mechanism linking EIS to OE is selective attention and identity-consistent cognitive framing rather than motivation alone. Role Identity Theory suggests that when a role identity becomes salient, it is more likely to be activated as a relevant basis for interpreting the situation and guiding cognition (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Accordingly, when the entrepreneurial role is highly salient, founders are more likely to attend to information that is relevant to entrepreneurship and to interpret ambiguous market or environmental cues through an entrepreneurial frame. This does not imply that EIS automatically motivates opportunity pursuit or necessarily produces cognitive bias. Rather, salience increases the cognitive accessibility of the entrepreneurial role, making role-consistent information and meanings more influential in the subsequent evaluation of an opportunity. OE remains a separate judgment concerning the desirability, feasibility, risk, and potential value of that opportunity (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Scheaf et al., 2020).

EIS should also be distinguished from entrepreneurial alertness and opportunity recognition. EIS is an identity-based construct concerned with the cognitive prominence and activation of the entrepreneurial role within the self, whereas entrepreneurial alertness concerns an individual's sensitivity and attentiveness to information that may signal potential opportunities. Opportunity recognition, in turn, concerns identifying or perceiving the existence of a potential opportunity. Thus, EIS does not measure an entrepreneur's ability to detect opportunities or whether an opportunity has been recognized. Instead, it concerns whether the entrepreneurial role is sufficiently activated to provide a self-relevant interpretive frame through which opportunity-related information is subsequently evaluated. This necessitates a more thorough re-evaluation and analysis of the psychological and social factors, particularly EIS, which, however, lacks sufficient theoretical frameworks. Therefore, this thesis proposes the following hypothesis:

H1a: *Entrepreneurial identity salience (EIS) is positively related to opportunity evaluation (OE).*

2.3.3 Linking Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) to Opportunity Evaluation (OE)

EI is considered a psychological process that directs thinking and behavioral responses to specialised situations and forms the ground for personal identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). EI is linked to the self and serves as a reference point that guides entrepreneurs' behavior in the face of rejection of new ideas (Burke & Stets, 2022). As per identity theory, those with high centrality understanding are more concerned with supportive evidence, more motivated to verify their identity, and experience a greater emotional investment in identity-putting forward outcomes (Burke & Stets, 2022). The empirical evidence supports identity theory. For instance, senior managers with a high centrality understanding of EIC are more entrepreneurial in behavior by conducting more investigation and networking activities; thus, there is a greater knowledge required in assessing entrepreneurial opportunities (Zhu et al., 2024). This suggests that those with a strong EI experience mental processes and drive systems optimized in spotting entrepreneurial opportunities that confirm their identity. This indicates that when entrepreneurship dominates a person's identity, their mental processes and drive systems become optimized to detect and evaluate business prospects that validate their EI.

Hence, it has been determined that entrepreneurs with a high EIC demonstrate greater identification congruence while making enterprise judgments. This, in turn, complements their valuation methods (Wang et al., 2022). Similarly, identity aspirations, EIC structure, and social positivity are linked to the desire to relocate to the port and to agency valuation (Seibert et al., 2021). It is imperative to understand that EI and self-concept are significant to the capabilities of entrepreneurs while carrying out control-related responsibilities. Additionally, EIC score is important in making entrepreneurial conduct more predictable when faced with stress and anticipatory cognition (Smith et al., 2023). The above relates to entrepreneurs bearing additional resilience in opportunity-related decision processes when identity proves vital to self-concept, including adverse identification-triggering processes.

Entrepreneurs also create narratives surrounding opportunities where identity plays a fundamental role at the center of the narratives, hence defining the foundation for expertise and justifying the opportunities presented (Crosina, 2024). Therefore, the relationship between identity and narratives creates an effective framework for the legitimacy of the pursuit of the opportunities presented, at the same time strengthening the entrepreneur's dedication to the opportunities. Furthermore, evidence illustrates that high EIC correlates positively with entrepreneurial passion (Murnieks et al., 2014), proactivity (Liu et al., 2019), intrinsic motivation (Gielnik et al., 2017), and identity centrality-enhanced entrepreneurship-efficacy (Newbery et al., 2018), which are well-known predictors of favorable opportunity decisions. The existing literature provides robust theoretical and empirical justification for positing a positive relationship between EIC and OE. As such, centralizing entrepreneurship within one's identity framework heightens sensitivity to opportunity-related cues, facilitates more favorable evaluations of entrepreneurial opportunities, and reinforces the cognitive and emotional commitment necessary to pursue entrepreneurial action.

The identity-verification mechanism underlying the proposed EIC–OE relationship does not necessarily imply that highly central entrepreneurial identities produce more accurate or objectively superior OEs. When entrepreneurship occupies an important position within the self-concept, founders may give greater attention and weight to information that is consistent with their entrepreneurial self-meanings and may evaluate opportunities partly in terms of their compatibility with that identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020). This provides the theoretical basis for expecting a positive relationship between EIC and OE. However, the same identity-congruent processing may also potentially create challenges. Strong attachment to the entrepreneurial role could reduce sensitivity to identity-incongruent or negative information and may therefore contribute to overly favourable judgments of opportunities that objectively possess weaknesses. Accordingly, the hypothesized positive relationship refers to the strength or favourability of OE rather than to its objective accuracy.

The present hypothesis does not directly test confirmation bias or evaluation accuracy. The possibility of identity-driven bias is therefore treated as a theoretical boundary to the proposed positive relationship rather than as an alternative effect tested in this study. Thus, EIC is expected to strengthen identity-consistent OE, but the thesis does not assume that stronger identity-consistent evaluation is necessarily more objectively accurate. Therefore, this thesis advances the following:

H1b*: Entrepreneurial identity centrality (EIC) is positively related to opportunity evaluation (OE).*

The reviewed literature thus far establishes a theoretical grounding for the development of the hypotheses that follow in this thesis. Identity and role identity theory were rooted in the work of Stryker & Burke (2000) and Cheng et al. (2021). The argument suggests that when identity occupies a central position in the self-concept, entrepreneurs apply cognitive and affective resources to make decisions about the opportunity. The prior researchers combine synthesized information from identification theory alongside newly found empirical support (Slade-Shantz et al., 2017; Zhu et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022), creating a complex analysis of EIC, in which it not only enhances attentiveness to opportunities but also enhances commitment and persistence in evaluating an entrepreneurial idea, engaging narrative constructing, creating alignment, and evoking emotional resonance, primarily through entrepreneurial passion and self-efficacy (Murnieks et al., 2014; Gielnik et al., 2017). However, the literature could benefit from deeper engagement with alternative approaches, such as where potential identity inflexibility or over-commitment may interfere with OE. Nevertheless, the overall analysis is broad, ideologically consistent, and analytically motivated, making a suggested case for EIC as a central antecedent of OE.

2.3.4 Linking Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Opportunity Development (OD)

EIS determines the cognitive resources that entrepreneurs allocate to understanding the opportunity; it is supposed to influence the development process (Jarvis, 2016). Furthermore, entrepreneurs with high salience have been found to pay greater attention to entrepreneurial responsibilities and show greater endurance in entrepreneurial activities (Humphreys & Sui, 2015). The salience of identity is also intrinsically tied to affective commitment and situational responsiveness (Ashforth & Johnson, 2014); both can be binding for OD. Hence, entrepreneurs who experience overwhelming identity salience tend to demonstrate advanced cognitive abilities. Entrepreneurs use their advanced mental skills to create new solutions that help them handle changing situations (Thoits, 2020). Moreover, recent research shows that these people display heightened awareness of environmental changes because they use response loops to manage their organizations (Karami et al., 2023). The entrepreneurs whom we study maintain an ongoing focus on their entrepreneurial responsibilities, which enables them to respond to market changes while they create new knowledge and develop the rational adaptability they need for ongoing organizational development (Tabares et al., 2021).

Regardless, while EIS improves engagement with opportunities, scholars have suggested that greater attention should be given to its influence in later entrepreneurial opportunity stages (Kettle, 2019; Capitano et al., 2017). OD, especially in its advanced stages, may require additional factors such as resource-collection skills, strategic foresight, commitment to external input, and potentially modeling the direct effect of EIS (Snihur et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2016). Still, activating EIS is a vital precursor that may inspire the development process to meet market needs.

Although EIS may be particularly relevant during earlier opportunity-related judgments, its influence is not necessarily confined to the initial stages of the opportunity process. OD is iterative rather than a single later-stage event and requires founders to repeatedly interpret feedback, interact with stakeholders, refine ideas, and make development-related decisions (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Shepherd et al., 2021). Such situations can reactivate the entrepreneurial role, making a salient EI relevant to continued developmental engagement. Role Identity Theory suggests that when a role identity becomes salient in a particular situation, it is more likely to guide role-consistent cognition and behavior (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Therefore, higher EIS is expected to be positively associated with OD because repeated activation of the entrepreneurial role can support attention to, and engagement with, activities that advance the opportunity.

However, this hypothesis does not imply that EIS should be equally influential across all stages of OD or that its relationship with OD should be as strong as that of EIC. Because EIS is more context-sensitive, its influence may depend on the extent to which development situations activate the entrepreneurial role, whereas EIC may provide a more enduring basis for sustained commitment over time. H2a therefore predicts the direction of the direct relationship between EIS and OD rather than making a comparative claim about its strength relative to EIC. Thus, EIS can catalyze the OD process by promoting continuous cognitive connection, flexibility in various situations, and adaptive behavior. Accordingly, this thesis posits the following hypothesis:

H2a: *Entrepreneurial identity salience (EIS) is positively related to opportunity development (OD).*

2.3.5 Linking Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) and Opportunity Development (OD)

The identity that plays a significant role in an individual's self-definition exerts a strong influence on ongoing development (Settles, 2020). Therefore, because centrality connects positively with self-definition, this makes EIC a theoretically manageable base for OD (Bao et al., 2017). This meaning could be through a long-term period association with how to deal with complex and indistinct obligations (Vahlne, 2020). Therefore, EIC has been found to facilitate cognitive energy and emotional flexibility that act as motivating forces to navigate the apprehension and repetition that mark OD (Clausen, 2020).

Furthermore, identity theory implies that centrality identity acts as a guideline in generating emotions in entrepreneurs, thus influencing their perception of stimuli and their priorities (Nevis & Ozbek, 2016) (Nevis & Ozbek, 2016). Thus, it is considerably more likely that entrepreneurs with excessive EIC interpret challenges and fallacies in OD as essential to their entrepreneurial activities (Burke & Stets, 2022). This explanatory lens enhances an entrepreneur's ability and encourages the apprehension of surrounding situations through continuous intention for new idea development (York et al., 2024). This is consistent with the idea that entrepreneurs with a high level of EIC have a psychological commitment to their undertakings, thereby fuelling their zeal to identify opportunities to act on them (Shepherd et al., 2023). This psychological commitment to opportunities is further anticipated to create potential for engaging in or understanding entrepreneurs, thus supporting further enhancement in complexity in OD approaches (Kakouris et al., 2025; Bamberger et al., 2015).

It is also noteworthy that EIC enhances entrepreneurs' ability to mobilize social capital, as highly central identities increase the prospect of network activation and resource leveraging for venture development (Karami & Liñán, 2022). Furthermore, EIC is more inclined to utilize market feedback as well as external sources of information, thus facilitating the refinement as well as actualization of an opportunity more successfully (Alsos et al., 2019). Role identity theory is critical in the domain labeled as entrepreneurial since it is an inherent aspect of an individual's overarching identity structure and cognition (Bui et al., 2025; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). The flexible aspects of recognition of entrepreneurship include general forms of centrality or hierarchic significance assigned to the role of an entrepreneur in other forms of personal constructs of identity (Stevenson et al., 2024). This theoretical framing suggests that entrepreneurs with high EIC are more likely to demonstrate sustained involvement in entrepreneurial processes, especially in evolving domains of OD. Consequently, within the logic of role identity theory, identity centrality serves as an internal regulatory mechanism, shaping what individuals do and how they do it, continuously and beneficially (Stets & Burke, 2025). As a result, EIC is presented to increase the firmness of OD, meaning entrepreneurs have more plans and resources to shape viable market services. By synthesizing understanding from both role identity theory and entrepreneurship literacy, it can theoretically be argued that entrepreneurs whose roles are central to their identity may possibly allow for greater involvement in OD activities.

The proposed positive relationship between EIC and OD should not be interpreted as implying that increasing identity centrality is beneficial without limit. The enduring importance of the entrepreneurial role can provide the commitment and persistence required to remain engaged in the iterative activities of OD. However, this same mechanism may become maladaptive when EI becomes excessively central or rigid. Strong identification with the entrepreneurial role may make disengagement from an opportunity psychologically threatening because abandoning the opportunity can be experienced as inconsistent with the entrepreneur's self-definition. Consequently, excessive identity centrality may contribute to prolonged involvement in poorly performing initiatives, resistance to negative feedback, or escalation of commitment to failing opportunities (Powell & Baker, 2014; Baker & Powell, 2020; Mmbaga et al., 2020). In this context, it is proposed that:

H2b: *Entrepreneurial identity centrality (EIC) is positively related to opportunity development (OD).*

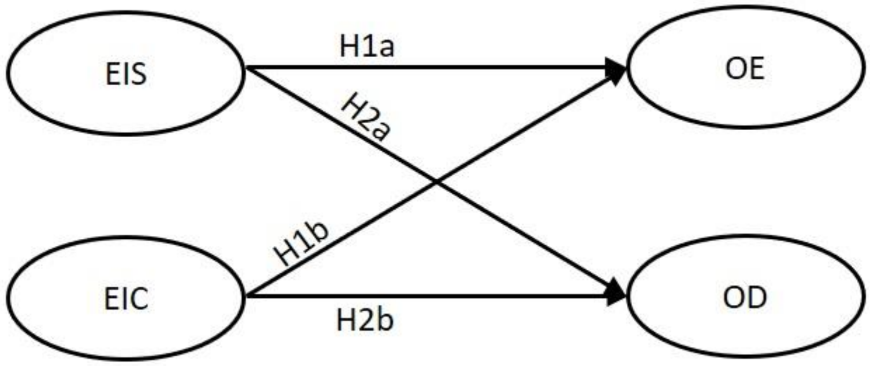
H2b nevertheless specifies a positive linear relationship because the present study examines the general association between EIC and engagement in OD rather than the optimal level of identity centrality or the quality of the opportunity being developed. The model does not include a quadratic term capable of testing whether the relationship becomes weaker or negative at very high levels of EIC. The possibility of such a curvilinear relationship therefore represents an important theoretical boundary to H2b rather than an effect tested in the present study.

Although OE and OD are conceptually connected, this thesis does not assume a strictly linear sequence in which identity influences OD only through prior OE. OE concerns judgments regarding the desirability, feasibility, risk, and potential value of an opportunity, whereas OD concerns the subsequent activities through which an opportunity is refined, adapted, and advanced (Wood & McKelvie, 2015; Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). In practice, these processes may be iterative rather than strictly sequential, because developmental activities can generate new information and feedback that lead entrepreneurs to reassess the opportunity. Accordingly, OE and OD are treated as distinct but interconnected opportunity processes rather than as fixed stages in a single causal chain.

The direct-effects structure of the model reflects the theoretical objective of examining whether different properties of EI are independently associated with these two opportunity processes. EIS is expected to be particularly relevant to OE because situational identity activation can shape attention and interpretation during judgment, whereas EIC may be particularly relevant to OD because the enduring importance of the entrepreneurial role can support sustained engagement and commitment (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2020). However, these are relative theoretical emphases rather than exclusive pathways: EIS may also influence developmental engagement, and EIC may also shape evaluation. A mediation model in which OE transmits the effects of EIS or EIC to OD would therefore constitute a distinct process hypothesis that was not specified or tested in the present study.

Figure 2.2 represents the thesis conceptual model 1 (direct effect model): The Impact of Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) on Opportunity Evaluation (OE) and Opportunity Development (OD). The independent, dependent, and proposed hypotheses for this model are displayed below.

Figure 2.2: *The Conceptual Model 1(direct relationships) and Hypotheses*



The two constructs, namely, EIS and EIC, need to be examined separately, as they reveal different theoretical facets of identity, which in their own ways impact business startup success. Whereas centrality plays an important role in the individual's overall identity structure, it is about the importance of being an entrepreneur to who one is across time and situations (Harrod & Serpe, 2023). Salience, on the other hand, reflects the situational prominence of that identity, or the likelihood that it will be activated in context (Burke, 2023). Both of these factors are also seen as having impacts on opportunities-related behavior, but they do so in different ways. Indeed, EIS operates as a direct influencer of vigilant attention and responsibility in decision contexts, as in OE. At the same time, EIC can be more predictive of ongoing, even strategic, identification in identity-consistent contexts, as in OD. In this way, distinguishing between EIC and EIS also helps clarify constructs and, in turn, can provide a more nuanced understanding of ongoing identity and identity in context effects on entrepreneurship.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence (EmI) as a Moderator

EmI broadly refers to an individual's capacity to perceive and understand emotional information and to regulate and use emotions effectively in judgment, interaction, and action (Goleman, 2013; Fteiha & Awwad, 2020; Mayer et al., 2024). Rather than referring simply to the experience of positive or negative emotions, EmI concerns how individuals recognize and manage emotional information in themselves and others. This distinction is important because emotions can influence attention, interpretation, interpersonal interaction, and decision-making, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and stress. EmI therefore represents an emotional capability that can shape how individuals respond to situations rather than merely describing their emotional state.

Different conceptual approaches to EmI exist, but this thesis adopts Goleman's framework because of its emphasis on emotional competencies relevant to behavior and interpersonal functioning. Within this framework, EmI comprises five interrelated dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman et al., 2001; Goleman, 2013). Self-awareness concerns the ability to recognize one's emotional states and their implications; self-regulation concerns managing emotions so that they do not overwhelm judgment or behavior; and self-motivation reflects the capacity to maintain goal-directed effort. Empathy extends emotional awareness to the emotions and reactions of others, while social skills concern the ability to manage interpersonal relationships effectively. Together, these aspects capture both intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of emotional functioning rather than reducing EmI to emotional control alone (Boyatzis et al., 2015; Goleman, 2019).

EmI is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship because entrepreneurial activity frequently takes place under uncertainty, ambiguity, resource pressure, and the possibility of failure. Such conditions generate emotional responses that can influence how entrepreneurs interpret information and maintain engagement with entrepreneurial activities (Chien-Chi et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022). The different dimensions of EmI may consequently support different aspects of entrepreneurial functioning. Self-awareness can help entrepreneurs recognize how their own emotional states influence judgment, while self-regulation can prevent strong affective reactions from overwhelming decision-making. Self-motivation can support persistence toward entrepreneurial goals, whereas empathy and social skills facilitate interaction with stakeholders, teams, and networks (Han et al., 2020; Emami et al., 2021; Nielsen & Klyver, 2020). EmI is therefore relevant not only to how entrepreneurs feel but also to how effectively they interpret, regulate, and respond to emotionally demanding entrepreneurial situations.

This relevance becomes particularly apparent in OE and OD. OE requires entrepreneurs to make judgments about potential gains, risk, feasibility, and desirability under conditions in which information may be incomplete and outcomes uncertain. Emotional awareness and regulation can therefore influence how entrepreneurs interpret risk, feedback, and their own affective reactions during evaluation. OD, by contrast, requires continued interaction, adaptation, persistence, and engagement with other actors as an opportunity is progressively refined. Empathy, social skills, emotional regulation, and motivation may consequently become important in sustaining collaboration and adaptive action during this process (Caruso et al., 2019; Emami et al., 2021). EmI is therefore theoretically relevant across both OE and OD, although the way in which it operates may differ according to the demands of each process.

Importantly, the present thesis does not conceptualize EmI as another dimension of EI. EI and EmI perform theoretically distinct functions. EI concerns the self-meanings associated with being an entrepreneur and provides identity-based direction and motivation, whereas EmI concerns the capacity to perceive, understand, and regulate emotional information during the enactment of that identity. In this sense, EI can influence what is personally meaningful and motivating, while EmI can influence how that identity-based motivation is emotionally managed and expressed in judgment and action. This distinction provides the theoretical basis for positioning EmI as a moderator of the relationships between EIS/EIC and OE/OD rather than treating it as part of EI itself. This identity-based foundation is primarily cognitive in its proposed influence on opportunity interpretation and judgment, but it is not affectively neutral. Since entrepreneurial roles carry personal meaning and importance, their activation may also involve emotional responses and self-relevant feelings. However, the present thesis does not conceptualize EI itself as an emotional capability. Rather, emotional functioning is represented separately through EmI, which is proposed to regulate how identity-based cognition is translated into OE and development. Accordingly, the hypotheses distinguish the direct relationships of EIS and EIC with OE and OD from the moderating role of EmI in these relationships. The following sections develop this moderating role across the four identity–opportunity relationships.

EmI was selected because OE and OD occur under conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, risk, and interpersonal interaction. EmI influences how entrepreneurs perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions when making decisions. Therefore, it is theoretically well positioned to strengthen or weaken the extent to which EI is translated into opportunity-related behavior. While constructs such as self-efficacy, passion, and resilience are important, they do not directly address emotional processing, which was the specific focus of this study. EI provides motivation and self-definition, but identity alone may not be sufficient for effective OE and development. Entrepreneurs must also manage uncertainty, setbacks, interpersonal relationships, and emotional responses. EmI therefore functions as a boundary condition that influences how effectively EI is translated into entrepreneurial action.

This thesis conceptualizes EmI as a moderator rather than a mediator. This distinction is theoretically important because mediation and moderation imply fundamentally different causal mechanisms. A mediating variable explains how or why an independent variable influences an outcome, whereas a moderating variable explains when, under what conditions, or to what extent such an influence occurs (Hayes, 2024). Within the present theoretical framework, EIS and EIC are viewed as identity-based motivational structures that shape entrepreneurial cognition and behavior. EmI is not theorized as an outcome of EI. Rather, it represents a relatively stable capability that enables individuals to perceive, regulate, and utilize emotions effectively in uncertain and emotionally demanding environments (Mayer et al., 2024; Goleman et al., 2013). Consequently, EmI does not explain the transmission of EI into OE and OD. Instead, it may influence the effectiveness with which identity-based motivations are translated into opportunity-related judgments and actions.

Entrepreneurs possessing similar levels of EI may therefore differ substantially in their OE and development behaviors depending on their EmI. For example, two entrepreneurs with equally strong identity salience may differ in OE quality depending on their emotional regulation and perception abilities. In this sense, EmI can operate as an influential factor that strengthens, weakens, or redirects the influence of EI under emotionally demanding circumstances. This perspective is particularly relevant in entrepreneurship because OE and development frequently involve uncertainty, ambiguity, risk, and potential failure. EmI may therefore affect the expression of EI rather than serving as a mechanism through which EI itself is formed or transmitted.

2.4.1 EmI as a Catalyst of Identity-Salience in Opportunity Evaluation

OE includes assessing the feasibility and the cost of the perceived possibility (Healey et al., 2021). This procedure has cognitive deliberations and emotional judgment, which includes chance evaluation, envisioning ability outcomes, and aligning the opportunity with private and social values (Zettel & Garrett, 2023). Entrepreneurs who possess high EIS will probably pursue OE activities because their identity-based motivation drives them to do so (Thoits, 2020). However, their ability to evaluate effectively depends on how well they regulate their affective states.

Entrepreneurs with excessive EmI are better geared up to navigate emotionally charged critiques, as they can screen their internal states and decrease biases such as over-optimism, fear of failure, or emotional inertia (Busari, 2025; Idris, 2023). According to Tomkins (2014), emotional instances influence an idea. They provide heuristic cues that shape how people method data. Thus, in identity salience, they can shape evaluation judgments either by distorting them or by clarifying them, depending upon one's ability to harness the power of emotions, i.e., emotional principles. Accordingly, EmI can enhance the EIS-OE relationship by matching emotions and reason, hence allowing entrepreneurs to behave consonantly, either by enhancing the relationship or by distorting it. Rachmad (2018) determined that entrepreneurs with high emotional recognition and law were significantly more accurate in assessing market conditions and in making decisions about opportunities. Similarly, the incorporation of elements of emotions in strategic thinking, an attribute of excessive EmI, shall serve as a guide for the entrepreneur in understanding ambiguous cues, uncovering promising trends, and instilling confidence in exploring opportunities (Idris, 2023). Accordingly, this thesis proposes:

H3a: *Emotional Intelligence (EmI) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Opportunity Evaluation (OE), such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of EmI.*

An important strength of EmI arises as it is viewed as a corrective mechanism, thus reducing cognitive distortions (e.g., overconfidence, affective bias) that may arise when EIS is high. However, a limitation of this, in theory, is the linear form of the potential moderating effect considered, and an exploration of the potential 'threshold' effects of too much salience, together with high EmI, resulting in over-identification and consequent biased outcomes, is untested. Moreover, although this argument is grounded in psychological and entrepreneurial cognition traditions, it is conceived that an incorporation of behavioral strategy research in relation to the effects of emotion-driven decisions in the formation of entrepreneurial heuristics is advisable (Gilbert-Saad et al., 2023). Nonetheless, this section is beneficial in providing an explanation of EmI as a boundary condition in EIS, resulting in more balanced outcomes in terms of OE.

2.4.2 EmI as a Catalyst of Identity-Salience in Opportunity Development

The self-concept of entrepreneurs with high EIS drives them to focus on development tasks, such as economic growth and solving societal challenges, because it helps them validate their identity and achieve identity congruence. At this stage, the procedure of self-verification for the entrepreneur becomes poor when being confronted by emotional challenges, setbacks, and insecurity, because identification-motivated persistence will fail to support adequately (Bénabou & Henkel, 2025). Thus, entrepreneurs who lack adequate emotional resources may develop cognitive rigidity and burnout and experience misidentification when their results fail to align with their expected identity.

The affective and relational aspects of EmI enable entrepreneurs to maintain their effort and adaptability throughout the OD process. The ability to regulate emotions during high-pressure situations, maintain empathetic communication with stakeholders, and stay motivated through uncertain times with multiple failures (Caruso et al., 2019; Goleman, 2019). The EmI, which impacts entrepreneurs, can escalate in its role as OD progresses in its stages of helping with conceptual development to assist with investments. For instance, in helping with conceptual development, EmI impacts entrepreneurs by helping them interpret interactions in a positive manner, especially in keeping in line with flexibility with other individuals (Santos de Souza & Chimenti, 2024). Therefore, it can be established that each emotionally intelligent entrepreneur has used their empathetic skills in creating trust with other individuals, especially in keeping with collaborations.

Furthermore, EmI has been found to allow for cognitive reassessment and psychological balance. Therefore, when a development plan isn't going well, EmI helps the entrepreneur accept this constructively and move toward alternative plans while identifying gaps and working to address them (Caruso et al., 2019). EmI came up with the intervention that functions as the programmatic motivation for the entrepreneur for transforming EIS from a motivator into a permanent adaptive system that works to help improve the entrepreneurs, whose failures guide them instead of becoming obstacles. Such an ability to control emotions and understand the emotional states of others will yield social validation, as the team members become more bonded. In turn, the application of OD will yield higher performance through endurance. Therefore, the high EIS and high EmI could produce an effective balance to enhance the development process.

Entrepreneurs high in both constructs are motivated to act and emotionally equipped to sustain and adjust their actions over time. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is posited:

H3b. *Emotional Intelligence (EmI) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Opportunity Development (OD), such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of EmI.*

Although it is true that the existing literature adds to the general importance of EmI within the context of entrepreneurships, such as Bénabou and Henkel (2025) and Goleman (2019), research that specifically explores how the three constructs of EIS, EmI, and OD interact requires further research. A think that the concept has been developed by integrating two theoretical perspectives: the identity theory, which focuses on affective regulation, and EmI, identified as a dynamic moderator that facilitates continuous opportunity enactment across various phases of the entrepreneurial process.

2.4.3 EmI as a Catalyst of Identity-Centrality in Opportunity Evaluation

EIC shows the extent to which the entrepreneurial position is integrated into a character's self-concept and influences their wandering and movements (Murnieks et al., 2014). Entrepreneurs with high EIC are more likely to be encouraged to pursue opportunities that reflect and strengthen their core identity (Schwandt, 2020). However, the associated emotional depth within EIC can also lead to cognitive biases, overconfidence, confirmation bias, or escalating dedication, while opportunities intently align with self-defining values (Clausen, 2020). EmI offers the regulatory ability to manipulate this identity-influenced engagement. The promotion of emotional self-acknowledgement, coupled with cognition reappraisal, by the EmI creates room for the entrepreneur to be able to distinguish between emotions and evaluative thoughts, thereby promoting objectivity with the help of its judgment capabilities (Ellsworth, 2024).

Additionally, EmI improves the connection between identification wishes and opportunity characteristics by ensuring that reviews are reasonable and logical sounding (Pekaar et al., 2020). Thus, entrepreneurs who score well on both EIC and EmI are more likely to be increasingly ready to engage in rational identification-consistent opportunity checks. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4a. *Emotional Intelligence (EmI) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) and Opportunity Evaluation (OE), such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of EmI.*

The current section positions EmI as a key facilitator in translating EIC into an extra effective opportunity evaluation. It efficiently identifies conceptual anxiety: at the same time as EIC increases commitment and motivation, it can additionally result in tension and cognitive bias. EmI is provided as the mechanism that moderates these issues, for instance, by enhancing self-awareness and emotional regulation. Its main contribution is recognizing emotional overinvestment as a potential downside of central identity, an insight that is less often addressed in the EI literature (Clausen, 2020). However, one sizable problem is the untested assumption that EmI is consistently improving rational doubt. For instance, Kumar and Chaurasia (2024) suggested that high EmI at times leads to higher confirmation biases when emotional involvement is at a high level. Furthermore, the argument can be improved by incorporating dual-process theories to explain how EmI manages fast versus slow evaluative decisions related to central identity.

2.4.4 EmI as a Buffer in Centrality-Driven Opportunity Development

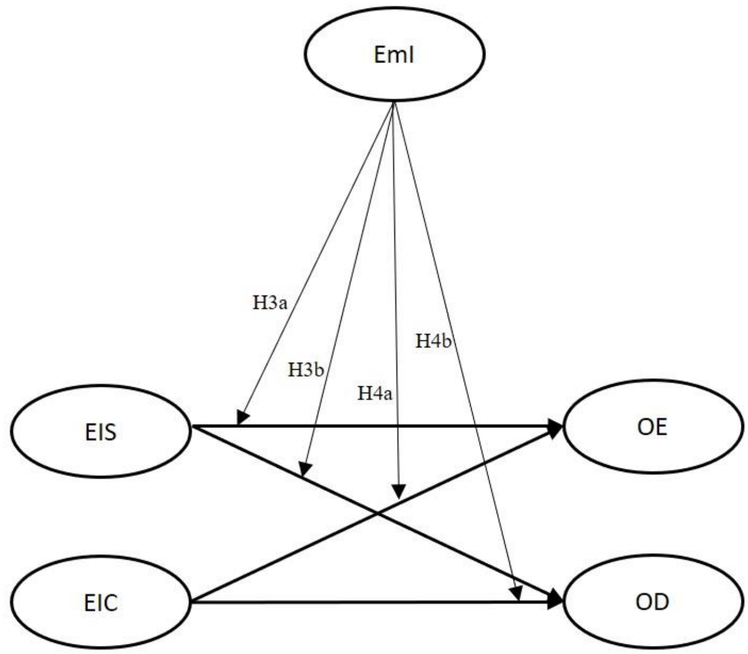
It can be inferred that, apart from taking risks, which entrepreneurs with high EIC tend to avoid, other risks, such as over-commitment to their vision and a reluctance to accept necessary variation or input, may also be present in entrepreneurs with high EIC (Afsar et al., 2020). Thus, to overcome all these risks, EmI undertakes activities like enhancing cognitive flexibility, encouraging open conversation, and helping to reflect (Antonopoulou, 2024). For instance, by developing their ability to reinterpret emotionally threatening information constructively, entrepreneurs with high EmI can recast their development initiatives, which in turn can preserve their team’s morale (Shabanishad et al., 2019). The activities of EmI can thereby activate all relevant aspects in relation to developing OD, like coalition-building, developing coalitions, and resolving conflict (Huy & Scheef, 2019). All these activities by EmI can help entrepreneurs with high EIC successfully navigate their business path, as their stakes in their businesses will always be extremely high and can be affected by unstable moods, which can, in turn, affect their motivational urge, which will come with their central identity. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is posited:

H4b. *Emotional Intelligence (EmI) positively moderates the relationship between Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) and Opportunity Development (OD), such that the relationship is stronger at higher levels of EmI.*

The argument's strength is rooted in its challenge to EIC not just as a motivational factor but as a source of cognition when used by entrepreneurs to equate mission identification with their personal worth. The existence of EmI is posited on its use as a means for maintaining regularities of its association with EIC, which is critical for iterative OD.

The suggested hypotheses (H3a–H4b) treat EmI as an evolving moderator in the process by which salient and centrality identity orientations are transformed by entrepreneurial recyclers into opportunities for entrepreneurship development. While EIS upgrades drive the appraisal and development of opportunities in accordance with an individual’s self-concept, EIC facilitates the continuous involvement and responsibility with opportunities. Nonetheless, without emotional ordinance, each construct may lead to cognitive biases, over-identity, or pressure effects. The theoretically proposed concept delivers emotional clarity that assists in the enthralling of opportunistic thinking and behavioral development from identity-driven inclinations. The theoretical proposal or concept enhances the practical expression of identity during both phases of evaluation and development by fostering emotional awareness, empathy, and constructive feedback processing. In this way, it is expected that EmI will not only amplify the motivational power of EIS but also the behavioral persistence associated with EIC, thereby acting as a psychological catalyst that assists in sustaining opportunity pursuit in the light of uncertainty. Figure 2.3 illustrates the overall structural design of Model 2.

Figure 2.3: *The Conceptual Model 2 (moderated model) and Hypotheses*



2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning the study and established the conceptual foundation for examining the relationships between entrepreneurial identity, opportunity evaluation (OE), opportunity development (OD), and emotional intelligence (EmI). Drawing primarily on Role Identity Theory, the chapter explained how individuals internalize role-related meanings and expectations as part of their self-concept and how these identities subsequently influence cognition and behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Within the entrepreneurial context, identity provides an important basis for understanding how entrepreneurs interpret their roles and engage in entrepreneurial activities (Murnieks et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

A central distinction developed in this chapter was between Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) and Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC). Although both reflect the incorporation of the entrepreneurial role into the self-concept, they capture different aspects of identity functioning. EIS concerns the prominence and activation of the entrepreneurial role relative to other identities, whereas EIC reflects the enduring importance of entrepreneurship to an individual's self-definition (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2020). Maintaining this distinction provides the theoretical basis for examining whether these two dimensions of EI relate differently to opportunity-related activities.

The chapter further distinguished between OE and OD as related but conceptually distinct components of the entrepreneurial opportunity process. OE involves entrepreneurs' subjective judgments concerning the attractiveness, desirability, feasibility, potential gains, and potential losses associated with an opportunity (Scheaf et al., 2020). OD, in contrast, involves the actions and interactions through which an initially perceived opportunity is refined, elaborated, and developed over time, including engagement with relevant stakeholders and the incorporation of feedback (Shepherd et al., 2021). This distinction is important because evaluating an opportunity and actively developing it may require different forms of identity-based motivation, cognition, and behavioral commitment.

EmI was subsequently incorporated into the framework to account for the emotional processes that may shape how EI is translated into opportunity-related judgments and actions. Rather than being positioned as an alternative source of EI, EmI is conceptualized as a moderating capability that may alter the strength of the relationships between EIS and EIC and the two opportunity processes. This perspective recognizes that entrepreneurial decision-making involves interactions between cognitive, identity-based, and emotional processes, particularly under conditions of uncertainty (Goleman, 2013).

Building on these theoretical arguments, the chapter developed hypotheses concerning the direct relationships of EIS and EIC with OE and OD and the moderating role of EmI in these relationships. Collectively, the literature reviewed in this chapter establishes the theoretical rationale for the study's conceptual model and provides the foundation for its empirical examination. Having established the theoretical framework, constructs, and proposed relationships, Chapter 3 explains the methodological approach adopted to operationalize these constructs, collect data from founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, and empirically test the proposed hypotheses.

3. Methods

3.1 The Population of Examination

This thesis focuses on founder-entrepreneurs in Jordan, who are characterized in this context not only as financial actors but also as identity-driven entrepreneurs who adapt, innovate, and assert themselves in the face of social, financial, and institutional obstacles (Al-Weshah et al., 2022). An entrepreneur is a dynamic actor whose role is not limited to a narrow scope but encompasses an ongoing process of setting and formulating goals (Huarng & Yu, 2021). The study of founder entrepreneurs provides researchers with a unique and theoretically valuable field to investigate how EI influences the process of opportunity (Ozasir Kacar et al., 2023). This thesis adopts Shepherd et al.'s (2021) definition of founder-entrepreneurs as individuals who initiated and managed their own ventures while retaining strategic and operational responsibility. These entrepreneurs differ fundamentally from business owners and managers who inherited or bought existing businesses, and from budding entrepreneurs who have not yet started running their businesses (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022).

This population was selected for three reasons. First, founding entrepreneurs have considerable autonomy and are subsequently required to take full responsibility for their actions. This means that their outlook simultaneously reflects the salience and centrality of identity (Watts & Halkovic, 2022). Second, these entrepreneurs enjoy increased mental ownership and emotional attachment to their enterprise. The founding entrepreneurs' sense of rational ownership, which can be explained by a greater sense of self-function overlap, including EI as a fundamental element, is a significant factor (Zhu et al., 2024). Third, founders implant their experienced personal values in their groups' strategic direction and subculture, providing a unique context for observing how personal identity concerns collective outcomes (Murnieks et al., 2020).

This thesis conceptualizes EI as a founder identity (Wagenschwanz, 2021), thus capturing the self-definition that motivates opportunity finding and venture development. This provided a clear delineation to explain the limits of the construct being studied. The broad theoretical foundation was discussed in Chapter 2. Consequently, this chapter outlines the sampling logic, inclusion criteria, and empirical relevance of founder entrepreneurs within the Jordanian entrepreneurial system.

The exclusive focus on founder-entrepreneurs provides theoretical consistency with the identity-based focus of this thesis, but it also limits the generalizability of the findings to other entrepreneurial populations. EI may operate differently among nascent entrepreneurs, whose EI may still represent a developing or possible future self, and among managers or non-founder business owners, whose opportunity-related decisions may be shaped by organizational roles and constraints rather than by founder identity (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022). Therefore, the relationships identified in this study should primarily be interpreted within the context of established founder-entrepreneurs.

3.2 Thesis Context – The Resource-Limited Environment of Jordan

Jordan provides a distinctive empirical and theoretical context for studying identity-driven entrepreneurship. The country has a population of approximately 11 million and, despite its relative political and social stability within a region characterized by considerable uncertainty, continues to face significant economic and labour-market constraints. Unemployment represents one of the most persistent challenges, particularly among younger people and university graduates, for whom educational attainment does not necessarily translate into sufficient employment opportunities. Unemployment reached 22.6% in the third quarter of 2025, with particularly important implications for the economic participation of women (World Bank, 2026). Jordan also hosts approximately 1.3 million Syrians, representing a substantial proportion of its population and contributing additional pressures on employment opportunities, public services, infrastructure, and other limited national resources (USAID, 2023).

These conditions provide an important background for understanding entrepreneurship in Jordan. Recent evidence from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) indicates substantial entrepreneurial activity within the country. In 2024, approximately one-fifth of adults were involved in Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA), representing a substantial increase in entrepreneurial participation. At the same time, established business ownership remained considerably lower, highlighting the continuing challenges associated with moving from venture creation to longer-term business sustainability (GEM, 2025). These patterns suggest that entrepreneurship constitutes an important component of Jordan's economic environment while also demonstrating the difficulties entrepreneurs face in sustaining their ventures under constrained conditions. Precise statistics on the number of founder entrepreneurs are not readily available because national statistics typically measure registered enterprises, business ownership, self-employment, or entrepreneurial activity rather than founders as defined in the present study. Consequently, these indicators provide contextual evidence of the scale of entrepreneurial activity but should not be interpreted as an estimate of the specific founder population examined in this thesis.

3.2.1 Socio-Economic Constraints and Entrepreneurial Necessity

Within this economic environment, entrepreneurship represents an important pathway for individuals seeking to generate income and employment when conventional employment opportunities are limited. This is particularly relevant to younger and underemployed individuals, for whom venture creation can provide an alternative route towards economic independence and professional development (Shymko & Khoury, 2023). The economic role of entrepreneurship can also intersect with identity formation because creating and leading a venture may become associated with independence, resilience, responsibility, and an individual's understanding of their role within society (Refai et al., 2018).

The importance of economic necessity is also reflected in recent evidence on entrepreneurial motivation in Jordan. A substantial proportion of individuals engaged in entrepreneurship report earning a living because jobs are scarce as an important motivation for starting a business (GEM, 2025). Entrepreneurship in this context should therefore not be interpreted exclusively as opportunity-driven venture creation; it may also represent a response to labour-market constraints and economic uncertainty. This distinction is particularly relevant to the present thesis because entrepreneurs operating under similar resource constraints may nevertheless differ in how they perceive, evaluate, and develop potential opportunities.

Consistent with Shepherd and Williams (2020) and Zahra (2022), socio-economic adversity in emerging-market contexts may influence the cognitive and emotional processes underlying entrepreneurial behavior. In Jordan, therefore, resource limitations provide more than an economic background to entrepreneurship. They create an environment in which entrepreneurs must make decisions under uncertainty and constrained access to resources. This makes Jordan theoretically relevant for examining whether the salience and centrality of EI are associated with OE and OD and whether EmI conditions these relationships.

3.2.2 Institutional Ecosystem and Policy Initiatives

Throughout time constraints, Jordan has developed an increasingly visible institutional ecosystem intended to support entrepreneurship and innovation. Initiatives involving the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, Oasis500, the Queen Rania Center for Entrepreneurship, and the Zain Innovation Platform (ZINC) reflect efforts to establish entrepreneurship as an important component of national economic development (Jarrar, 2022). Such initiatives provide different combinations of financing, mentoring, training, networking, and incubation and contribute to broader policy objectives relating to employment generation, youth participation, women's economic inclusion, and sustainable development (USAID, 2023).

Recent evidence nevertheless suggests that the entrepreneurial ecosystem continues to face important structural challenges. Access to finance, venture capital, and other resources remains difficult for many entrepreneurs, while attitudes towards risk and failure can constrain entrepreneurial activity (Mirkovski et al., 2024; Khan, 2022). The coexistence of institutional support and persistent resource constraints makes Jordan particularly relevant to the present study. Entrepreneurs must navigate both emerging opportunities and structural limitations, increasing the importance of understanding the individual-level cognitive, identity, and emotional processes through which opportunities are evaluated and subsequently developed.

3.2.3 Cultural, Religious, and Gender Context

Entrepreneurship in Jordan is also embedded within a broader Arab social and cultural environment in which family relationships, social networks, reputation, and community expectations can influence individual choices and behavior. Entrepreneurial decisions may therefore extend beyond individual economic objectives to involve considerations of family responsibilities, social acceptance, and an individual's position within the wider community. Such social influences are particularly relevant to an identity-based study because EI is not formed and enacted in isolation; the entrepreneurial role is interpreted within a social environment in which recognition and validation from significant others may contribute to how individuals understand themselves as entrepreneurs (Tauber, 2020).

Islamic teachings also form part of the broader normative environment within which economic activity occurs in Jordan. Values associated with productive work, individual responsibility, honesty in exchange, fairness, and responsibility towards others provide principles through which economic and business behavior may be understood. These values coexist with Arab family and community expectations and can contribute to the broader social environment within which entrepreneurs interpret their roles and responsibilities. This does not imply that all Jordanian entrepreneurs interpret or enact religious and cultural values uniformly. Rather, recognizing these influences provides contextual understanding of entrepreneurship as a socially embedded activity and helps avoid treating EI as independent of the cultural environment in which it develops and is enacted.

Gender provides a particularly important dimension of this context. Women in Jordan may face entrepreneurial conditions that differ from those experienced by men, including social expectations concerning family roles, access to networks and resources, and societal perceptions of women's participation in business (Alakaleek et al., 2024). Recent GEM evidence nevertheless indicates substantial growth in women's entrepreneurial participation. Female Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity increased from approximately 11% in 2023 to 20% in 2024, although women's participation in established business ownership remained substantially lower. These figures indicate increasing involvement of women in venture creation while also suggesting continuing challenges in sustaining businesses beyond the early entrepreneurial stage (GEM, 2025).

This gender context is also relevant to the composition of the present study. Direct equivalence between the sample distribution and national entrepreneurship statistics cannot be claimed because GEM measures population-level entrepreneurial activity, whereas this study specifically examines established founder entrepreneurs who met its screening criteria. Nevertheless, the substantial representation of women in the sample enables the study to capture entrepreneurial experiences across both genders and provides a basis for considering the sample composition in relation to the broader gender characteristics of entrepreneurship in Jordan.

3.2.4 Illustrative Entrepreneurial Cases in Jordan

The development of Jordan's entrepreneurial ecosystem can also be illustrated through prominent founder-led ventures. Maktoob, founded by Sameh Toukan and Hussam Khoury, emerged as an early provider of Arabic-language internet services and was subsequently acquired by Yahoo in 2009 for approximately US$164 million (Cativilla, 2023). Its development illustrates how founders identified an opportunity associated with the limited availability of Arabic-language digital services and developed that opportunity within the regional market.

Aramex provides another example of a Jordanian-founded venture that developed beyond its local origins. Established by Fadi Ghandour in 1982, the company developed an international logistics presence while maintaining strong connections to its regional context (Alberti-Alhtaybat et al., 2019). Similarly, Tamatem, established in 2013, identified opportunities associated with adapting and localising mobile gaming content for Arabic-speaking consumers (Venture Staff, 2018). These cases are not presented as empirical evidence for the relationships tested in this thesis; rather, they illustrate the broader entrepreneurial environment in which Jordanian founders identify and develop opportunities despite market and resource constraints.

Taken together, Jordan's socio-economic constraints, developing institutional ecosystem, and distinctive social and cultural environment provide a theoretically meaningful context for the present research. Resource limitations and labour-market pressures coexist with increasing entrepreneurial activity and institutional efforts to encourage venture creation. At the same time, family and community expectations, cultural and religious values, and gender-related conditions contribute to the social environment within which entrepreneurial roles are formed and enacted. Jordan therefore provides an appropriate setting for examining how EI salience and EI centrality relate to opportunity evaluation and opportunity development and whether emotional intelligence moderates these relationships.

Although Jordan provides the empirical setting for this study, the institutional, cultural, and economic characteristics described above are treated as contextual boundary conditions rather than as explanatory variables within the structural model. The primary purpose of the study is to examine individual-level relationships between EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI among founder-entrepreneurs, rather than to estimate the independent effects of institutional or cultural conditions. Incorporating these contextual dimensions as additional variables would therefore extend the study beyond its theoretical scope. At the same time, the findings should not be assumed to generalize universally beyond Jordan. Instead, they may provide theoretically relevant insights for other resource-constrained entrepreneurial environments where founders similarly operate under institutional uncertainty and resource limitations. Future comparative or multi-country research could explicitly model institutional, cultural, and economic conditions to examine whether they strengthen, weaken, or otherwise shape the identity–opportunity relationships identified in this study.

3.3 Philosophical Foundations of the Study

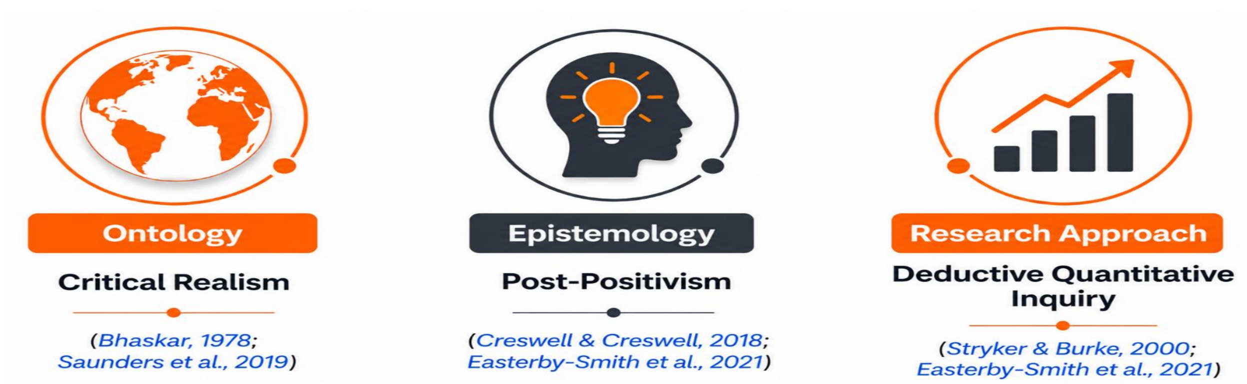
Research philosophy provides the underlying assumptions through which researchers understand reality, determine what can reasonably be known about it, and select appropriate ways of generating knowledge. These assumptions are therefore closely connected rather than representing separate methodological choices, as they collectively shape the research approach, design, methods of data collection, and analytical procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the present study, this philosophical foundation combines a critical realist understanding of reality with a post-positivist approach to knowledge. This combination is appropriate for examining theoretically derived relationships among EI, EmI, OE, and OD through quantitative empirical investigation.

The ontological position adopted in this study is grounded in critical realism and begins with the assumption that entrepreneurial phenomena have an existence that is not dependent solely on how individuals or researchers perceive them. Critical realism recognizes an external reality while acknowledging that many social and psychological phenomena are not directly observable and may operate through underlying structures and mechanisms (Bhaskar, 1978). This understanding is particularly relevant to the present study because EIS, EIC, EmI, OE, and OD cannot be directly observed in the same way as physical characteristics. They are nevertheless treated as theoretically meaningful phenomena that can influence entrepreneurial cognition and behavior and can be examined through observable indicators derived from established theoretical frameworks and measurement instruments (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022).

Recognizing an underlying reality does not imply that researchers can know that reality with complete certainty. The critical realist position adopted here is therefore complemented by a post-positivist epistemological perspective, which recognizes the limitations inherent in observing and measuring complex social phenomena. Rather than assuming that empirical observations provide a perfect representation of reality, post-positivism treats research findings as evidence-based but provisional explanations that can be evaluated and refined through systematic investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship research, where psychological and social constructs are measured indirectly and may be affected by measurement error and contextual influences. The use of theoretically grounded measures and systematic assessments of reliability and validity therefore provides a means of evaluating the proposed relationships while acknowledging that empirical measurement cannot capture social reality with absolute precision (Hair et al., 2022).

These interconnected philosophical assumptions provide the basis for the methodological approach adopted in this thesis. The study follows a deductive logic in which propositions derived primarily from Role Identity Theory and the entrepreneurship literature are translated into hypotheses that can be empirically examined. A quantitative approach is appropriate because the research seeks to assess theoretically specified relationships among latent constructs across a sample of founder entrepreneurs rather than to construct individual accounts of entrepreneurial experience. Survey data therefore provides the empirical basis for examining the proposed relationships, while structural equation modelling enables the simultaneous assessment of the measurement and structural components of the theoretical model (Hair et al., 2022). The methodology consequently reflects a coherent progression from the study's understanding of reality and knowledge to its deductive reasoning, quantitative research design, measurement procedures, and statistical analysis. The philosophical and methodological foundations of this study are summarized in Figure 3.1 The study adopts critical realism as its ontological position and post-positivism as its epistemological stance, recognizing that an objective reality exists while acknowledging that knowledge of this reality is inevitably partial and subject to empirical testing. Consistent with these foundations, the study employs a deductive quantitative approach to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study constructs. Figure 3.1 illustrates the alignment between these philosophical assumptions and the methodological approach adopted in this research.

Figure 3.1: *Research Philosophy and Methodological Approach of the Study*



3.4 Research Design and Methodological Approach

The research methodology used for carrying out this thesis is that of deductive research methodology, according to which the process begins with general theoretical assumptions, concepts, or ideas, and moves towards specificity. For testing hypotheses, these assumptions, concepts, or ideas are verified by using a specific methodology for data collection and analysis. In deductive research methodology, the scientific process is broken down into two types: theoretical reasoning and testing, or using theory, concepts, and ideas, and then testing them (Valaris, 2019). The following sections clarify the processes used in the thesis.

3.4.1 Research Paradigm and Logic of Inquiry

Within the framework of deductive thinking, this study begins with what is known in theory, exploring verification regarding what can be measured (Coetzee & Monti, 2018). Specifically, it is aimed at verifying or further developing identity-related theories along with processes of entrepreneurial opportunity. Deductive methods are particularly appropriate when models are quantified, in which hypotheses are determined in advance and tested with inferential statistical techniques (Hair & Alamar, 2022).

3.4.2 Research Strategy

A cross-sectional survey strategy was used because it enables the collection of standardized data from a large population simultaneously and supports statistical generalization and hypothesis testing (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The study method employed has been widely recognized in entrepreneurship studies as the best means of collecting data on entrepreneurs' cognitions and attitudes (Scheaf et al., 2023; Shaveret, 2025).

Although EI, emotions, and opportunity processes may evolve over time, the purpose of this study was not to examine their temporal development, but to test the theoretically proposed relationships among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI within a defined population of established founder-entrepreneurs. A cross-sectional design was therefore appropriate for assessing these relationships at a specific point in time. Nevertheless, this design does not imply that the underlying constructs are temporally static. EIS may vary as the entrepreneurial role becomes more or less salient across situations, whereas EIC represents the relatively more enduring importance of entrepreneurship within the individual's self-concept. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of associations rather than changes or causal effects over time.

The questionnaire was structured and consisted of validated scales developed in previous studies (which are presented in section 3.4). It was designed around the constructs of EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI. All items were rated with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") to reduce subject fatigue (Khanal & Chhetri, 2024).

The questionnaire concluded with an optional open-ended question inviting participants to provide any additional comments concerning their entrepreneurial experiences or the issues addressed in the survey. These responses were not part of the quantitative measurement model or hypothesis testing. Given the primarily quantitative design of the study, the comments were treated as supplementary contextual material rather than as a separate qualitative dataset. The responses were reviewed and grouped according to recurring issues to identify whether they provided additional context for interpreting the quantitative findings.

3.4.3 Sampling Technique and Data Collection

Given the absence of a comprehensive and publicly accessible sampling frame of founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, a non-probability snowball sampling technique was adopted. This approach was considered appropriate for reaching a population that could not be readily identified through a single formal database and whose members operate across different sectors and entrepreneurial networks (Khoury et al., 2024). Initial participants were approached through multiple entrepreneurship and professional networks, including Oasis500 and ZINC. Eligible participants were also encouraged to refer other individuals who met the study's founder criteria. The use of multiple recruitment channels was intended to broaden access to the target population, although, as with other non-probability sampling approaches, it does not ensure statistical representativeness of the wider population of Jordanian founders (Shamsudin et al., 2024).

The use of non-probability snowball sampling introduces a potential risk of selection bias, particularly because some initial participants were accessed through incubators and professional entrepreneurial networks (Khoury et al., 2024; Shamsudin et al., 2024). Entrepreneurs connected to such networks may be more visible, better connected, or more actively engaged with the formal entrepreneurial ecosystem than founders operating outside these networks. To reduce dependence on a single network, recruitment was conducted through multiple channels and referrals, while the same founder eligibility criteria were applied regardless of the recruitment source. Nevertheless, these procedures cannot eliminate selection bias, and the sample should not be considered statistically representative of the entire population of founder-entrepreneurs in Jordan. Accordingly, the findings should be generalized with caution, particularly to less connected or informal entrepreneurs who may have different experiences of EI and opportunity processes.

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship provided institutional support during the recruitment process. Specifically, the Ministry provided a support letter that assisted the researcher in approaching entrepreneurial organizations and networks and establishing the academic legitimacy of the research. The Ministry did not provide financial support for the study and was not involved in the development of the questionnaire, identification or selection of individual respondents, access to individual responses, data analysis, or interpretation of the findings. The research remained academically independent and was conducted under the ethical requirements of the Waikato Management School Human Research Ethics Committee.

Data was collected through an online Google Forms questionnaire between 2023 and 2024. The online format facilitated access to founders across different geographical areas, reduced administrative costs, and minimized transcription errors through automatic recording of responses (Perrone et al., 2020). The participant information accompanying the questionnaire clearly identified the research as an academic study and explained that participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous and confidential, there were no right or wrong answers, and the information collected would be used solely for academic research purposes (Gaur et al., 2020; Appendix F). No paper-based or alternative modes of questionnaire administration were used.

Although the Ministry's role was limited to providing institutional support for recruitment, its association with the research may have influenced participation. The support letter may have enhanced the perceived legitimacy and credibility of the study among entrepreneurial organizations and potential respondents and may therefore have contributed positively to participation. Conversely, some potential participants may have perceived an association between the research and a governmental institution, which could have influenced their willingness to participate. This possibility cannot be empirically determined from the available data and is therefore acknowledged as a potential influence on the recruitment process and response pattern.

The explicit communication of the study's academic independence, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality was intended to minimize such perceptions.

3.4.4 Instrument Development and Pre-Testing

A pilot test was conducted among 30 founder Jordanian entrepreneurs to ensure the content validity and clarity of the proposed tool before mass distribution (Roebianto et al., 2023). The test subjects were asked to undertake the questionnaire for this purpose and give comments on the format, length, and wording. Some modifications and improvements were made based on the outcome. For instance, there was rewording for confusing item wording in the EIC and OD components. Also benefited by the clarity and increased accessibility was the wording of the survey's instructions. At the same time, it ensured that an online format would function properly with mobile devices. The survey lasted around 15 minutes, so it was ensured that the tool being designed was appropriate for its subjects.

As the measurement scales adopted in this study were originally developed in English, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic to ensure its accessibility and appropriateness for the target population of Jordanian founder entrepreneurs. The initial translation from English into Arabic was undertaken by a professional translator, with particular attention given to preserving the conceptual meaning of the original items rather than relying solely on literal word-for-word translation. The Arabic version was subsequently back-translated into English to assess its consistency with the original questionnaire. The original and back-translated versions were compared to identify potential discrepancies in meaning and wording.

The Arabic version was also reviewed by academics to assess the clarity, appropriateness, and conceptual equivalence of the translated items within the Jordanian context. Based on this review, minor wording modifications were made where necessary to improve clarity and cultural comprehensibility while retaining the intended meaning of the original constructs. The revised Arabic questionnaire was subsequently included in the pilot testing process with 30 Jordanian founder entrepreneurs. Feedback from the pilot test provided an additional assessment of item clarity, instructions, and questionnaire accessibility before the final version was administered. This translation, review, back-translation, and pre-testing process was intended to minimize linguistic ambiguity and strengthen the cross-cultural applicability of the measurement instrument.

3.4.5 Ethical Considerations

The ethics of obtaining data were well observed during the data gathering process, as explained by the institution's guidelines. The approval for ethical considerations was obtained from the Waikato Management School Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A). The participants were informed that their participation in this research was voluntary and their identity would not be disclosed. They were confident that their data would remain confidential and that the findings could be presented without any reference to individual circumstances.

3.4.6 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis process followed the four-stage method, which is recommended for SEM-based studies (Usakli & Rasoolimanesh, 2023):

(1) Preliminary Analysis

In SPSS 29, descriptive statistics and reliability analyses were conducted. According to the results of the study done by Izah et al. (2023), an acceptable level for internal consistency is a Cronbach alpha value not lower than 0.70. Determination of missing data was temporarily done via listwise deletion (Wang & Aronow, 2023).

(2) Measurement Model Evaluation

With the help of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the studied constructs are confirmed to be unidimensional and factorable ($KMO > 0.80$; p-value of Bartlett Test < 0.001). The adequacy of the measurement model as a confirmatory factor model was checked through the values of CFI and TLI ≥ 0.90, RMSEA ≤ 0.08 (Hair et al., 2025).

(3) Structural Model Estimation

The hypothesized relationships among the constructs were tested by applying Structural Equation Modeling in AMOS 29. SEM can simultaneously estimate multiple latent relationships, considering measurement error as well. According to Perrone et al. (2020), the estimated model tested the direct impact of EIS and EIC on OE and OD, respectively (Model 1), and added the interaction terms to test the moderating role of EmI in a later model (Model 2).

(4) Moderation Testing

The moderating effect of EmI was examined using a Z-score standardization approach within the structural equation modelling framework. Prior to estimating the interaction effects, the latent exogenous variables were standardized to reduce multicollinearity between the main effects and the interaction terms (Schober et al., 2021). Interaction constructs were then formed by multiplying the standardized EI dimensions by standardized EmI and were specified as exogenous predictors of opportunity evaluation and opportunity development. The significance of moderation effects was assessed using standardized regression weights and associated critical ratios reported in the AMOS output. Model adequacy was evaluated using conventional goodness-of-fit indices, and model comparison was conducted by examining changes in χ^2, AIC (Akaike Information Criterion), and BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) values to assess whether the inclusion of interaction terms improved overall model fit (Kline, 2023; Collier, 2020).

The standardized interaction-term approach provides a practical means of examining moderation within the structural model and facilitates the interpretation and estimation of interaction effects (Kline, 2023; Cheung et al., 2024). However, standardization does not eliminate measurement error in the underlying constructs. This is particularly relevant because EIS, EIC, and EmI are conceptualized as reflective latent constructs. Consequently, an interaction based on standardized terms may not capture the latent interaction as fully as approaches that explicitly incorporate measurement error into the estimation of the interaction effect.

Alternative latent interaction techniques could therefore have been considered. One approach is the product-indicator method, in which indicators of the interacting latent constructs are combined to represent the latent interaction. Another is Latent Moderated Structural Equations (LMS), which estimates the interaction between latent variables directly while accounting for measurement error. These approaches can provide a more explicit representation of moderation at the latent level, although they also increase model complexity and may require different estimation and model-evaluation procedures (Kline, 2023; Cheung et al., 2024). The standardized interaction approach adopted in this study should therefore be interpreted as a pragmatic analytical specification for testing the hypothesized moderation effects rather than as eliminating all measurement-related limitations.

3.4.7 Methodological Rigor and Bias Control

To improve methodological rigor, some procedural and statistical corrections were made to counteract common method variance (CMV) (Tehseen et al., 2017):

1) Transparent and impartial question types give priority to "there are no right or wrong answers" in the choices.

2) The constructs were distinguished into different parts to avoid the proximity effect.

3) Reverse-coded items and balanced item wording countered acquiescence.
4) Anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized to reduce the threat of evaluation apprehension.

5) Post-hoc assessments using Harman's single-factor test and the marker variable method did not indicate that CMV represented a dominant explanation for the observed relationships; however, these tests cannot establish the complete absence of common method bias.

Because all focal constructs were measured using self-reported data from the same respondents at a single point in time, common method variance (CMV) represents a potential methodological concern. Several procedural remedies were therefore incorporated into the survey design, including anonymity and confidentiality, separation of constructs into different questionnaire sections, balanced and reverse-coded items, and neutral instructions emphasizing that there were no right or wrong responses (Tehseen et al., 2017). Statistical diagnostics, including Harman's single-factor test and the marker variable method, were also employed to assess whether a common method factor appeared to dominate the observed relationships. However, these procedures cannot demonstrate the complete absence of CMV. Harman's single-factor test should be interpreted as a diagnostic assessment rather than definitive evidence that shared method bias is absent. Although the statistical checks did not indicate that a single common factor accounted for the observed relationships, some shared variance may remain because the predictors and outcomes were obtained from the same respondents using the same survey at the same time. Consequently, the estimated relationships may contain some degree of method-related inflation and should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

3.4.8 Justification of Analytical Choice

The combined use of SPSS 29 and AMOS 29 was appropriate for the analytical objectives of this study. With the inclusion of an interaction method based on the use of the Z-score, the rigor of the proposed methodology is improved, as it is possible to investigate moderation effects within a structural equation modeling context, while facilitating the estimation and interpretation of the interaction terms. The proposed method meets the current need for robust methods for examining the interaction between psychological and behavioral constructs, as emphasized in the entrepreneurship research (Kline, 2023; Cheung et al., 2021).

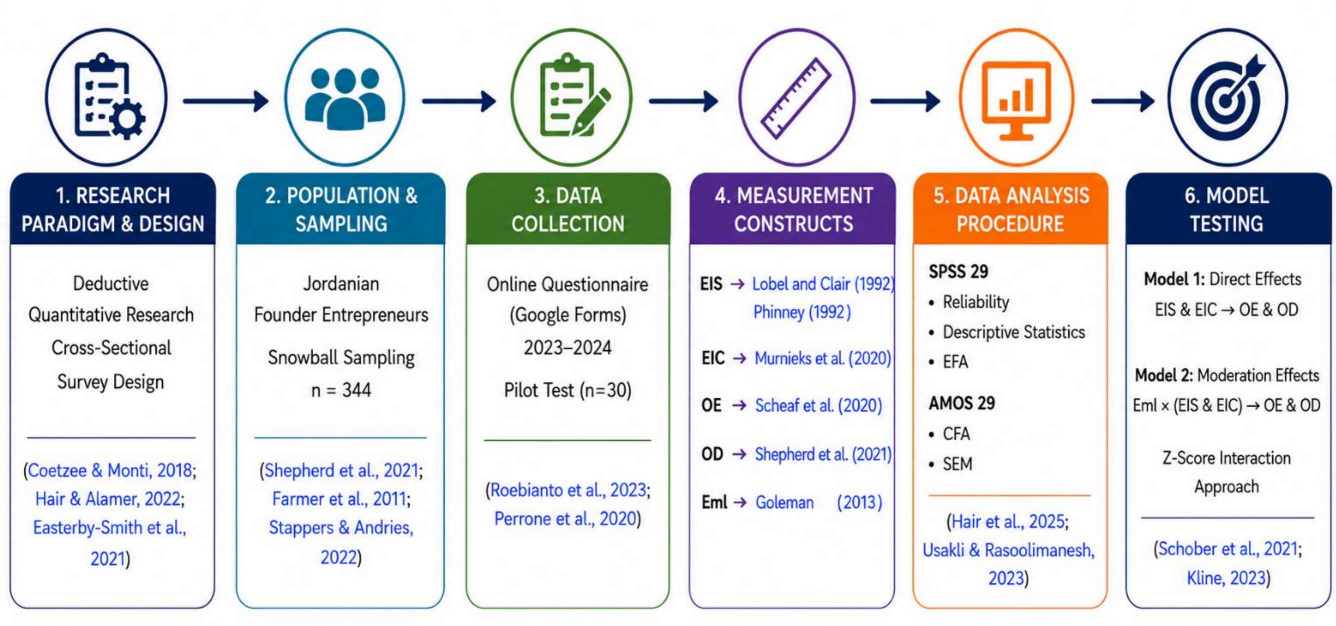
SEM was selected because the study adopts a deductive, theory-testing approach and examines multiple relationships among latent psychological constructs while explicitly accounting for measurement error (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023). The use of CFA followed by structural model estimation also enables the measurement properties of the constructs to be assessed before testing the hypothesized relationships. This is particularly appropriate for EIS and EIC, which are specified in this study as reflective latent constructs whose observed indicators are treated as manifestations of the underlying constructs.

Alternative approaches were possible. For example, multiple regression or path analysis using composite scores could test the proposed direct and interaction effects, but these approaches would provide less explicit treatment of measurement error and the latent measurement structure. PLS-SEM could also provide an alternative, particularly for prediction-oriented research or models involving formative specifications. However, the primary objective of this study was theory testing and confirmation of the proposed measurement and structural relationships rather than prediction. Accordingly, covariance-based SEM using AMOS was considered appropriate for the objectives and measurement specification of the study (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023).

This choice nevertheless depends on the appropriateness of the reflective measurement specification. If EIS or EIC were theoretically formative rather than reflective, the direction of the relationship between the construct and its indicators would differ, and the current CFA-based measurement specification would require reconsideration. Measurement misspecification could affect estimates of reliability and validity and, consequently, the interpretation of structural relationships. The use of SEM should therefore be understood as consistent with, rather than independent of, the theoretical specification of the constructs.

In this manner, the methodological approach combines high theoretical clarity with high empirical validity. The cross-sectional survey design enables testing identity-based theories within Jordan's evolving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the constructs have been ensured through the process of pilot testing, EFA, and CFA, and the direct and moderating associations have been thoroughly scrutinized using the SEM and Z-standardization techniques. Finally, the approaches and techniques utilized in this study have been summarized in the following figure (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: *Methodological Approach*



3.5 Measurement Scales and Items

3.5.1 Sample and Data Screening

The present thesis lies at the intersection of these concepts but deliberately distinguishes between the population studied and the identity construct examined. Empirically, the study focuses on founder entrepreneurs, defined as individuals who initiated and currently manage ventures for which they retain strategic and operational responsibility. This boundary excludes individuals who merely own or manage businesses that they purchased or inherited, nascent entrepreneurs who have not yet established operating ventures, and individuals engaging in entrepreneurial activities solely within existing organizations (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022). Theoretically, however, the thesis examines EI, rather than founder identity as a separate construct, because the central question concerns how strongly the entrepreneurial role is activated and incorporated into the self-concept.

Accordingly, EI provides the theoretical construct. This distinction is important because founder status alone does not indicate how psychologically important the entrepreneurial role is to the individual. Two people may both be founders, yet the EI may be more salient or central for one than for the other. Role Identity Theory provides the mechanism for examining this variation through EIS and EIC (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The focus on founder entrepreneurs therefore provides a theoretically appropriate setting in which the entrepreneurial role is actively enacted, while EIS and EIC allow the study to examine variation in the strength and activation of that role.

These conceptual definitions also distinguish the present population from adjacent entrepreneurial categories. Owner-managers may exercise managerial responsibility without having initiated the venture; family-business successors may inherit an existing entrepreneurial role; self-employed individuals may operate independently without necessarily creating or developing an entrepreneurial venture; intrapreneurs engage in entrepreneurial activities within organizations they did not establish; and nascent entrepreneurs are still attempting to enter entrepreneurship rather than enacting an established founder role. These groups may all possess entrepreneurial identities to varying degrees, but combining them with established founders would introduce substantial heterogeneity in role experience, venture responsibility, and identity development. Restricting the study to founder entrepreneurs therefore strengthens the alignment between the theoretical focus on enacted entrepreneurial role identity and the empirical population examined.

The survey was initially distributed to 3,046 potential participants through the researcher's recruitment channels and collaborating entrepreneurial networks. Recipients were asked to participate if they met the study's eligibility criteria and were also permitted to refer or forward the survey link to other founder entrepreneurs whom they believed met those criteria. These referrals constituted the snowball component of the sampling procedure. Referred participants accessed the same online questionnaire and were subject to the same eligibility screening criteria as directly contacted participants. No distinction was made in the questionnaire between directly recruited and referred respondents, and individual referral chains were not recorded in order to preserve anonymity.

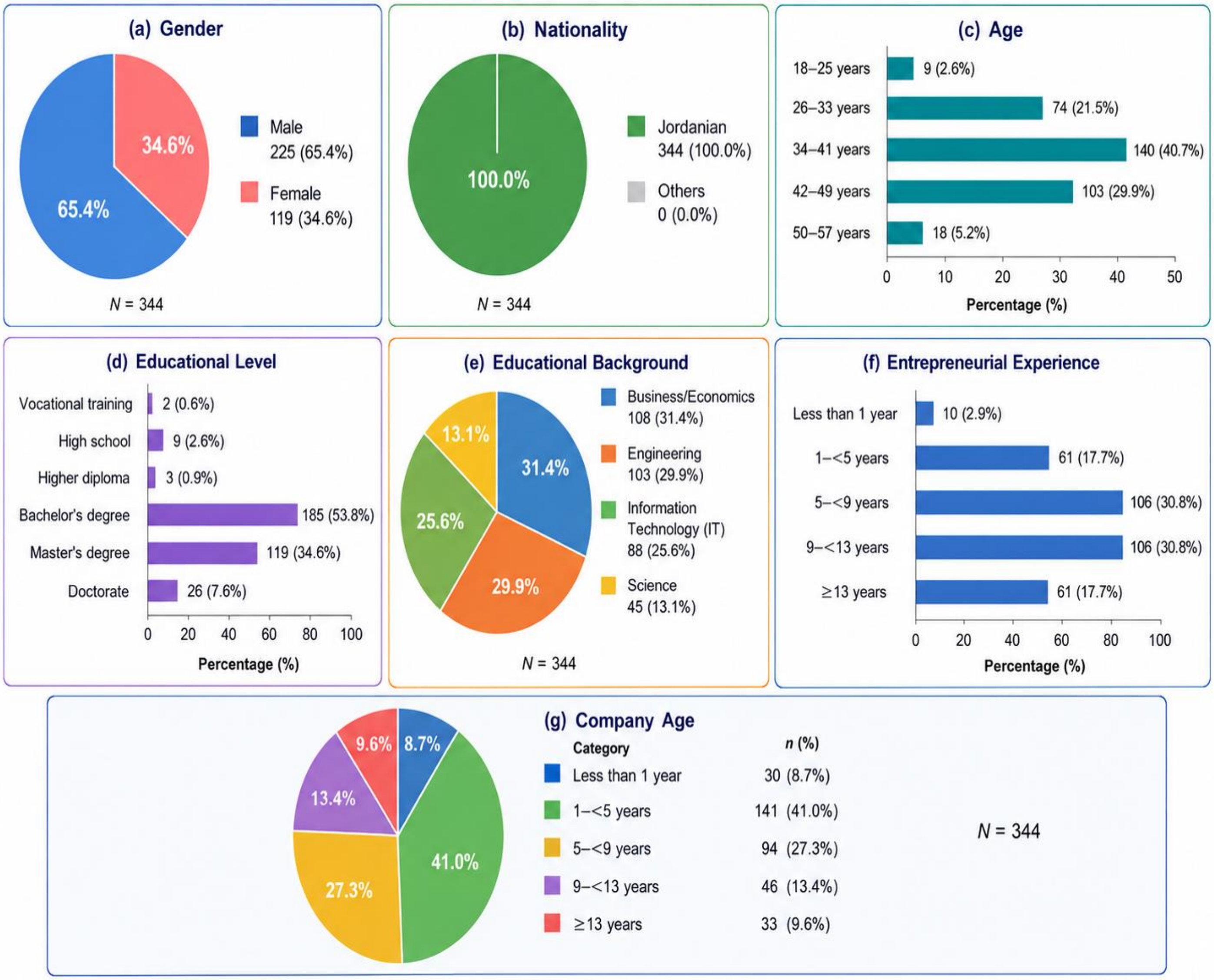
The target population of this study was specifically founder entrepreneurs in Jordan. Eligibility was assessed using information collected from respondents concerning their relationship with the venture, including whether they had founded the business, held an ownership interest, and remained actively involved in its management and strategic decision-making. These criteria were used to distinguish founder entrepreneurs from individuals who managed or owned businesses that they had not personally established.

The eligibility criteria were applied during the data-screening stage rather than through an automatic termination function within the online questionnaire. Consequently, respondents who did not ultimately satisfy the definition of a founder were technically able to complete and submit the questionnaire. Their responses were retained in the original dataset but were excluded before the analysis used to test the hypotheses of this thesis. Of the 856 questionnaires received, 273 respondents were excluded because they did not satisfy the required ownership and management criteria, and a further 142 were excluded because they did not meet the study's definition of a founder. This resulted in 441 eligible founder responses before the treatment of missing data. Following listwise deletion of 97 incomplete cases, the final analytical sample comprised 344 founder entrepreneurs.

The filtering process should be distinguished from non-response when considering the representativeness of the final sample. The exclusion of respondents who were not founder-entrepreneurs reflected the predefined population and inclusion criteria of the study rather than an attempt to obtain a more favorable sample. This restriction is consistent with the study’s focus on established founder identity and its distinction from nascent or potential EI (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022). However, the removal of 97 cases because of missing data through listwise deletion may have affected sample composition if incomplete respondents differed systematically from those retained in the analysis (Wang & Aronow, 2023). In addition, no formal non-response bias analysis was conducted to compare respondents with individuals who did not participate. Therefore, although the final sample satisfied the theoretical eligibility criteria of the study, it cannot be assumed to be statistically representative of the wider population of Jordanian founder-entrepreneurs. The findings should consequently be generalized with appropriate caution.

This distinction is important because the screening procedure was designed to determine inclusion in the analytical sample rather than to prevent questionnaire completion. The thesis has therefore been revised to distinguish clearly between the eligibility criteria, questionnaire administration, and subsequent data-screening process. The screening process was applied consistently across all returned questionnaires to ensure that the final analytical sample corresponded to the predefined population of established founder-entrepreneurs. The sample size was determined using the method proposed by Chaokromthong and Sintao (2021), which assumes a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Figure 3.3 lists the demographic variables.

Figure 3.3: *Demographics Profile of the Sample*



Sample Size n=344

The survey included 344 Jordanian founder-entrepreneurs, from whom 65.4% were male and 34.6% female. The age of the majority was between 34 and 49 (70.6%), which points to an increase in the number of entrepreneurs. A slight majority of the respondents had graduated (53.8%), while a large portion had even higher educational attainment, such as a master's or a doctoral degree (42.2%). The largest group of entrepreneurs by education was composed of 31.4% having a business and economic background and of 29.9% with an engineering background. When it comes to entrepreneurs' experience, roughly 79% had a professional activity of over 5 years, which indicates a solid entrepreneurial ground. In the same line, 41% of the ventures had been around for 1-5 years or less, thus showing both the stability and the new blood in the Jordanian entrepreneurial ecosystem.

3.5.2 Supplementary Analysis: Relative Importance Index (RII)

Apart from subject matter reliability and factor analysis, the Relative Importance Index (RII) was used for ranking the indicators in this study. To calculate (RII), the equation $\text{RII} = W/A \ast N$ was used. Where the RII establishes ranking indicators (importance levels), W denotes the weight assigned to each respondent on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting the lowest weight and 5 the highest. N is the total number of people (344), and A is the maximum weight (5 in our case). The relative index values are classified into five levels: Low (L) (0<=RII<0.2), Medium-Low (M-L) (0.2<=RII<0.4), Medium (M) (0.4<=RII<0.6), High-Medium (H-M) (0.6<=RII<0.8), and High (H) (0.8<=RII<=1). More information is given in Table 4.2 in the findings chapter.

3.5.3 Operationalization of Variables

Dependent variables

Before analyzing the study variables, respondents were assessed against predefined eligibility criteria to determine whether they met the study's operational definition of a founder entrepreneur. Consistent with the study's focus on individuals who had personally established and remained actively involved in their ventures, eligibility was assessed using three questions adapted from the criteria used in previous entrepreneurship research (Reynolds et al., 2005; Scheaf et al., 2023). The exact wording presented to respondents was:

"I am one of the founders who established the entrepreneurial business."

"I hold ownership or equity in the business I founded."

"I am responsible for the management and strategic direction of the business I founded."

For the purposes of this study, respondents were classified as founder entrepreneurs when they satisfied all three criteria. Together, these criteria operationalized founder status through venture creation, continuing ownership or equity, and active managerial or strategic responsibility. The term "established" was therefore not used to indicate a specific minimum venture age or revenue threshold; rather, the intention was to distinguish respondents who had already founded and were actively involved in an operating venture from individuals who were only considering or attempting to establish a business. The eligibility criteria were applied when determining inclusion in the analytical sample. Respondents who did not satisfy all three criteria were excluded from the analyses reported in this thesis. This procedure ensured that the final analytical sample corresponded with the theoretically defined population of founder entrepreneurs examined in the study.

This thesis focuses on two dependent variables that capture the range of OE and OD activities undertaken by founder entrepreneurs. To operationalize these constructs, we adapted established measures from Scheaf et al. (2020) for evaluation and Shepherd et al. (2021) for development. Every single item signifies a distinct entrepreneurial action (for instance, testing, improving, or pursuing opportunities), and omitting any of them would alter the conceptual meaning of the whole construct (Compeau et al., 2022; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021).

OE as well as OD scales contained four items each. These items were taken from Scheaf et al. (2020), who already demonstrated a valid measure of entrepreneurial cognition on the perceptions an entrepreneur may have with respect to possible gains (OE1: "If there is a potential opportunity, I see large potential gains for myself in pursuing it"). Curiosity and the tendency to want to learn more about pursuing it (OE2: "If there is a potential opportunity, I want to learn more about pursuing it"). Perceived riskiness (OE3: "reverse-coded: If there is a potential opportunity, the overall riskiness of pursuing it is high for me"). Finally, anticipated enjoyment in making opportunities a reality (OE4: "If there is a potential opportunity, I would love working on making it a reality"). The set of items that appear this way combines the mental and emotional aspects of the opportunity assessment, weighing the perception of potential gain against that of loss aversion.

The OD scale was adapted from established measures of opportunity enactment and development (Shepherd et al., 2021). The items capture forward-looking intentions to consult others for refinement (OD1: “Looking into the immediate future, I plan to consult next to further develop a business opportunity”). Reliance on team interactions in the developmental process (OD2: “I see interaction(s) with the team as good for developing an opportunity”). Active efforts to improve existing features and functions (OD3: “I focus on improving existing features and functions; time and effort on developing opportunities”). And awareness of relational and networking activities supporting development (OD4: “I am aware of any other contacts my team is reaching out to develop an opportunity”). Collectively, these items highlight both the individual and collective aspects of the opportunity development process, as well as its behavioral and relational dimensions.

Independent Variables

Measurement items for EIS were adapted from the identity salience scales used in social identity and role identity research (Phinney, 1992; Lobel & Clair, 1992). These items capture the extent to which entrepreneurial work constitutes a primary source of satisfaction (EIS1: "The major satisfactions in my life come from my entrepreneurial work"). Defines life's most significant experiences (EIS2: "The most important things that happen to me involve my entrepreneurial work"). Competes with other roles such as family (EIS3: "I am an entrepreneur and a family person, but lean a bit more towards entrepreneurial work"). And motivates individuals to engage in reflective exploration of entrepreneurial traditions and practices (EIS4: "I have spent time trying to find out more about my entrepreneurial work, such as its history, traditions, and customs"). Collectively, these items illustrate the degree to which entrepreneurship dominates attention and priority in the individual's role hierarchy.

Items for EIC were adapted from identity centrality measures employed by Murnieks et al. (2020). These items assess how frequently entrepreneurs think about their role (EIC1: "Being an entrepreneur is something I frequently think about"). Whether entrepreneurship forms a core part of their self-definition (EIC2: "Entrepreneurship is an important part of who I am"). The emotional loss they would experience if forced to abandon entrepreneurship (EIC3: "I would feel a loss if I were forced to give up being an entrepreneur"). And the extent to which being an entrepreneur transcends instrumental, financial motives (EIC4: "Being an entrepreneur means more to me than just making a living"). Also, such elements point to the extent to which personal commitment is expressed and the level to which entrepreneurship is integrated in the self-schema.

EIS and EIC were specified as reflective latent constructs in this study. This specification is theoretically consistent with the conceptualization of EI adopted in the thesis, whereby the observed items are treated as manifestations of an underlying identity construct rather than as separate components that collectively form it. Thus, variations in EIS or EIC are expected to be reflected in respondents' scores on their respective indicators. For EIS, the indicators reflect the prominence and priority of the entrepreneurial role (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Phinney, 1992), whereas the EIC indicators reflect the importance of entrepreneurship to the individual's self-definition (Murnieks et al., 2020).

This reflective specification is also consistent with the measurement approach adopted in the SEM analysis, in which EFA and CFA were used to assess factor structure, indicator loadings, reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2025). A formative specification would imply a different theoretical direction, whereby the individual indicators collectively create the identity construct rather than reflect it. If the reflective specification were incorrect, estimates of measurement reliability and validity, as well as the subsequent structural relationships, could be misspecified and potentially biased. Therefore, the interpretation of the structural results depends on the theoretical and empirical appropriateness of the reflective measurement specification.

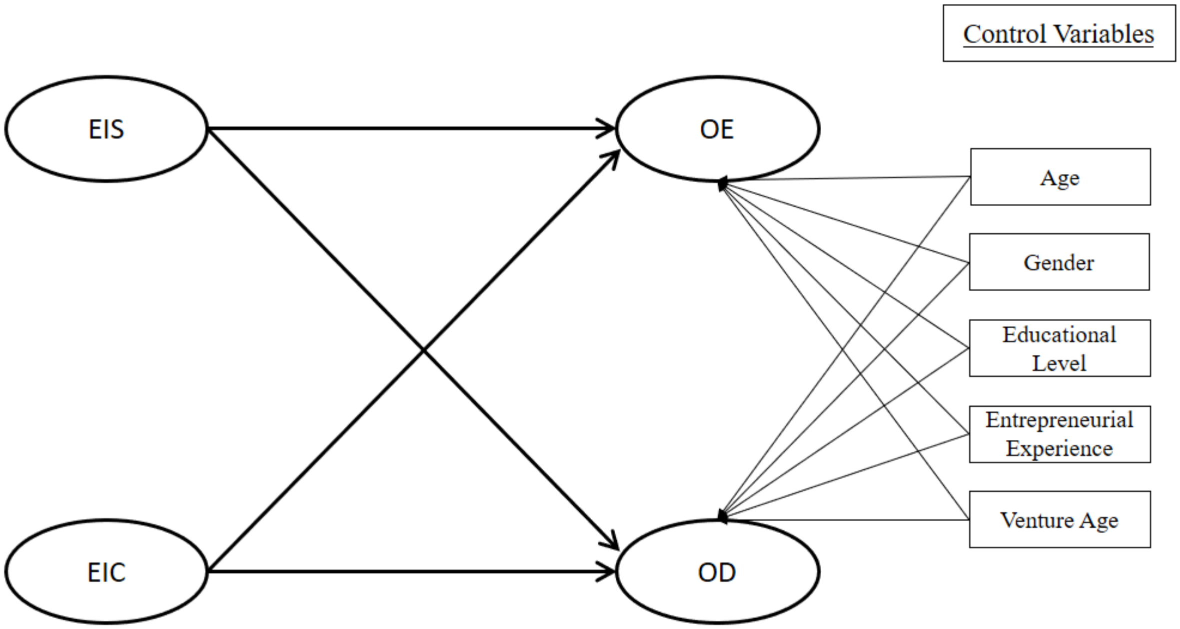
Although EIS, EIC, OE, and OD are conceptually related and were measured through self-reports, several steps were taken to assess and preserve their distinctiveness. First, each construct represents a theoretically distinct aspect of the entrepreneurial process and was operationalized using established measures from the relevant literature. EIS captures the prominence of the entrepreneurial role within an individual's role hierarchy (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Phinney, 1992), whereas EIC captures the enduring importance of entrepreneurship to the individual's self-definition (Murnieks et al., 2020). In contrast, OE concerns the assessment of the attractiveness and feasibility of potential opportunities (Scheaf et al., 2020), while OD captures activities directed toward refining and developing opportunities (Shepherd et al., 2021).

Second, the empirical distinctiveness of these constructs was assessed through EFA and CFA, together with reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity assessment. These procedures provided evidence that the observed items represented their intended latent constructs and reduced concerns that the measures were capturing the same underlying psychological tendency (Hair et al., 2025). Procedural and statistical measures were also employed to reduce the potential influence of common method variance (Tehseen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, because the constructs were measured through self-reports within the same survey, the possibility of some shared variance arising from broader psychological tendencies, such as motivation or proactivity, cannot be completely excluded.

Control Variables

Apart from independent variables of focus, that is, EIS and EIC, several demographic, experiential, perceptual, and contextual variables were used as controls, given that they enhance the robustness of a structural model, a feature of a research methodology advanced by earlier research that evidenced the contribution of both individual attributes and societal perspectives in processes of entrepreneurial opportunity (Dimov, 2021; Ucbasaran et al., 2013). The demographic, human capital, experiential, and perceptual variables that were used as controls in this study featured variables such as the respondents' ages, gender, and education level, a feature that has been evidenced in earlier literature to reportedly influence entrepreneurs' perceptions (Stappers & Andries, 2022). The entrepreneurial experience (length of time as a founder) and venture age were also introduced as control variables (Gielnik et al., 2018). Model 1 (the effect of EIS and EIC on OE and OD) is shown in Figure 3.4. The red arrows denote hypotheses H1a–H1b, and the black arrows indicate hypotheses H2a–H2b. Control variables (age, gender, educational level, entrepreneurial experience, and venture age) are associated with dependent latent variables OE and OD.

Figure 3.4: *SEM model 1*



3.5.4 Development of Emotional Intelligence Construct

This Thesis also strives to integrate dialogue on theoretical implications for Model 2 by including different, but pertinent, variables, such as emotional intelligence (EmI). EmI, or one's capacity for recognizing, controlling, and directing one's own and others' emotions, and making decisions according to these, is theoretically grounded here as the moderator factor between factors EI and opportunities. Actual involvement or non-involvement in EI-based action would enrich the psychological aspects included here, contributing to an increasingly complex character for the model. Grounds for choosing EmI as a moderator, referring to Goleman et al. (2001) dimensions of "self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, social skills," rest on strong theoretical and/or corroborating research rationale. An academic rationale for choosing EmI, among other reasons, is set out below.

EmI in the Identity–Opportunity Nexus

Goleman et al. (2001) empirically applied the Five-Dimensional Model of EmI, which has long provided theoretical underpinning, scope for wide-ranging application, and is significant to entrepreneurial behavioral patterns. Moreover, EmI, as a concept by Goleman, is grounded in understanding, explaining, and utilizing emotional information, both of oneself and others, which plays a crucial role in mutual functioning, making decisions, and in stress reduction (Boyatzis et al., 2015; Goleman, 2019). Each EmI dimension captures a distinct but related aspect of the broader EmI construct, where 'self-awareness' enables an entrepreneur to match their entrepreneurial ideals with their personal ideals, as well as strengthen their personal identity structures (Murnieks et al., 2014). 'Self-regulation' is useful in dealing with emotional instability while improving resilience and strategic thinking. Moreover, 'self-motivation' is helpful in dealing with goal orientation and flexibility. Besides, 'empathy' increases the level of participation and interactions. Additionally, 'social skills' are useful in building trust and improving social capital (Han et al., 2020). Such skills can be crucial in an entrepreneurial setting when identified practices are used. In operationalizing the EmI construct, there were 15 items, three for each EmI dimension, which were all taken from Goleman et al. (2001).

Although EmI is conceptually represented through five dimensions—self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills—it was modeled in this study as an overall moderator representing the entrepreneur's broader emotional capability. This decision is consistent with the study's theoretical objective, which was to examine whether overall emotional functioning conditions the relationship between EI and opportunity processes, rather than to test separate moderating hypotheses for each EmI dimension. The five dimensions represent related aspects of recognizing, regulating, motivating, and managing emotional and interpersonal processes and collectively provide the broader EmI framework adopted in this study (Goleman et al., 2001; Boyatzis et al., 2015).

Modeling each dimension as an independent moderator would have addressed a different and more fine-grained research question and would have required separate theoretical hypotheses and interaction effects for each dimension. Nevertheless, the aggregate specification does not imply that all five dimensions contribute equally to the observed moderation effects. Specific dimensions, particularly self-regulation in conditions involving uncertainty and emotional demands, may exert stronger moderating influences than others. The present model cannot isolate such dimension-specific effects; therefore, the moderation findings should be interpreted as reflecting the overall EmI construct.

Self-Awareness (SA): This aspect is of utmost importance for entrepreneurs since the acknowledgement of internal conditions greatly influences the judgment of opportunities and the making of strategic decisions (Wagenschwanz, 2021). Items assess awareness of moods (SA1: “I am always aware of my moods”). Insight into personal drivers (SA2: “I have good insight into what makes me tick”). And the ability to articulate emotions. (SA3: “I have difficulty describing my feelings to others”).

Self-Regulation (SR): Items capture emotional resilience (SR1: "I can often shrug off a foul mood and go on with my day"). Intensity of negative emotions (SR2: “reverse-coded: "I feel negative emotions more strongly than other people"). And the capacity to regulate moods (SR3: "I can regulate my moods so that they do not overwhelm me"). Regulations that work properly are very important for entrepreneurs who pass through hardships and uncertainties, as they enable them to stay attentive and always be there (Priyaa et al., 2025).

Self-Motivation (SM): Items measure perseverance and goal orientation (SM1: "I have the will to accomplish my goals"). Intrinsic motivation (SM2, reverse coded: "I have too little motivation to try hard enough to do well"). And self-starting behavior (SM3: "I am what others call a self-starter"). The alignment of this dimension with entrepreneurial passion and proactivity is of significant importance for the whole opportunity development process and venture growth (Cardon et al., 2020; Murnieks et al., 2020).

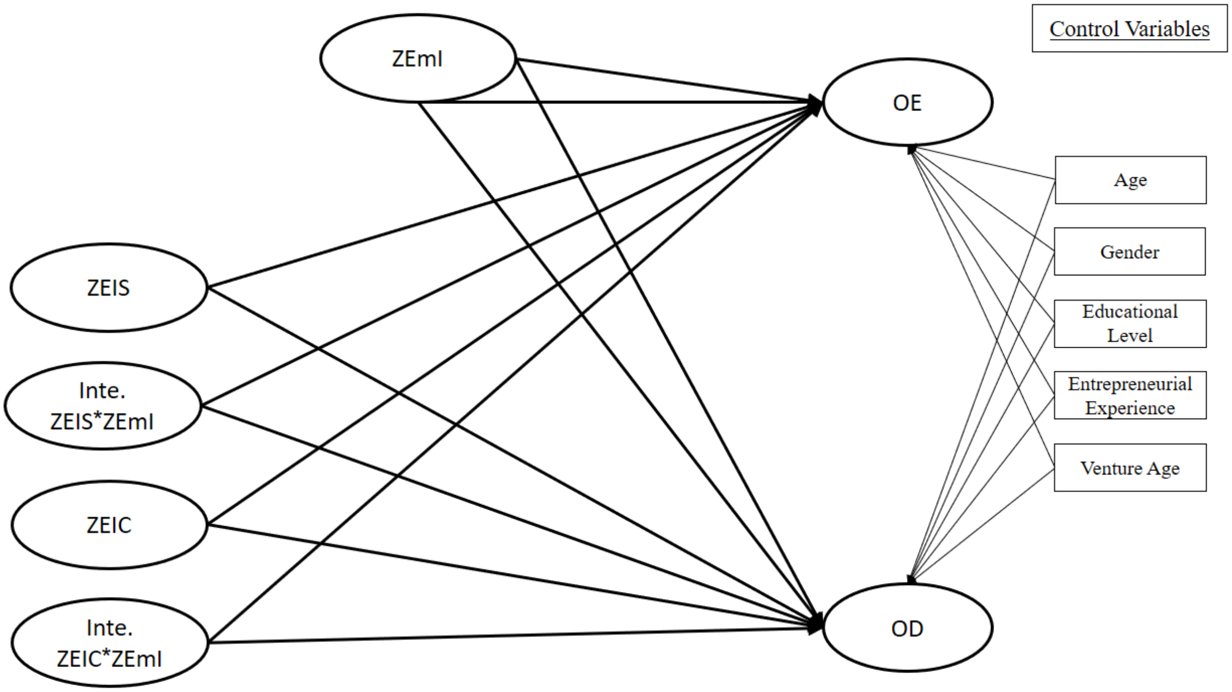
Empathy (E): Items assess sensitivity to others' feelings (E1: "I am keenly aware of feelings of other people"). Intuitive sensing of emotions (E2: "I am gifted at sensing what others around me are feeling"). And awareness of reactions and responses (E3: "I am astute at reading others' reactions and feelings"). In entrepreneurship, empathy supports stakeholder engagement, refinement of opportunities, and co-creation of value (Emami et al., 2021).

Finally, Social Skills (SS): Items measure interpersonal effectiveness (SS1: "I have good people skills"). Relational difficulties (SS2, reverse coded: "People seem to avoid interacting with me"). And teamwork orientation (SS3: "I could be described as a good team player"). Robust social skills enable business owners to mobilize resources, negotiate in their favor, and exploit opportunities through social interactions (Nielsen & Klyver, 2020).

While EI provides motivational and cognitive structure, EmI determines the quality of enactment. In emotional entrepreneurship processes, such as opportunity evaluation, resource collection, or team management, emotionally intelligent reactions manage mutual dynamics and better align with internal motivations and external expectations (Levitats et al., 2025). Thus, EmI, as a moderator, might amplify or attenuate the extent to which identity salience and centrality influence opportunity evaluation and development. Furthermore, Goleman's model is tested across several valid psychometric units (e.g., the emotional capacity portfolio), which demonstrate high internal consistency and cross-cultural applicability (Boyatzis et al., 2015).

These parameters are well applied in the literature on leadership and entrepreneurship, thus constituting a functional and general framework for the current scenario. The general structural model 2 is presented graphically in Figure 3.5. The red arrows show hypotheses H3a and H3b, whereas the blue arrows show hypotheses H4a and H4b. The control variables that encompass age, gender, education, entrepreneurial experience, and venture age are connected to the dependent latent variables OE and OD. The prefix “Z” indicates that these latent variables were standardized as Z-scores. The terms “Inte.” represent the interaction of the independent variables and the moderator variable after standardization, and these were incorporated into the structural model to examine the moderation effects. This interaction-term approach is consistent with prior SEM research on moderation using standardized product indicators (Cheung et al., 2024).

Figure 3.5*: SEM model 2*



In conclusion, a methodological approach was assembled that combined robust conceptualization with precision, which facilitated an investigation of the relationships between EI dimensions, EmI, and opportunity-related processes. Using SEM with data collected from founder-entrepreneurs in Jordan facilitated an investigation of interaction effects, whilst construct validity and reliability were ensured. The findings of the subsequent chapter will include information that will revolve around structural relationships and statistical support, thus enriching knowledge of identity-based entrepreneurship. For methodical transparency, data analysis has been adopted sequentially:

Model 1: Direct Effects. Reliability, validity, EFA, CFA, and SEM tests were conducted to assess EIS/EIC effects on OE/OD. Model 2: Moderated Model. In this model, reliability, validity and EFA tests were conducted for EmI as a new latent variable, while for the measurement model with all constructs, CFA tests were conducted. Furthermore, SEM and Z-score tests were conducted to assess the effect of moderation on the hypothesized model 2. This model therefore provides an assurance of validity before hypothesis testing, thus validating the concept of sequential validation as proposed in Hair and Alamer (2022) and Hair et al. (2021), as proposed in the study work done by Cheung et al. (2021).

The design of the thesis attempted to strike an appropriate balance between the requirement to preserve conceptual distinctness. The purpose of this thesis study in this research field is to provide an opportunity to explore a range of associated psychological, behavioral, and contextual questions in the Jordanian entrepreneurial ecosystem. The following chapter presents the study findings, starting with the analysis concerning scale's reliability, construct validity, in addition to structural and moderating model analysis.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined and justified the methodological approach adopted to examine the relationships between EI, OE, OD, and EmI. Consistent with the study's research objectives and hypothesis-testing orientation, a quantitative, deductive, and cross-sectional research design was employed. The methodological approach was underpinned by a critical realist ontology and a post-positivist epistemology, recognizing that entrepreneurial phenomena exist independently of the researcher while acknowledging that their empirical measurement and interpretation are necessarily imperfect (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

The chapter also explained the selection of Jordan as the empirical context and the focus on founder entrepreneurs as the study population. Founder entrepreneurs were considered particularly appropriate because they are directly involved in establishing and managing their ventures and are therefore well positioned to report on their entrepreneurial identities and opportunity-related activities (Farmer et al., 2011; Stappers & Andries, 2022). The sampling strategy, participant recruitment, survey administration, and screening procedures were described, including the criteria used to ensure that the final sample consisted of individuals who had founded, retained ownership or equity in, and maintained strategic responsibility for their ventures.

The chapter further detailed the operationalization and measurement of the study's principal constructs. Established measures from previous research were adapted to assess EIS (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Phinney, 1992), EIC (Murnieks et al., 2020), OE (Scheaf et al., 2020), OD (Shepherd et al., 2021), and EmI (Goleman, 2013). The procedures adopted to support measurement reliability and validity, translation and back-translation, cross-cultural appropriateness, and the conceptual distinctiveness of the constructs were also explained.

Finally, the chapter described the analytical procedures used to evaluate the measurement and structural models and test the proposed hypotheses. These procedures included descriptive analysis, reliability assessment, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, and SEM. Attention was also given to potential methodological concerns, including common method variance, construct overlap, measurement specification, and the limitations associated with the cross-sectional and non-probability sampling design (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

Overall, the methodological procedures presented in this chapter provide the basis for systematically examining the theoretical relationships developed in Chapter 2. Having established how the constructs were operationalized, the data were collected, and the proposed relationships were to be tested, Chapter 4 presents the empirical results, including the assessment of the measurement models, structural relationships, and moderation effects.

4. Findings

This chapter presents empirical findings of the current thesis. The results are presented in accordance with the conceptual framework and hypotheses, beginning with measurement scales reliability and constructs validity, followed by the structural models and the testing of moderation effects. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an interpretation of how identity-based mechanisms and EmI interact to shape opportunity-related outcomes within the Jordanian entrepreneurial context.

Although the study employed non-probability snowball sampling and therefore does not claim statistical representativeness of the Jordanian population, the demographic characteristics of the sample can be compared with the broader national context to identify areas of similarity and difference. As shown in Figure 3.3, 65.4% of the respondents were male and 34.6% were female. This gender imbalance is broadly consistent with the contextual evidence presented in Chapter 3, which indicates that women face greater constraints in labour-market and entrepreneurial participation in Jordan. However, the sample is relatively highly educated, with 53.8% of respondents holding a bachelor's degree, 34.6% a master's degree, and 7.6% a doctoral degree. This suggests that the sample is more highly educated than the Jordanian population as a whole.

As such, these comparisons should be interpreted cautiously. The demographic profile of the sample demonstrates some correspondence with characteristics of the Jordanian entrepreneurial context, particularly in terms of gender participation, but it should not be considered statistically representative of the general population. This is also consistent with the study's sampling strategy and target population, which focused specifically on established founder entrepreneurs rather than Jordanian adults generally. Accordingly, the findings are generalized to founder entrepreneurs with characteristics similar to those represented in the sample, rather than to the Jordanian population as a whole.

The results did not include respondents who identified with other ethnic groups. This outcome should be interpreted primarily in light of the study's non-probability snowball sampling approach, through which participants were recruited through entrepreneurial networks and referrals within Jordan. Consequently, the ethnic composition of the sample is likely to reflect the characteristics of the recruitment networks rather than the ethnic composition of the wider Jordanian population.

The questionnaire included an optional section allowing respondents to provide additional comments. Only a small number of respondents used this section, and the comments received were limited to brief expressions of goodwill, such as “good luck” and “wishing you success.” No substantive comments relating to the study constructs, questionnaire items, or respondents’ entrepreneurial experiences were provided. Accordingly, these comments were not subjected to qualitative or thematic analysis. Their exclusion did not result in the loss of information relevant to the quantitative analysis or the interpretation of the study findings.

The following section presents the empirical results for SEM Model 1, which examines the direct relationships between the two dimensions of EI (EIS and EIC), and the two opportunity-related outcomes (OE and OD). The analysis proceeds by first assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement model, followed by an examination of the correlations among the study constructs and the structural model estimates. The hypothesized direct relationships (H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b) are then tested while accounting for the specified control variables. This sequence provides the empirical foundation for Model 2, which subsequently examines the moderating role of EmI in the relationships between entrepreneurial identity and opportunity-related outcomes.

4.1 Results for the SEM Model 1

Reliability analysis confirmed that the studied constructs of model 1 demonstrated strong internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha values exceeded the recommended .70 thresholds across all four constructs.: EIS (α = 0.821), EIC (α = 0.781), OE (α = 0.857), and OD (α = 0.814). To evaluate the measurement scales for the model variables, we conducted exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Results from the exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 4.1.

In Table 4.1, the factor loadings of all observed items for the latent constructs being studied, which are EIS, EIC, OE, and OD, are presented. No factor loading was insignificant, and all of them were beyond .86; thus, the requirement for convergent validity was very well satisfied. All constructs had CR values higher than .70, and AVEs were over .50, providing evidence of adequate reliability and convergent validity in accordance with the recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2022). All four items load primarily on the factor they are expected to load on (i.e., all factor loadings exceeded .70, satisfying the recommended threshold (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 4.1: *Results of exploratory factor analysis (n=344)*

	ITEM	COMPONENT				SOURCE
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	
	Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS) (α= 0.821)					
1 (EIS1)	The primary satisfactions in my life come from my entrepreneurial work.	0.910				Lobel and Clair (1992)
2 (EIS2)	The most important things that have happened to me involve my entrepreneurial work.	0.910				Lobel and Clair (1992)
3 (EIS3)	I am an entrepreneur and a family person, but lean a bit more towards entrepreneurial work.	0.904				Lobel and Clair (1992)
4 (EIS4)	I have spent time trying to find out more about my entrepreneurial work, such as its history, traditions, and customs.	0.902				Phinney (1992)
	Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC) (α= 0.781)					
5 (EIC1)	Being an entrepreneur is something I frequently think about.		0.913			Murnieks et al. (2020)
6 (EIC2)	Entrepreneurship is an important part of who I am.		0.911			Murnieks et al. (2020)
7 (EIC3)	I would feel a loss if I were forced to give up being an entrepreneur.		[a]			Murnieks et al. (2020)
8 (EIC4)	Being an entrepreneur means more to me than just making a living.		0.917			Murnieks et al. (2020)

	Opportunity Evaluation (OE) (α= 0.857)			
9 (OE1)	If there is a potential opportunity, I see large potential gains for myself in pursuing it.	0.871		Scheaf et al. (2020)
10 (OE2)	If there is a potential opportunity, I want to learn more about pursuing it.	0.864		Scheaf et al. (2020)
11 (OE3)	If there is a potential opportunity, the overall riskiness of pursuing it is high for me. (Reversed)	0.865		Scheaf et al. (2020)
12 (OE4)	If there is a potential opportunity, I would love to work on making it a reality.	0.872		Scheaf et al. (2020)
13 (OE5)	Seeking feedback from family and friends	[a]		Scheaf et al. (2020)
	Opportunity Development (OD) (α= 0.814)			
14 (OD1)	Looking into the immediate future, I plan to consult with someone to further develop a business opportunity.		0.914	Shepherd et al. (2021)
15 (OD2)	I see interaction(s) with the team as good for developing an opportunity.		0.910	Shepherd et al. (2021)
16 (OD3)	I focus on improving existing features and functions (Time and effort on developing opportunities).		0.906	Shepherd et al. (2021)
17 (OD4)	I am aware of any other contacts my team is reaching out to develop an opportunity.		0.901	Shepherd et al. (2021)

[a] Items EIC3 and OE5 were removed after CFA due to high residuals and cross-loadings (> .40), following Hair et al. (2022). Reliability and validity values improved post-deletion (see below on the CFA results).

A study on the Relative Importance Index (RII) was also performed, this study provides meaningful interpretations of the degree of embeddedness of identity- and opportunity-related cognition within the entrepreneurial mindset. Accordingly, below is a summary of the emphasis entrepreneurs place on each construct, explaining how personal perceptions of these constructs relate to opportunities. Table 4.2 presents an elaborate overview of the constructs' importance and relative importance scales for all measurement items on the four key constructs. Interestingly, the findings show that all items ranked fall within the H-M importance level, indicating that the sampled entrepreneurs place consistent emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurship constructs. Entrepreneurs who participated in the survey show positive reactions to EIS and EIC identity-based elements and demonstrate interest in OE and OD processes, as they consider the study's entrepreneurship elements vital. The research indicates that entrepreneurs exhibit positive reactions to all EIC, EIS, OE, and OD elements because they consider them significant. The RII construct values demonstrate strong relationships through their measurement range between 0.679 and 0.722, which proves that these elements maintain vital connections within the entrepreneurial mindset. The mean values show a range of 3.396 to 3.610, which demonstrates that respondents generally maintain positive views about the assessed elements. The standard deviation values showed a range between 1.120 and 1.390, which revealed that the respondents displayed moderate differences in their opinions. The results show that respondents exhibit different patterns in the elements they focus on during their tasks.

Table 4.2*: Ranking Criteria and Items' Importance Level*

Selection criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	RII*	Ranking by category	Overall ranking	Importance level
EIS1	3.451	1.389	0.690	4	13	H-M
EIS2	3.463	1.380	0.692	3	12	H-M
EIS3	3.470	1.372	0.694	2	10	H-M
EIS4	3.482	1.390	0.696	1	7	H-M
Overall EIS	3.465	1.361	0.693			
EIC1	3.524	1.230	0.704	1	4	H-M
EIC2	3.506	1.226	0.701	2	5	H-M
EIC4	3.470	1.210	0.694	3	11	H-M
Overall EIC	3.503	1.200	0.702			
OE1	3.482	1.358	0.696	1	8	H-M
OE2	3.476	1.372	0.695	2	9	H-M
OE3	3.439	1.343	0.687	3	14	H-M
OE4	3.396	1.350	0.679	4	15	H-M
Overall OE	3.448	1.330	0.689			
OD1	3.506	1.121	0.701	4	6	H-M
OD2	3.573	1.151	0.714	3	3	H-M
OD3	3.598	1.144	0.719	2	2	H-M
OD4	3.610	1.164	0.722	1	1	H-M
Overall OD	3.571	1.120	0.714			

**Relative Important Index. EIS: Entrepreneurial identity salience. EIC: Entrepreneurial identity centrality. OE: Opportunity evaluation. OD: Opportunity development.*

To evaluate the appropriateness of the measurement model, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out. The initial measurement model showed a rather poor fit, χ^2 (24) = 1580.126, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.097, CFI = 0.849, and TLI = 0.774. In accordance with Anderson et al. (2015), the modification indices were used to refine the measurement model. Two items (EIC3 'I would feel a loss if I were forced to give up being an entrepreneur' and OE5 'Seeking feedback from family and friends') had very high standardized residuals (> 3.0) and expressed more than 0.40 loadings on unintended constructs, signifying localized stress and possible conceptual overlap. Indices of modification indicated that EIC3's cross-loadings on EIS (MI = 24.6) and OE5's on OD (MI = 18.3) facilitated their exclusion. Following the protocols of Hair et al. (2022) and Kline (2023), these items were removed to enhance the model's fit. The removal of these items led to an increase in each construct's Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which crossed the recommended thresholds (CR > 0.70; AVE > 0.50). After the item deletions, the overall fit indices of the model improved (CFI went up from 0.849 to 0.939; RMSEA went down from 0.097 to 0.061), thereby substantiating the better model specifications and the internal consistency.

After the removal of certain indicators, the EIC construct was composed of three indicators: EIC1, EIC2, and EIC4, and their factor loadings were between 0.91 and 0.92 (already shown in Table 4.1). The construct could be considered reliable ($\alpha = 0.781$, CR = 0.88). The OE construct, on the other hand, was made up of four indicators (OE1–OE4) whose respective loadings were between 0.864 and 0.872 (already shown in Table 4.1) and whose reliability could also be considered satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.857$, CR = 0.89). The items that were removed did not change the theoretical scope of the constructs but rather reduced duplication and improved discriminant validity. The case is such that one item has been removed from each of the two constructs, yet the remaining items still cover the theoretical content area of the centrality of entrepreneurial identity (where the role of the entrepreneur is about commitment and cognitive dedication) and the evaluation of opportunities (the cognitive evaluation of the feasibility and attractiveness of the opportunity) thereby guaranteeing content validity.

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability primarily provide evidence of internal consistency, while factor loadings and AVE provide evidence regarding the convergence of indicators on their intended constructs (Hair et al., 2022). This consideration is particularly relevant to EIS and EIC because both represent dimensions of EI and are therefore theoretically related. However, their relationship does not imply conceptual equivalence. Empirically, the reasonable correlation between EIS and EIC ($r = .359$, $p < .001$, see Table 4.3), together with their distinct factor structure, provides evidence that the constructs are related but distinguishable. Therefore, the statistical validity results should be interpreted as supporting, rather than independently establishing, the conceptual distinctiveness of the constructs.

The interrelation of the different aspects of EI, salience and centrality, as well as the opportunity-oriented processes, evaluation, and development, can serve as the foundation for the theoretical validation of the analysis of the model and the hypotheses presented in this study. Lastly, the confirmatory factor analysis represents a highly critical step that enables evaluation of the strength of the correlation between the latent constructs, ensuring the measurement model used has internal consistency, i.e., the entire model is consistent with the theoretical perspective, as noted by Hair et al. (2022). In the CFA, the correlation analysis will make sure the constants remain different from one another, as well as determine the exact points where identity extends into the cognitive/behavioral factors affecting the level of engagement for the entrepreneurial opportunities presented. Hence, the following correlation matrix (Table 4.3) illustrates the extent to which these constructs are interlinked, providing the first empirical evidence of their theoretical alignment within the EI literature.

Table 4.3: *Correlation statistics (N = 344)*

	EIS	**EIC**	**OE**	**OD**
EIS	1			
EIC	0.359***	1		
OE	0.515***	0.386***	1	
OD	0.319***	0.408***	0.452***	1

*Diagonal values are 1.000. ***p < .001.*

The data revealed a very unified correlation among the constructs as the variables under study were found to be positively and significantly correlated ($p < .001$), in particular EIS having a high positive correlation with OE ($r = .515$), meaning that entrepreneurs possessing a higher salience of their identity are the ones who activate the evaluating of opportunities that are in line with their self-concept. EIC also correlates quite reasonably with both OE ($r = .386$) and OD ($r = .408$), indicating that entrepreneurs who more strongly identify with the entrepreneurial role are more likely to engage in continuous opportunity generation and development. The correlation between OE and OD ($r = .452$) further supports the theoretical connection between these opportunity processes, in which the practical evaluation often leads to more vigorous development actions. All in all, the correlation pattern gives preliminary evidence for the posited associations among EI dimensions and opportunity-related outcomes, confirming the measurement model's conceptual coherence.

Table 4.4 shows the structural model results that include the main predictors (EIS and EIC) as well as the control variables (age, gender, education level, entrepreneurial experience, and venture age). The effect of EI dimensions is strong and statistically significant even when the aforementioned demographic and contextual factors are considered. The control variables, age, gender, education level, and entrepreneurial experience, do not show any significant relationships with OE and OD, which indicates that identity-based mechanisms are the primary determinants of entrepreneurs' cognition and behavior regarding opportunity. The only control variable with a weak but significant positive effect on OD is venture age ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$), suggesting that more mature ventures may possess the structural or experiential capacity to engage more deeply in opportunity development activities. These results suggest that while demographic and perceptual factors may inform initial entry into entrepreneurship, their explanatory power diminishes as founders establish their ventures.

Most of the control variables included in Model 1: age, gender, education level, and entrepreneurial experience, were not significantly associated with OE or OD after accounting for EIS and EIC. Venture age was the exception, showing a small but significant positive relationship with OD ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$). These findings indicate that the demographic controls included in the model provided limited additional explanatory contribution to opportunity-related outcomes beyond the focal identity variables. However, their non-significance should not be interpreted as evidence that EI fully dominates entrepreneurial decision-making. The model was designed specifically to examine identity-based explanations of OE and OD and does not incorporate all potentially relevant cognitive, social, contextual, or venture-level influences.

Similarly, the non-significance of the control variables does not, by itself, indicate model misspecification. The acceptable model-fit indices and robustness checks provide support for the stability of the specified relationships (Hair et al., 2022; Kline, 2023), but they cannot exclude the possibility that relevant variables were omitted from the model. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted with this understanding. EIS and EIC explain significant variation in OE and OD within the theoretical boundaries of the present model, while other unmeasured factors may also contribute to entrepreneurial opportunity-related processes. Future research could extend the model by incorporating additional contextual, cognitive, social, and venture-specific variables to assess the explanatory contribution of EI relative to alternative influences. The specified Model 1 showed a very good fit to the data, with no trace of model misspecification: RMSEA = .061, CFI = .939, NFI = .921, IFI = .939, CMIN/DF = 1.604, and KMO = .903 (Hair et al., 2025). The combined evidence indicates that the measurement items represented their respective latent constructs reliably; therefore, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were strong.

Table 4.4: *Structural Model Results: Effects of EI and Control Variables on OE and OD*

Variable	**β (OE)**	**p**	**β (OD)**	**p**
EIS	0.678	< .001	0.241	< .001
EIC	0.276	< .001	0.634	< .001
Age	0.05	ns	0.07	ns
Gender (1 = Male)	-0.04	ns	-0.02	ns
Education Level	0.03	ns	0.06	ns
Entrepreneurial Experience	0.09	ns	0.11	ns
Venture Age	0.08	ns	0.14	< .05

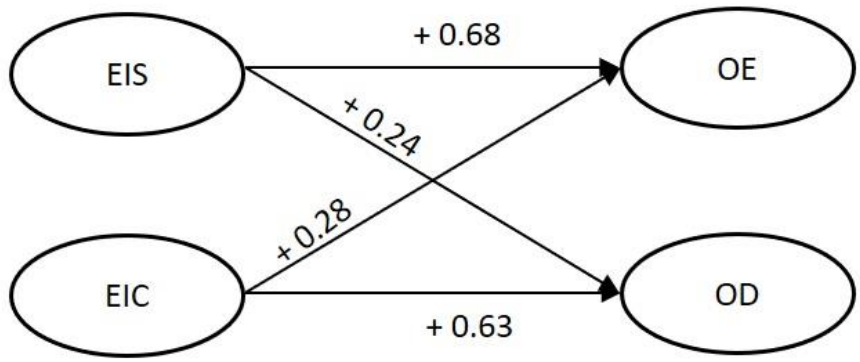
Note: *Standardized regression coefficients (β) are reported. ns = not significant. EIS = Entrepreneurial Identity Salience; EIC = Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality. Model estimated using SEM (n = 344).*

The structural relationships reported in this study should be interpreted as theoretically specified associations rather than definitive causal effects. Although the hypothesised model specifies directional relationships from EIS and EIC to OE and OD, the cross-sectional research design measures these constructs at a single point in time and therefore cannot establish temporal precedence. Accordingly, statistically significant SEM path coefficients indicate that the observed relationships are consistent with the theoretical predictions of the study.

The theoretical direction of the relationships is grounded in Role Identity Theory, which provides the rationale for positioning identity salience and centrality as antecedents of opportunity-related cognition and behavior (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This provides support for the theoretical plausibility of the proposed direction but should not be regarded as establishing causality. Reverse causality and reciprocal relationships remain possible; for example, engagement in OE or development may also reinforce the salience or centrality of an entrepreneurial identity. Longitudinal or experimental research is therefore required to establish temporal ordering and provide stronger evidence of causal relationships.

The SEM analysis results for model 1 presented in Figure 4.1 provide robust empirical support for the hypothesised relationships between the two theoretically distinct role-identity properties of EI (EIS and EIC), and the two opportunity-related processes (OE and OD). The analysis demonstrates that both EIS and EIC are significantly and positively associated with OE and OD, thereby confirming all four hypotheses (H1a–H2b). Specifically, the results confirm hypothesis H1a, which posits that EIS is positively associated with OE, with a standardised regression coefficient of 0.678 and a high significance level ($p < 0.001$). Likewise, hypothesis H1b confirmed that EIC positively affects OE, with a standardised regression coefficient of 0.276 and a high significance level ($p < 0.001$). Hypothesis H2a was also confirmed, showing that EIS influences OD, with a standardised regression coefficient of 0.241 and a very high significance level ($p < 0.001$). Also, hypothesis H2b was confirmed; EIC is positively associated with OD, with a standardised regression coefficient of 0.634 and an important significance level ($p < 0.001$). Conclusively, EIS and EIC highly predict OE and OD.

Figure 4.1: *SEM Model 1 Results*



The relative strength of the direct effects provides further insight into the distinct roles of EIS and EIC in opportunity-related processes. EIS exhibited a substantially stronger relationship with OE ($\beta = .678$) than with OD ($\beta = .241$), whereas EIC demonstrated a considerably stronger relationship with OD ($\beta = .634$) than with OE ($\beta = .276$). The findings therefore support a process-based differentiation in their relative influence: situational identity prominence appears more strongly associated with evaluative processes, whereas enduring identity importance appears more strongly associated with developmental processes. Because the present study employed a cross-sectional design, it cannot establish temporal ordering among EIS, EIC, OE, and OD.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 show the diagrams of the relationships between EIS, EIC, OE, and OD. They show that the more salient and central the EI is, the higher the chances of identifying and developing opportunities. Meaning that the relationship between EI dimensions and OE and OD is direct and positive. This supports the study hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b.

Figure 4.2: *Direct relationships of EIS and OE, OD*

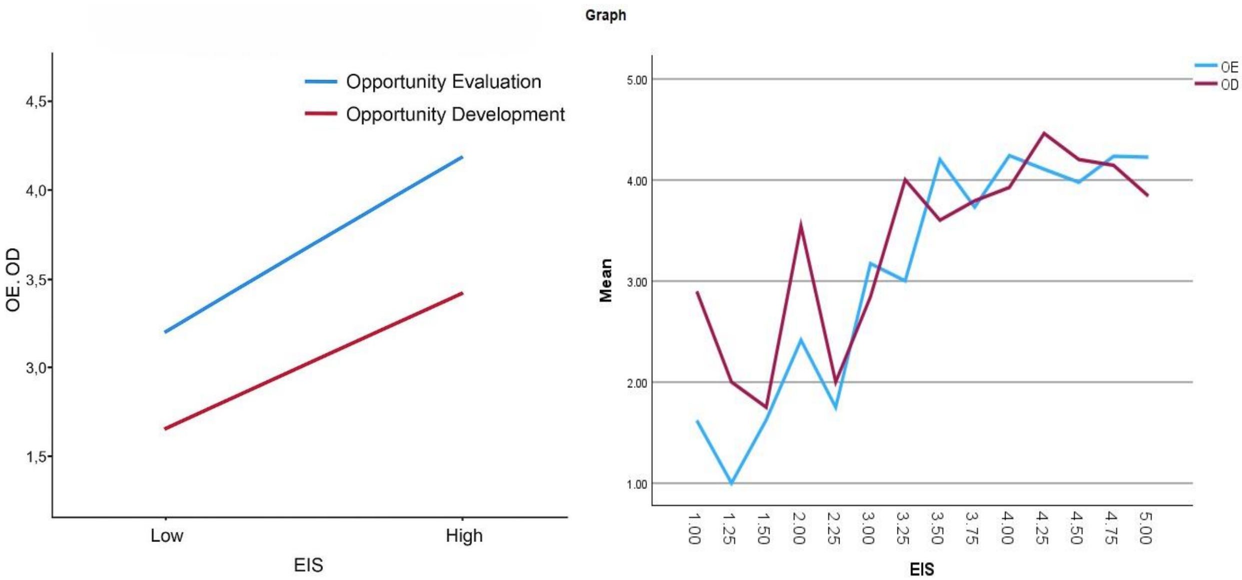
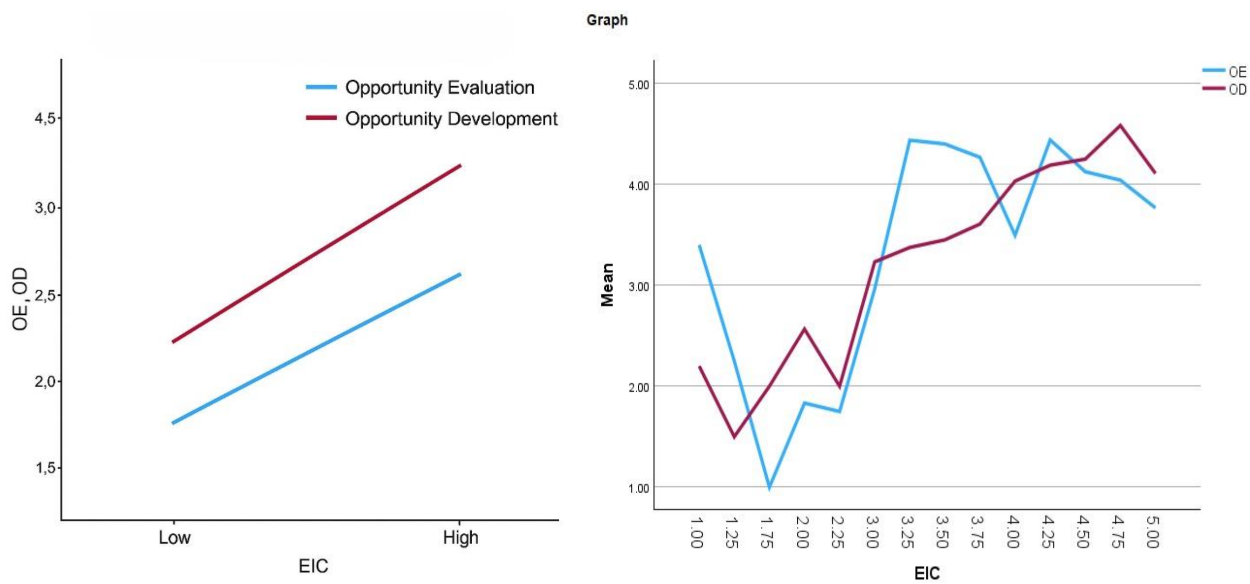


Figure 4.3: *Direct relationships of EIC and OE, OD*



As shown in Figure 4.2, higher levels of EIS are associated with increases in both OE and OD, indicating that when entrepreneurs strongly perceive and prioritize their entrepreneurial role, they are more capable of recognizing and assessing opportunities and initiating their development. Besides, Figure 4.3 demonstrates that greater EIC similarly enhances both OE and OD, though the effect is more pronounced for OD. This pattern suggests that EIS is more strongly associated with the cognitive and evaluative aspects of opportunity processes, whereas EIC shows a stronger association with development-oriented activities. The figures visually confirm that identity-driven mechanisms are central in shaping entrepreneurial cognition and behavior. This reinforces the study's empirical findings that EIS and EIC predict opportunity-related outcomes.

4.2 Results for the SEM Model 2

In Model 2, EmI, employed as the moderating construct, constituted the fifth and final construct in the questionnaire, following EIS, EIC, OE, and OD. The model design comprised two nested structural models estimated sequentially. Model 1 created the groundwork for direct effects, showing the relationships among EIS, EIC, and the two opportunity processes (OE and OD). Model 2 further built on this groundwork by adding the moderating construct of EmI. At the latent-variable level, moderation was tested using the Z-standardization method in AMOS 29. To reduce multicollinearity, mean centring was performed on all latent variables before calculating interaction terms. A hierarchical approach such as this assures that alterations in model fit and path coefficients between Model 1 and Model 2 denote the sole additional influence of EmI as a moderator and not the differences in measurement specifications.

Following the procedure outlined by Cheung et al. (2021). Reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients for the study constructs (EmI). The measure of EmI has 15 items that are assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, and its development builds on Goleman (2001). Following recommendations under model validation, which used the SEM methodology (Hair et al., 2022), structured analysis of the research model's measures, EmI, was completed, assessing the construct and discriminant validity of the research model. EmI built a sound internal consistency level beyond the one required in this research, with an alpha of 0.834 calculated.

An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted, which confirmed the intended five-factor structure (EIS, EIC, OE, OD, EmI), with all items loading above 0.50. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.893, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (χ^2 (105) = 1784.42, $p < 0.001$), confirming the suitability of the data for factor analysis. The rotated component matrix shows that all 15 items loaded strongly (≥ 0.70) on a single latent component, with no evidence of cross-loadings or multicollinearity (see Table 4.5). All standard loading values exceeded 0.70 and were statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. This pattern supports the internal coherence and convergent validity of the EmI construct. The results of the Rotated Component Matrix for EmI are displayed in Table 4.5 below. High values of the KMO measure, coupled with the outcome of the significant Bartlett's test, establish the robustness of the psychometric properties of the scale. Therefore, EmI was selected as a unidimensional reflective construct for subsequent confirmatory factor analysis and for moderation analyses in SEM Model 2.

Table 4.5: *Rotated Component Matrix*

	ITEM	COMPONENT					SOURCE
		1	2	3	4	5	
EMI	**(SA, SR, SM, E, SS) (α= 0.834)**						
1 (SA1)	I am always aware of my moods.					0.701	Goleman (2013)
2 (SA2)	I have good insight into what makes me tick.					0.763	Goleman (2013)
3 (SA3)	I have difficulty describing my feelings to others.					0.757	Goleman (2013)
4 (SR1)	I can often shrug off a foul mood and go on with my day.					0.784	Goleman (2013)
5 (SR2)	I feel negative emotions more strongly than other people (R).					0.797	Goleman (2013)
6 (SR3)	I can regulate my moods so that they do not overwhelm me.					0.796	Goleman (2013)
7 (SM1)	I have the will to accomplish my goals.					0.832	Goleman (2013)
8 (SM2)	I have too little motivation to try hard enough to do well (R).					0.816	Goleman (2013)
9 (SM3)	I am what others call a self-starter.					0.796	Goleman (2013)
10 (E1)	I am keenly aware of feelings of other people.					0.788	Goleman (2013)
11 (E2)	I am gifted at sensing what others around me are feeling.					0.774	Goleman (2013)
12 (E3)	I am astute at reading others' reactions and feelings.					0.752	Goleman (2013)
13 (SS1)	I have good people skills.					0.782	Goleman (2013)
14 (SS2)	People seem to avoid interacting with me (R).					0.763	Goleman (2013)
15 (SS3)	I could be described as a good team player.					0.779	Goleman (2013)

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Note(s): EMI = Emotional Intelligence (SA = Self-Awareness, SR = Self-Regulation, SM = Self-Motivation, E = Empathy, SS = Social-Skills).

The Relative Importance Index results indicate that all 15 EmI items were rated in the high–medium importance range (0.678–0.715). Among the five sub-dimensions, Self-Awareness recorded the highest mean RII (0.708), indicating that entrepreneurs perceive understanding and awareness of their emotional states as critical to their entrepreneurial functioning. Table 4.6 displays the RII for each EmI item, relevant importance level, and ranking. Conversely, Self-Motivation and Self-Regulation items obtained comparatively lower RII scores (about 0.69), though still within the high–medium range, suggesting a consistent but slightly less prominent perceived influence. The overall value of 0.697 as a result for the RII measures a level of stability, indicating a substantial level of emotional competence within the sample population. These measures are consistent with those obtained via EFA analysis once again, reiterating the construct's reliability as a contributing variable within the SEM model 2.

Table 4.6: *Ranking Criteria and Items' Importance Levels*

Selection criteria	Mean	Std. Deviation	RII*	Ranking by category	Overall ranking	Importance level
SA1	3.523	1.187	0.7046	2	9	H-M
SA2	3.574	1.109	0.7148	1	8	H-M
SA3	3.520	1.165	0.704	3	10	H-M
SR1	3.458	1.094	0.6916	10	24	H-M
SR2	3.473	1.071	0.6946	9	23	H-M
SR3	3.477	1.054	0.6954	8	21	H-M
SM1	3.458	1.064	0.6916	11	25	H-M
SM2	3.458	1.067	0.6916	11	26	H-M
SM3	3.390	1.090	0.678	13	30	H-M
E1	3.440	1.073	0.688	12	28	H-M
E2	3.480	1.002	0.696	7	20	H-M
E3	3.509	0.984	0.7018	5	13	H-M
SS1	3.509	1.027	0.7018	5	14	H-M
SS2	3.484	1.020	0.6968	6	19	H-M
SS3	3.513	1.105	0.7026	4	12	H-M

Overall EMI	3.485	0.911	0.697			H-M

**Relative Important Index. EMI = Emotional intelligence (SA = Self-Awareness, SR = Self-Regulation, SM = Self-Motivation, E = Empathy, SS = Social-Skills).*

Table 4.7 shows the correlation among model 2 latent variables. From the results, it is clear that moderate-to-strong positive correlations existed among all factors, specifically measuring from 0.404 to 0.659. The strongest relationship occurred when measuring the relationship between EmI and OE, where $r = 0.659$ and $p < 0.001$. Both dimensions of EI, as presented by both EIS and EIC, had a positive correlation with the opportunity factors of OE and OD. Moreover, the significant relationships between EmI and all other variables suggest that EmI is closely linked to how entrepreneurs evaluate and develop opportunities. These findings support the inclusion of EmI as an influential variable in the subsequent SEM analysis (Model 2). Supporting their theoretical relatedness while remaining empirically distinct, all latent constructs were in a positive and significant correlation ($p < 0.001$).

Table 4.7: *Correlations Between Constructs in Model 2*

Construct	EIS	EIC	OE	OD	EmI
EIS	1	0.429**	0.452**	0.404**	0.604**
EIC		1	0.446**	0.424**	0.502**
OE			1	0.462**	0.659**
OD				1	0.548**
EmI					1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

n = 344.

The positive correlations among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI indicate that the constructs share some variance, which is theoretically expected because they represent related aspects of EI and opportunity-related processes. Particular attention is warranted for the relatively stronger correlations between EmI and EIS and between EmI and OE. However, relatively high correlations alone do not establish that these constructs are manifestations of a single broader latent factor, such as entrepreneurial engagement or motivation. Statistical distinctiveness must be considered alongside the theoretical content and boundaries of the constructs. Conceptually, the constructs capture different phenomena. Thus, although these constructs may covary because they operate within the same entrepreneurial process, they are not theoretically interchangeable.

To evaluate discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion has been utilized, which involves the AVE square root of each construct with the latter's correlations with other latent constructs as per Cheung et al. (2021) and Hair et al. (2022). Discriminant validity was confirmed through the application of the Fornell–Larcker criterion in Table 4.8: the square roots of the AVEs for the five latent variables (0.79–0.83) were higher than those of their inter-construct correlations that corresponded. The case of EmI is a clear-cut example; the √AVE for EmI (0.82) was higher than its correlations with EIS (0.60), EIC (0.50), OE (0.66), and OD (0.55), respectively. Thus, combining these findings indicates that there is strong psychometric evidence for the five constructs EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI, that the measurement model is validated, and that the inclusion of EmI as a moderating variable in the structural model is supported.

Table 4.8. *Fornell–Larcker Discriminant Validity Matrix (Model 2)*

Construct	**√AVE**	**EIS**	**EIC**	**OE**	**OD**	**EmI**
EIS	**0.81**	—				
EIC	0.79	**0.43**	—			
OE	0.83	0.46	**0.45**	—		
OD	0.82	0.40	0.42	**0.46**	—	
EmI	0.82	0.60	0.50	0.66	**0.55**	—

Note: *Second column values represent the square roots of the AVE for each construct; off-diagonal entries are latent variable correlations. EIS = Entrepreneurial Identity Salience; EIC = Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality; OE = Opportunity Evaluation; OD = Opportunity Development; EmI = Emotional Intelligence.*

These findings support the assumption that the five latent variables measure distinct but related theoretical domains. Combined with the high CR and AVE values, these results validate the measurement model's adequacy and justify proceeding with SEM for testing the moderating role of EmI in Model 2.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) for the Moderated Model (Model 2)

After confirming the reliability and validity of the measurement model, a moderated structural equation model was estimated to examine the moderating role of emotional intelligence (EmI) on the relationships between entrepreneurial identity salience (EIS), entrepreneurial identity centrality (EIC), and opportunity evaluation (OE) and opportunity development (OD). Moderation analysis was conducted in AMOS 29 using an interaction-term approach within the SEM framework.

All exogenous latent constructs were standardized using Z-score transformation to reduce potential multicollinearity. Product indicators were subsequently created by multiplying the standardized entrepreneurial identity dimensions (EIS and EIC) by the standardized moderator (EmI). These interaction terms were specified as exogenous predictors of OE and OD. The significance of moderation effects was assessed using standardized regression weights and corresponding critical ratios obtained from the AMOS structural model output (Collier, 2020).

Model fit indices were reported for both the baseline and moderated models to evaluate overall model adequacy. The results of the moderated model indicated that the model fit was acceptable within the range, as suggested by Hair et al. (2022), and the model fit statistics were as follows: RMSEA = 0.076, CFI = 0.923, NFI = 0.917, IFI = 0.923, CMIN/DF = 2.612.

The chi-square statistic increased in the moderated model, rising from 682.91 (df = 389) in the baseline model to 1107.37 (df = 424) in the moderated model. This increase in the chi-square statistic is expected, given the additional parameters added to the model in the form of the interaction terms, as well as the sensitivity of the chi-square statistic to sample size effects. Thus, the chi-square statistic is interpreted descriptively rather than inferentially.

The findings on the effects of the moderators were based on the significance of the standardized interaction effects. Table 4.9 presents a comparative summary of fit statistics for the baseline and moderated models.

Table 4.9: *Model-Fit Comparison*

Fit Index	**Recommended Threshold***	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Δ (Model 2 –- 1)**	**Interpretation**
χ^2 (df)	—	682.91 (389)	1107.37 (424)	—	χ^2 is expected to rise with added paths
CFI	≥ 0.90 (good); ≥ 0.95 (excellent)	0.939	0.923	– 0.016	Slight decline; still acceptable
NFI	≥ 0.90	0.921	0.917	– 0.004	Stable
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.939	0.923	– 0.016	Acceptable
RMSEA	≤ 0.08 (adequate); ≤ 0.05 (good)	0.061	0.076	+ 0.015	Acceptable; modest increase
CMIN/DF	≤ 3.00	1.60	2.61	+ 1.01	Remains within recommended range
PNFI	≥ 0.50	0.812	0.836	+ 0.024	Improved parsimony

*Recommended thresholds based on Hu & Bentler (1999) and Hair et al. (2023).

**A significant p-value for χ^2 is common in large samples; incremental indices provide a more stable basis for assessing fit.

The outputs of the comparison in Table 4.9 indicate that the structures of both the baseline (Model 1) and the moderated (Model 2) models display very good global fit. The minimal differences in the incremental indices (ΔCFI = -0.016; ΔRMSEA = 0.015) are allowed by the thresholds that are set as practically acceptable, therefore suggesting that adding EmI as a moderating construct would not result in a significant decrease of the model's fit. Even though the chi-square value increased, as expected with the addition of interaction terms, all alternative fit indicators remain above the prescribed thresholds. Therefore, Model 2 can be deemed as a statistically valid and theoretically defendable approach for studying the moderating effect of EmI on the relations between entrepreneurial-identity dimensions and opportunity processes.

Findings of the Moderating Effects

Significant interactions were unpacked by estimating simple slopes of the focal predictor (EIS or EIC) on the outcome (OE or OD) at low (−1 SD), mean, and high (+1 SD) levels of EmI (Aguinis et al., 2017). In addition, the Johnson–Neyman technique was applied to identify regions of significance of the predictor across the observed range of the moderator, thus avoiding arbitrary cut-off points and enhancing interpretability (Cheung et al., 2021).

Adding EmI as the moderator between EIS and OE slightly reduced the regression coefficient from $\beta = 0.678$ to $\beta = 0.635$ ($\Delta\beta = -0.043$). Although the chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 15.42$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < .05$) indicated a change in the model, it showed that the interaction term contributed to improved model fit (Cheung et al., 2021). Confirming the effect of the action of EmI as a significant moderator. Here, it was inferred that the values of R and R^2, which are 0.767 and 0.589, respectively, accounted for almost 58.9% of the variance of OE, which indicated that the overall model fit was improved. It is clear that the higher the values of EmI, the more likely it is to have a 'buffering effect' on the overall impact of EIS on OE, which results in the development of more mature and emotionally driven decision-making as opposed to impulsive and identity-driven decisions. Thus, H3a is confirmed, which highlights the effect of the action of EmI as a significant moderator under the EIS – OE relationship

On the other hand, the application of EmI as a moderating factor between the interplay of EIS and OD saw a magnitude increase in the regression coefficient from $\beta = 0.241$ to $\beta = 0.400$ ($\Delta\beta = +0.159$). Overall, the model was established with values of $R = 0.5501$ and R^2 of 0.3026. Importantly, the Chi-square difference test was carried out, showing values of $\Delta\chi^2 = 17.33$, $\Delta df = 2$, and $p < 0.05$. This suggests a significant increase in explanatory power and that the relationship between EIS and OD is positive at a high level. In fact, there was a significant increase in the regression from 24.1% to 40%. It suggests that entrepreneurs with high EmI values are better and more skilled at turning identity prominence into developmental actions. Thus, H3b is confirmed, which suggests that the interplay between EmI and EIS is strengthened.

The moderating effect of EmI on the relationship between EIC and OE was also statistically significant in the same way. The regression coefficient was increased significantly from $\beta = 0.276$ to $\beta = 0.587$ ($\Delta\beta = +0.311$), with $R = 0.6769$ and $R^2 = 0.4583$. The chi-square difference test showed a similar result ($\Delta\chi^2 = 12.85$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the positive effect of identity centrality on OE is stronger at higher levels of EmI. High EmI and strong central identities among entrepreneurs seem to make them better able to interpret information, regulate affect, and apply judgment during evaluation. Consequently, H4a is accepted, indicating that EmI reinforces the EIC–OE relationship, which is a very significant point.

Finally, we can note that including EmI as a moderator in the relationship between EIC and OD produced a negligible change in the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.634$ to 0.632; $\Delta\beta = -0.002$). The chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 0.93$, $\Delta df = 2$, $p > 0.05$) confirmed that this change is statistically and substantively non-significant, indicating that EmI does not moderate the EIC–OD relationship. This non-significant moderation indicates that, in situations in which EI is extremely important to self-definition, EmI no longer contributes to explaining OD. Those who have already made a great commitment to being entrepreneurs may not depend on emotional control to keep up the development activities, but rather on the intrinsic, persistent drive. A review of the literature (Lewis et al., 2016; Shepherd & Patzelt, 2018) asserts that very central identities lead to cognitive inflexibility, thereby making emotional rules less effective. Hence, EmI may slightly buffer rather than amplify the centrality-development link. The model achieved $R = 0.7176$ and $R^2 = 0.5150$, explaining 51.5% of the variance in OD. Consequently, H4b is not supported, indicating a weakening of EmI's moderating effect on the EIC–OD relationship.

The moderation results indicate that EmI does not operate uniformly across all identity–opportunity relationships. Rather, its influence appears to depend on both the dimension of EI and the nature of the opportunity-related process. For the EIS–OE relationship, EmI slightly attenuated the effect of identity salience, suggesting a regulatory or buffering role whereby emotional awareness and regulation may temper the extent to which a highly EIS shapes opportunity judgments. In contrast, EmI strengthened the EIS–OD relationship, suggesting that emotional capabilities may facilitate the translation of situational identity prominence into sustained developmental action. EmI also strengthened the EIC–OE relationship, which is consistent with the view that emotional regulation can complement enduring entrepreneurial commitment when entrepreneurs assess and interpret potential opportunities (Goleman, 2013; Cheung et al., 2021).

The absence of significant moderation for the EIC–OD relationship provides an important boundary condition to this interpretation. EIC already exhibited a strong direct relationship with OD ($\beta = .634$), and the inclusion of EmI produced virtually no change in this relationship ($\beta = .632$). One possible interpretation is that when entrepreneurship is highly central to an individual's self-concept, the enduring commitment and persistence associated with that identity may itself provide a sufficiently strong basis for continued opportunity-development activities, leaving limited incremental scope for EmI to alter this relationship (Murnieks et al., 2020). However, this mechanism was not directly tested and should therefore be regarded as a theoretically informed interpretation rather than a demonstrated causal explanation.

Consequently, the findings do not support characterizing EmI as a general catalyst that uniformly strengthens all identity–opportunity relationships. Instead, they position EmI more precisely as a selective and contingent regulatory mechanism whose influence varies across identity dimensions and opportunity processes. It may attenuate identity-driven influence in some evaluative contexts, strengthen the translation of identity into other opportunity-related processes, and provide little additional influence where identity-based commitment is already strongly associated with the outcome.

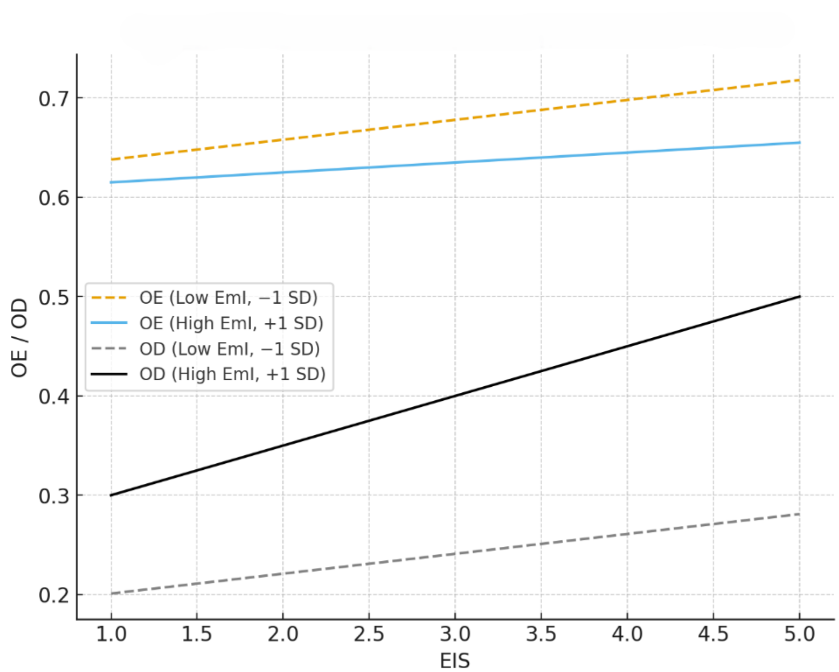
The opposing directions of the moderation effects can be reconciled by conceptualizing EmI as a regulatory rather than uniformly amplifying mechanism. From this perspective, the function of EmI is not necessarily to increase the influence of EI in every situation, but to regulate how identity-related cognitions and motivations are translated into opportunity-related judgments and actions. Emotional regulation may therefore attenuate an identity effect when excessive identity prominence could dominate evaluative judgment, while strengthening an identity effect when emotional capabilities facilitate the translation of identity into more sustained or effective opportunity-related activity (Goleman, 2013).

This regulatory interpretation is consistent with the observed pattern of results. In the EIS–OE relationship, EmI slightly reduced the effect of EIS ($\beta = .678$ to $\beta = .635$). Because EIS reflects the situational prominence of the entrepreneurial role, greater emotional awareness and regulation may temper the extent to which a highly activated EI shapes the evaluation of a potential opportunity, thereby producing a buffering effect. In contrast, EmI strengthened the EIS–OD relationship ($\beta = .241$ to $\beta = .400$), suggesting that emotional capabilities may assist entrepreneurs in translating situational identity prominence into developmental activity. Similarly, the strengthening of the EIC–OE relationship ($\beta = .276$ to $\beta = .587$) suggests that EmI can complement the enduring commitment associated with identity centrality by supporting emotional regulation and judgment during OE.

Accordingly, the different moderation directions are not necessarily theoretically contradictory. Rather, they indicate that the regulatory function of EmI is contingent on how a particular identity dimension interacts with the cognitive and behavioral demands of the opportunity process. EmI may buffer identity influence where regulation is beneficial to evaluative judgment and strengthen it where emotional capabilities facilitate the effective translation of identity into opportunity-related cognition or action. Thus, the findings support a context-sensitive regulatory interpretation of EmI rather than a simple assumption that higher EmI uniformly strengthens EI effects. Overall, these findings suggest that EmI operates as a selective and context-sensitive regulatory mechanism rather than as a general catalyst that uniformly amplifies EI effects. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the interaction plots for moderation effects.

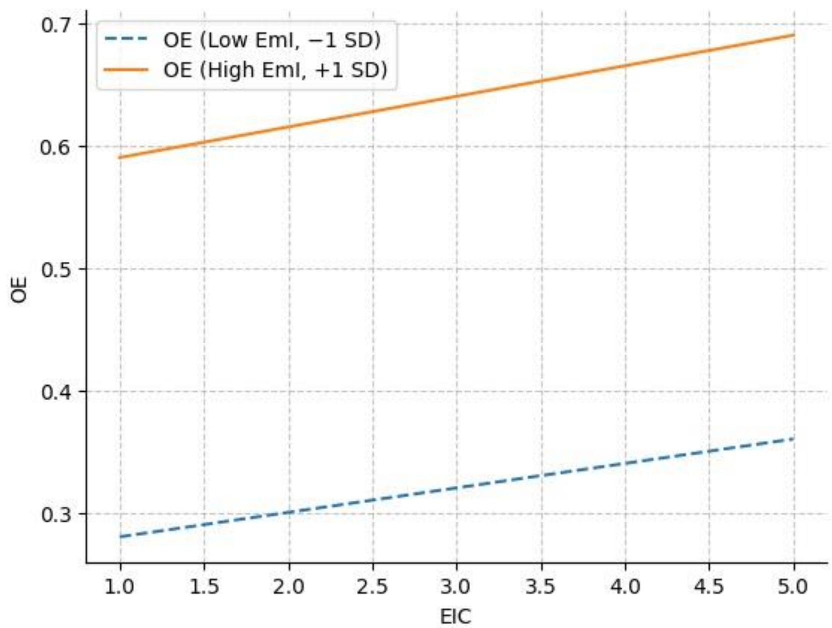
Figure 4.4. illustrates the interaction of EmI and EIS on OE and OD (Y-axis = OE/OD; X-axis = EIS). The slope for OE flattens as EmI increases, reflecting negative moderation: high emotional awareness tempers overconfidence in evaluation. There are significant differences between respondent groups, with respondents who have high EmI reporting higher levels of OD at low levels of EIS compared to respondents having low EmI. At high levels of EIS, all respondents reported higher levels of OD, but respondents with high EmI reported significantly higher levels of OD than those having low EmI. Overall, entrepreneurs with high EmI reported significantly higher levels of OD.

Figure 4.4: *Moderating effect of EmI on the relationships between EIS and OE/OD*



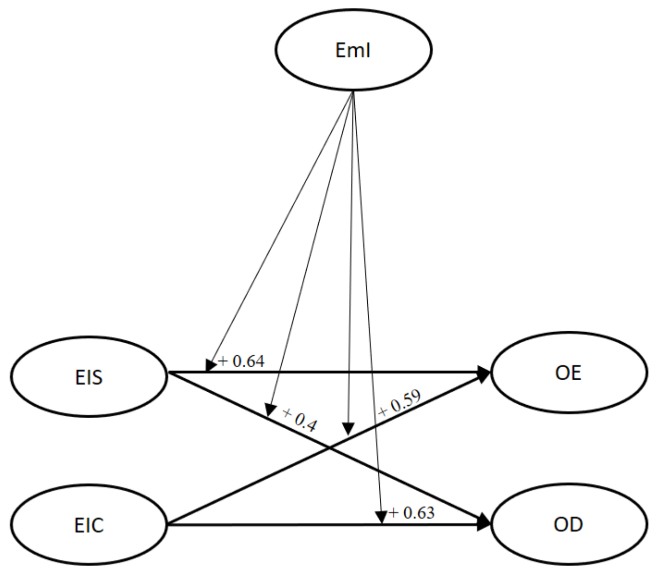
Moreover, Figure 4.5 illustrates the interaction of EmI and EIC on OE and OD. (Y-axis = OE/OD; X-axis = EIC). The slope of the EIC-OE gradient increases with higher levels of EmI, supporting the strengthening effect and corroborating H4a.

Figure 4.5: *Moderating effect of EmI on the relationships between EIC and OE*



Overall, the moderation analysis establishes that EmI exerts a significant and differentiated moderating effect across the identity–opportunity relationships. H3a and H3b show that EmI adds stability and potency to the effect of EIS on the outcomes of opportunity, which diminishes the impact of impulsiveness in evaluation and intensifies the effect of development. Furthermore, H4a shows that EmI also strengthens the EIC-OE relation by intensifying the impact of cognitive clarity and emotional regulation in evaluative reasoning. Overall, the results indicate that EmI operates as a selective rather than universal regulatory mechanism across identity–opportunity relationships.

Figure 4.6: *Model 2 Results*



Summarizing SEM results for Model 1 and Model 2

The results confirm that EmI plays a significant moderating role in the relationships between EI dimensions and opportunity outcomes, although the direction of moderation varies across relationships. Table 4.10 compares the path analyses for Models 1 and 2.

Table 4.10. *SEM Results for Model 1 and Model 2*

Relationship	Model 1 (β Without EmI)	Model 2 (β With EmI)	Δβ	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	p	Moderation effect
EIS → OE	0.678	0.635	−0.043	15.42 (2)	< .05	Supported
EIS → OD	0.241	0.400	+0.159	17.33 (2)	< .05	Supported
EIC → OE	0.276	0.587	+0.311	12.85 (2)	< .05	Supported
EIC → OD	0.634	0.632	−0.002	0.93 (2)	>.05	Not Supported

Note: *N = 344*

Robustness checks

A series of robustness checks was conducted to ensure the stability and reliability of the structural results. First, a multi-group analysis tested the invariance of the structural paths across gender, age, and venture age groups. The coefficients remained consistent across all sub-samples ($\Delta\chi^2$ not significant, $p > .05$), confirming the model's stability. Second, to address potential common method variance (CMV) arising from the self-reported survey design, Harman's single-factor test and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) single-factor model comparison approach were performed. The single-factor model explained less than 40% of the total variance, and model fit indices worsened significantly (CFI < .70; RMSEA > .10), indicating that CMV was not a significant concern. Third, alternative model specifications were tested by reversing the associated ordering between opportunity and EI constructs; however, the resulting fit indices (CFI = .821; RMSEA = .091) were inferior to those of the hypothesized models, supporting the theoretical directionality of effects. Lastly, a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 250 resamples confirmed the significance of the hypothesized direct structural paths, thus reinforcing the consistency of the estimates. Collectively, these robustness checks enhance confidence in the stability, internal validity, and theoretical credibility of the estimated SEM results.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the empirical findings of the study and reported the results of the analyses undertaken to test the hypothesized relationships between Entrepreneurial Identity Salience (EIS), Entrepreneurial Identity Centrality (EIC), Opportunity Evaluation (OE), Opportunity Development (OD), and Emotional Intelligence (EmI). Following established procedures for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the analysis first assessed the measurement properties of the constructs before examining the structural relationships and moderation effects (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2023).

The measurement assessment provided satisfactory evidence of reliability and convergent and discriminant validity for the study constructs. The reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended thresholds, while the confirmatory factor analysis supported the adequacy of the measurement model. Although the constructs were positively related, the additional validity assessments supported treating EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI as theoretically and empirically distinguishable constructs. These assessments provided an appropriate basis for proceeding to the structural analysis.

In Model 1, both EIS and EIC are significant predictors of both OE and OD, thus validating H1a, b and H2a, b. However, it should be noted that the results also indicate that, upon the inclusion of EmI as a moderator in Model 2, the influence of EIS slightly diminishes in favor of OE (H3a) (from .678 to .635) and moderately increases for OD (H3b) (from .241 to .400). This pattern provides empirical support for distinguishing between the situational prominence of the entrepreneurial role and its enduring centrality to the self-concept (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Murnieks et al., 2020), while also supporting the distinction between opportunity evaluation and opportunity development as related but different entrepreneurial activities (Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). While EmI enhances the impact of EIC on OE (H4a) ($\beta = .276$ to .587) it does not significantly moderate the relationship between EIC and OD (H4b). These results indicate that EmI does not uniformly amplify identity effects; rather, it fine-tunes them by mitigating excessive identity-driven intensity and promoting more balanced decision-making. The inclusion of EmI also improves the overall explanatory power of the model ($\Delta R^2 = .07$ for OE and $\Delta R^2 = .16$ for OD).

These results broaden the literature on EI by shedding light on how identity salience and centrality predict distinct processes for OE and OD. Using EmI as a moderator permits an emotion-regulation perspective to differentiate and refine the process- linking, or relationship, between identity and opportunity. This research, which illustrates whether EmI facilitates or diminishes processes through which entrepreneurs in limited-resource environments, such as Jordan, harness emotions to guide their opportunity processes.

Overall, the findings presented in this chapter provide empirical evidence for the majority of the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework while also revealing important differences in the relative roles of EIS, EIC, and EmI across OE and OD. Building on these empirical findings, Chapter 5 discusses their theoretical and practical meaning, compares them with the existing literature and the Jordanian entrepreneurial context, considers the study's contributions and limitations, and identifies directions for future research.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter is divided into four sections. The key findings are interpreted in Section 5.1. This section also clarifies how the connections between EmI, OE, OD, EIS, and EIC extend understanding on prior work in this area. The theoretical and empirical contributions are summarized in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, which also show how the results provide further insights into identity-based mechanisms in entrepreneurship. Then, Section 5.4 overviews the study's limitations and provides directions for future research. The chapter concludes in Section 5.5, by highlighting the study's overall contribution to the theory and summarizes the key findings.

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

The main findings from this study are now synthesized and discussed in light of previous studies on EI, opportunity processes, and EmI. This section provides rationale for the differences among entrepreneurs in their opportunity-related cognition and behavior, and for how these differences influence the success of the respective entrepreneurs. By separating EIS and EIC and treating EmI as a moderating factor, this thesis responds to requests to explore the psychological microfoundations of OE and OD (Davidsson, 2015; Shepherd, 2015; Wood & McKelvie, 2015). The focus on established Jordanian founder entrepreneurs provides contextually grounded evidence from a resource-constrained and comparatively underrepresented entrepreneurial environment, thereby allowing the theoretical relationships examined in this study to be assessed beyond the settings that have predominantly informed the existing literature.

The findings of Model I indicate that EIS and EIC share a two-fold similarity where they are positively associated with opportunity-oriented processes, yet their effects differ. EIS influences OE more strongly ($\beta = 0.678$, $p < .001$). This finding aligns with the associated theory where the salience of the entrepreneur's identity promotes attentional priority and cognitive framing (Serpe et al., 2020; Murnieks et al., 2014). On the other hand, EIC relates more strongly to OD ($\beta = 0.634$, $p < .001$), which aligns with the view that a strong central identity secures greater effort and persistence over a long period (Lex et al., 2022; Baker & Powell, 2020). These findings offer a new dimension to the opportunity process research, which has mainly focused on recognition and exploitation. In this instance, identity emerges as an important explanatory factor associated with both evaluative and developmental opportunity processes (Dimov, 2021;

Davidsson, 2015). Interestingly, it is identity salience appears more strongly associated with OE, whereas identity centrality shows a stronger association with sustained OD.

Although the findings demonstrate significant and theoretically meaningful associations between EI and both OE and OD, they should not be interpreted as establishing identity as the dominant or causal driver of opportunity processes. The present model was deliberately designed to examine identity-based explanations and therefore captures only part of the broader set of influences that may shape entrepreneurial opportunity-related cognition and activity. The significant relationships involving EIS and EIC indicate that EI provides an important explanatory perspective within the specified model, but they do not imply that identity outweighs all cognitive, emotional, social, contextual, or resource-related influences.

The theoretical contribution lies in identifying differentiated identity-related associations rather than establishing identity dominance. In particular, the stronger association between EIS and OE and the stronger association between EIC and OD provide a more fine-grained account of how distinct dimensions of EI relate differently to opportunity processes. This interpretation is consistent with Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Future research incorporating competing explanatory variables, alternative research designs, and different contexts is required to assess the relative explanatory importance of identity alongside other influences on OE and OD.

Turning to Model 2, the findings reveal that EmI significantly moderates three of the four identity–opportunity relationships, all relationships except EIC on OD, where the moderation effect was statistically negligible. Specifically, EmI negatively moderates the relationship between EIS and OE, indicating that EmI tempers overconfident or impulsive evaluative judgments by promoting emotions and reflective cognition. On the contrary, EmI plays a positive moderating role in the links between EIS and OD and between EIC and OE, indicating that EmI supports the constructive use of emotions during complex opportunity tasks. EmI strengthens relationships that are intellectually demanding (EIC on OE; EIS on OD) by emotional support and reflection, while at the same time decreasing the influence of emotions on evaluations (EIS on OE) by reducing the likelihood of impulsivity.

In this study, EmI has been found to be an important factor in the decision-making process, where the influence of emotions aligns with rationally assessed opportunities (Gonzales, 2022; Cardon et al., 2020; Goleman, 2013; Murnieks et al., 2020). Entrepreneurs with high EmI possess the skills to understand emotional messages better, they are very good at managing stress, and they are rated very high on the trait of confidence, especially when it is tempered by self-reflection. As such, this research contributes to understanding the 'Identity-Emotion Nexus' hypothesis, which states that identities depend on the ability to feel emotions (Stets & Burke, 2024). High EmI prevents one from being overly identified with a specific, rigid position, whereas low EmI leads to bias and over-identification.

Findings from this thesis support the idea that entrepreneurs with strong identity salience encourage more immediate decision making and those displaying strong identity centrality persist in developing opportunity (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022). These results thereby extend Dimov's (2021) model of entrepreneurial opportunity, which conceptualizes opportunity not as an objective entity to be discovered, but as a dynamic and iterative process of evaluation and development unfolding over time through entrepreneurial action. Thus, characterizing identity as an antecedent of opportunity processes and integrating emotion theory into this framework. Moreover, these results serve to provide greater clarification on prior research by explaining when identity exerts its most substantial influence. Namely, when emotions support rather than distort identity expression. As such, these insights provide enhanced understanding in the identity literature by introducing EmI as a moderator that differentiates adaptive from identity enactment.

The Jordanian context provides an important setting in which to interpret the findings of this study. As discussed in Chapters 1–3, much of the theoretical foundation informing EI, opportunity processes, and EmI has been developed without substantial attention to resource-constrained Middle Eastern entrepreneurial environments. Jordan presents a particularly relevant context because founder entrepreneurs operate under resource limitations, economic uncertainty, constrained access to finance, and institutional challenges while simultaneously relying on entrepreneurial activity as an important means of venture and economic development. Examining EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI in this setting therefore extends the empirical application of these theoretical relationships beyond the contexts that have predominantly informed the existing literature.

The findings demonstrate that EI remains meaningfully associated with opportunity-related processes within this resource-constrained environment. EIS was more strongly associated with OE ($\beta = .678$), whereas EIC was more strongly associated with OD ($\beta = .634$). In the Jordanian setting, this differentiated pattern suggests that the situational prominence of the entrepreneurial role is particularly relevant to how founders evaluate potential opportunities, while the enduring importance of entrepreneurship to the self-concept is more strongly associated with the sustained engagement required for OD. This is important in a context in which founders may not always be able to compensate for uncertainty through abundant financial, institutional, or market resources. The findings from this thesis, therefore, extend understanding of the relevance of Role Identity Theory by showing that the distinction between identity salience and centrality is empirically meaningful among established founder entrepreneurs operating in Jordan (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020).

The Jordanian context also provided a particularly relevant setting to examine the differentiated role of EmI. Rather than uniformly strengthening EI effects, EmI was found to attenuate the EIS–OE relationship, strengthen the EIS–OD and EIC–OE relationships, and did not significantly moderate the EIC–OD relationship. This pattern suggests that the EmI constructs examined may operate as a selective and context-sensitive regulatory resource rather than as a general positive catalyst. For founders operating under uncertainty and resource constraints, emotional awareness and regulation may help temper identity-driven evaluative judgments in some circumstances while supporting the translation of identity into opportunity-related judgment or developmental activity in others (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). The absence of moderation in the EIC–OD relationship further indicates that when entrepreneurship is already deeply central to a founder's self-concept, enduring identity-based commitment may be strongly associated with development regardless of additional variation in EmI.

These findings should not, however, be interpreted as demonstrating that Jordanian entrepreneurs are inherently different from entrepreneurs in Western or other settings, since the study did not conduct a direct cross-country comparison. Rather, the contribution lies in empirically examining theoretical relationships in a comparatively underrepresented, non-Western and resource-constrained entrepreneurial setting and demonstrating their relevance within that context. The Jordanian evidence therefore extends rather than replaces findings from other settings and highlights the need for future comparative research to determine whether the differentiated effects identified here are specific to resource-constrained environments or generalise across institutional and cultural contexts.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The core theoretical contribution of this study is the offer of a refined understanding of how EI is translated into opportunity-related cognition and behavior. Existing identity research has established that EI can shape entrepreneurial motivation, cognition, persistence, and action (Farmer et al., 2011; Murnieks et al., 2020; Cardon et al., 2020; Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021). However, treating EI as a broadly influential construct can obscure the different ways in which particular properties of identity operate. Drawing on Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022), this thesis distinguishes between how EIS and EIC can be systematically differentiated and applied to distinct entrepreneurial opportunity processes. In doing so, the thesis extends existing identity-based explanations of entrepreneurship by demonstrating that the influence associated with EI depends partly on which property of identity is considered.

Rather than treating entrepreneurial opportunities as a single or undifferentiated outcome, the thesis distinguishes OE from OD, recognising that evaluating the attractiveness and feasibility of an opportunity involves different cognitive and behavioral demands from subsequently refining and developing it (Scheaf et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021). The empirical asymmetry identified in the findings, where EIS was more strongly associated with OE, whereas EIC was more strongly associated with OD, provides a more differentiated account of how identity may operate across opportunity-related activities. This pattern suggests that the situational activation of the entrepreneurial role is particularly relevant to evaluative judgments, whereas the enduring centrality of that role becomes more consequential for the sustained commitment and action involved in OD. The thesis therefore provides a nuanced understanding of this process by linking distinct properties of EI to distinct opportunity processes rather than assuming that EI operates uniformly across entrepreneurial activity. Importantly, given the cross-sectional design, these findings should be understood as evidence of differentiated associations rather than as establishing a definitive temporal sequence from EIS through OE to EIC and OD.

This thesis extends this identity–opportunity framework by demonstrating that EmI does not operate as a uniformly beneficial contextual capability. Instead, EmI was found to selectively condition the relationships between identity and opportunity processes: it strengthened some identity–opportunity relationships, weakened others, and did not significantly moderate the EIC–OD relationship. This pattern qualifies broad interpretations of EmI as a consistently positive entrepreneurial capability (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). Therefore, the theoretical contribution is better characterised as positioning EmI as a selective and context-sensitive regulatory condition whose relevance depends on both the identity property being activated and the opportunity activity under consideration. Taken together, these findings integrate Role Identity Theory, opportunity-process research, and EmI within a more differentiated explanatory framework. The overall contribution of the thesis is thus to move beyond the general proposition that EI matters by specifying which aspect of identity is most strongly associated with which opportunity process, and when EmI changes those relationships. The discussion that follows elucidates these contributions by highlighting the relationship between the literature the hypotheses were derived from and the empirical outcome for each.

5.2.1 Direct Relationships between EI and Opportunity Processes

H1a proposed a positive relationship between EIS and OE and was supported. EIS was positively and significantly associated with OE ($\beta = .678$, $p < .001$), representing the strongest direct relationship with OE. This finding is consistent with Role Identity Theory, which suggests that a salient identity becomes more readily activated and influential in situations relevant to that role (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). It is also consistent with EI research suggesting that identity salience directs attention and provides a cognitive frame through which entrepreneurs interpret information relevant to entrepreneurship (Murnieks et al., 2014; Serpe et al., 2020). The present study therefore confirms the relevance of identity salience to entrepreneurial cognition while extending this reasoning specifically to OE. The contribution is not that salience itself is a new identity concept, but that its relative importance is demonstrated within a specific opportunity-related process among established founder entrepreneurs in Jordan. This provides empirical support for distinguishing the situational prominence of EI from more enduring forms of identity importance when explaining OE.

H1b proposed a positive relationship between EIC and OE and was also supported, although its relationship with OE ($\beta = .276$, $p < .001$) was substantially weaker than that of EIS. This finding is consistent with research positioning EIC as an enduring component of the self-concept that influences entrepreneurial cognition and commitment (Murnieks et al., 2020).

However, the relative difference between H1a and H1b adds an important qualification to existing identity-based explanations. EIC is relevant to OE, but the results suggest that the enduring importance of being an entrepreneur is less strongly associated with evaluation than the situational prominence of the entrepreneurial role. The theoretical implication is therefore that EI should not be treated as a unitary construct whose dimensions exert equivalent relationships across entrepreneurial processes. Rather, different aspects of identity appear to have different relative relevance depending on the opportunity-related activity under consideration.

H2a proposed a positive relationship between EIS and OD and was supported, but the relationship ($\beta = .241$, $p < .001$) was considerably weaker than the EIS–OE relationship. This result supports the proposition that identity salience remains relevant beyond immediate evaluative cognition and is also associated with activities directed toward OD. At the same time, its comparatively weaker association with OD qualifies any interpretation that situational identity activation is equally influential across the opportunity process. EIS appears to have greater relative relevance to evaluation than to the sustained activities involved in developing an opportunity. This finding therefore extends Role Identity Theory by demonstrating that the explanatory relevance of identity salience may vary according to the demands of the entrepreneurial process rather than operating with equal strength across outcomes (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022).

H2b proposed a positive relationship between EIC and OD and was strongly supported ($\beta = .634$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with literature associating a central entrepreneurial identity with enduring commitment, persistence, and sustained engagement in entrepreneurial activity (Murnieks et al., 2020; Baker & Powell, 2020; Lex et al., 2022). More importantly, the EIC–OD relationship was substantially stronger than the EIC–OE relationship, producing a pattern opposite to that observed for EIS. Taken together, H1a–H2b therefore provide evidence of an important theoretical asymmetry: EIS is more strongly associated with OE, whereas EIC is more strongly associated with OD. This differentiated pattern provides a more precise account of EI than approaches that treat identity strength as a single influence on entrepreneurial behavior.

However, this asymmetry should not be interpreted as establishing a fixed temporal sequence in which EIS first produces OE and EIC subsequently produces OD. EIS and EIC represent distinct dimensions of EI rather than sequential stages of identity formation, and both were significantly associated with both opportunity processes. The findings instead support a process-based differentiation in relative relevance: situational identity prominence appears more closely associated with evaluation, whereas enduring identity importance appears more closely associated with development. Because the study is cross-sectional, whether these relationships unfold sequentially or reciprocally over time remains an empirical question. This distinction refines existing applications of Role Identity Theory by demonstrating the value of simultaneously considering both salience and centrality without assuming either conceptual equivalence or temporal sequencing.

5.2.2 The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

The moderation findings provide a second theoretical contribution by advancing a more nuanced understanding of the role of EmI in entrepreneurial processes. Existing research has established that emotions are integral to entrepreneurial cognition and action and can shape how entrepreneurs interpret, evaluate, and respond to opportunities (Foo, 2011; Cardon et al., 2012; Welpe et al., 2012; Cardon et al., 2020). Building on this literature, the present thesis demonstrates that EmI does not operate simply as a uniformly beneficial capability that strengthens the influence of EI. Rather, its regulatory role varies according to both the dimension of EI and the opportunity process involved. Specifically, EmI weakened the relationship between EIS and OE, strengthened the relationships between EIS and OD and between EIC and OE, and did not significantly moderate the relationship between EIC and OD. These contrasting effects indicate that EmI can regulate how entrepreneurial self-meanings are translated into opportunity-related cognition and behavior, rather than merely amplifying their influence. This extends the existing literature by positioning EmI as a selective boundary condition in the EI–opportunity relationship: its influence depends on whether EI is situationally activated through EIS or more enduringly embedded through EIC, and whether entrepreneurs are evaluating or developing opportunities. Accordingly, the thesis contributes a more differentiated conceptualization of EmI as a selective and context-sensitive regulatory mechanism rather than a general catalyst for entrepreneurial cognition and action (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2012, 2020).

H3a proposed that EmI would moderate the relationship between EIS and OE and was supported; however, the direction of moderation requires particular theoretical attention. Rather than strengthening the relationship, EmI attenuated the association between EIS and OE, with the coefficient decreasing from $\beta = .678$ to $\beta = .635$. This finding diverges from a simple positive-amplification interpretation of EmI. One theoretically plausible explanation is that when the entrepreneurial role is highly salient during OE, emotional awareness and regulation may provide reflective distance from identity-driven judgments. EmI may therefore operate as a buffering mechanism, tempering rather than reinforcing the extent to which an activated EI is associated with OE. This finding extends existing work on emotional regulation by suggesting that the value of EmI may sometimes lie in constraining identity influence rather than strengthening it (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020).

H3b proposed that EmI would moderate the relationship between EIS and OD and was supported. In contrast to H3a, EmI strengthened the EIS–OD relationship, with the coefficient increasing from $\beta = .241$ to $\beta = .400$. This finding is consistent with the view that emotional capabilities can support entrepreneurial functioning under uncertainty and challenge (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). The theoretical implication is that EmI may help translate situational EI prominence into more sustained developmental activity. When development requires continued interaction, adjustment, and responses to uncertainty, emotional regulation may complement the motivational relevance of an activated EI. The contrasting results for H3a and H3b therefore demonstrate that EmI does not have a fixed directional influence even when interacting with the same identity dimension.

H4a proposed that EmI would moderate the EIC–OE relationship and was supported. EmI substantially strengthened this relationship, with the coefficient increasing from $\beta = .276$ to $\beta = .587$. This finding suggests that emotional capabilities may complement the enduring commitment associated with identity centrality when entrepreneurs engage in OE. EIC establishes the enduring importance of entrepreneurship to the self-concept, while EmI may assist entrepreneurs in managing the emotional information and uncertainty associated with evaluative judgment (Murnieks et al., 2020; Goleman, 2013). The result therefore extends the theoretical role of EIC by demonstrating that its association with OE is not necessarily fixed but may depend on entrepreneurs' emotional capabilities.

H4b proposed that EmI would moderate the EIC–OD relationship but was not supported. EIC already demonstrated a strong direct relationship with OD ($\beta = .634$, model 1), while the inclusion of EmI produced virtually no change ($\beta = .632$, model 2). One possible interpretation is that when entrepreneurship is already deeply central to a founder's self-concept, the enduring commitment associated with that identity may provide a sufficiently strong basis for continued opportunity-development activities, leaving limited incremental scope for EmI to alter the relationship (Murnieks et al., 2020). This explanation should remain tentative because the underlying psychological mechanism was not directly tested. Nevertheless, the absence of moderation challenges any claim that EmI acts as a universal catalyst across identity–opportunity relationships.

Taken together, H3a–H4b reveal a theoretically meaningful pattern: EmI attenuates one relationship, strengthens two relationships, and does not significantly alter another. These results are not adequately captured by describing EmI simply as a positive moderator or enhancer. Instead, they suggest that EmI regulates the expression of EI according to the demands of the particular identity–opportunity relationship. In evaluative situations where strong identity activation may exert considerable influence, regulation may involve attenuation; in other relationships, emotional capabilities may facilitate the translation of identity into opportunity-related cognition or activity; and where enduring identity commitment is already strongly associated with development, EmI may provide little incremental moderation. Thus, the study extends the EmI literature by positioning EmI as a selective, and context-sensitive regulatory condition rather than a uniformly beneficial amplifier of EI.

The interpretation of EmI as a regulatory mechanism should nevertheless be treated as theoretically informed rather than directly demonstrated by empirical evidence. The present study tested EmI as a moderator of the relationships between EI and opportunity processes; it did not directly observe the psychological processes through which emotional awareness or regulation altered identity-related cognition or behavior. Accordingly, the differentiated moderation pattern—whereby EmI attenuated the EIS–OE relationship, strengthened the EIS–OD and EIC–OE relationships, and did not significantly moderate EIC–OD—is consistent with a regulatory interpretation, but does not by itself establish the underlying regulatory mechanism. The theoretical positioning of EmI therefore draws on both the observed moderation pattern and existing conceptualizations of EmI as involving emotional awareness and regulation (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020).

This interpretation also requires caution in light of the relatively strong correlations between EmI and some of the study constructs, particularly EIS and OE. These correlations indicate substantial shared variance and raise the possibility that EmI may partly overlap with broader individual-level characteristics associated with entrepreneurial engagement, motivation, or positive self-perception. Nevertheless, shared variance does not necessarily imply conceptual equivalence. The measurement analyses supported a multidimensional factor structure, the single-factor model demonstrated poor fit, and the constructs were theoretically differentiated according to their content and functions. Furthermore, the moderation results were not uniform: EmI weakened one identity–opportunity relationship, strengthened two, and did not significantly alter another. This differentiated pattern is less consistent with a simple interpretation of EmI as a general positive entrepreneurial factor and provides qualified support for a more context-sensitive regulatory interpretation.

Consequently, the theoretical contribution should not be framed as demonstrating that EmI is definitively the regulatory mechanism through which EI influences opportunity processes. A more cautious conclusion is that the findings identify EmI as a potentially important regulatory condition that changes the strength and, in some cases, the expression of identity–opportunity relationships. The precise psychological mechanisms underlying these moderation effects remain to be established. Future research should therefore examine the individual dimensions of EmI and directly measure emotion-regulation processes using longitudinal, experimental, diary, or experience-sampling designs to determine whether emotional regulation accounts for the differentiated moderation pattern observed in the present study (Goleman, 2013).

The Jordanian setting adds an important contextual dimension to these theoretical contributions. This is particularly relevant given the continuing dominance of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) samples in entrepreneurship research (Shepherd et al., 2025). In their study, Shepherd and colleagues report that approximately 87% of samples in two leading entrepreneurship journals over the previous decade were drawn, at least in part, from WEIRD contexts. They caution that theories developed and tested predominantly in such settings cannot automatically be assumed to generalize to non-WEIRD environments and argue that greater attention to underrepresented contexts can provide a richer and more contextualized understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena. The present study responds to this concern by examining EI, opportunity processes, and EmI among founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, thereby extending these theoretical relationships into a comparatively underrepresented non-Western setting.

Importantly, the contribution of the Jordanian context is not simply geographical replication. Shepherd et al. (2025) argue that contextual differences may influence entrepreneurial phenomena and that non-WEIRD research can contribute to the development and refinement of entrepreneurship theory. The present findings demonstrate that the differentiated relationships among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI are empirically meaningful within the Jordanian context. In particular, the stronger association of EIS with OE, the stronger association of EIC with OD, and the selective moderating role of EmI provide evidence that the theoretical framework remains relevant outside the settings that dominate mainstream entrepreneurship research. At the same time, because no direct cross-country comparison was conducted, these findings should not be interpreted as evidence that Jordanian entrepreneurs are inherently different from Western entrepreneurs. Rather, the study extends the empirical domain of EI theory and identifies relationships and regulatory conditions that can subsequently be examined comparatively across Western and non-Western contexts.

The distinction between EIS and EIC should be understood as a theoretical refinement and empirical extension rather than as an entirely new distinction introduced by this study. Role Identity Theory already recognizes that identities can differ in their situational salience and in their more enduring importance within the self-concept (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022), while previous entrepreneurship research has examined EIS and centrality as theoretically meaningful identity dimensions (Murnieks et al., 2014; Murnieks et al., 2020). The contribution of the present study therefore does not lie in claiming to develop the conceptual distinction between salience and centrality. Rather, it refines its application to entrepreneurship by examining EIS and EIC simultaneously and demonstrating that their relative relevance differs across two distinct opportunity processes. Specifically, EIS was more strongly associated with OE, whereas EIC was more strongly associated with OD, despite both identity dimensions being significantly associated with both outcomes. This differentiated pattern provides empirical evidence that treating EI as a single undifferentiated construct may obscure theoretically meaningful variation in how different dimensions of identity relate to opportunity-related processes.

Accordingly, the novelty of the study lies primarily in the configuration of these established theoretical concepts and in the differentiated empirical pattern that emerges from their simultaneous examination. By connecting EIS and EIC to both OE and OD, the study provides a more fine-grained account of the identity–opportunity relationship: situational identity prominence appears relatively more relevant to OE, whereas enduring identity importance appears relatively more relevant to OD. This contribution is incremental in the sense that it builds on rather than replaces existing identity theory, but it is theoretically meaningful because it specifies the relative explanatory relevance of two established identity dimensions across distinct entrepreneurial processes. The study therefore extends Role Identity Theory into the opportunity domain rather than proposing a new identity theory.

Overall, the study therefore confirms the relevance of entrepreneurial identity to entrepreneurial cognition and action, extends existing research by distinguishing the relative roles of EIS and EIC across OE and OD, and qualifies existing assumptions concerning EmI by demonstrating that its moderating influence is selective and varies in direction. The contribution is consequently not the claim that entrepreneurial identity or emotional intelligence independently determines opportunity processes, but the development of a more differentiated theoretical explanation of how distinct dimensions of identity are associated with distinct opportunity processes and how these relationships vary according to emotional capabilities.

5.3 Practical Implications

The practical contribution of this study is particularly important given its objective of generating findings that are relevant to entrepreneurial practice within Jordan. The results have implications at three interconnected levels: founder entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship educators and mentors, and policymakers and organizations supporting the entrepreneurial ecosystem. At the founder level, the findings provide guidance on how identity awareness and emotional regulation can inform opportunity evaluation and development. At the educational and support levels, they provide a basis for designing interventions that encourage reflective identity awareness and emotional capabilities. At the policy level, they highlight the value of complementing financial and technical entrepreneurship support with founder-focused developmental support. The following sections consider these implications in turn.

5.3.1 Implications for Founder Entrepreneurs in Jordan

The findings from this thesis have several practical implications for founder entrepreneurs in Jordan. Most importantly, they suggest founders should recognize that opportunity-related decisions are associated not only with external market information and resource availability but also with how strongly the entrepreneurial role is activated and incorporated within their self-concept. In a resource-constrained environment, where founders may face limitations in finance, institutional support, and other resources, greater awareness of these identity-related influences may help entrepreneurs understand why they evaluate and pursue particular opportunities. The findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that identity can substitute for financial, market, or institutional resources; rather, identity awareness represents an additional internal resource that founders can consider when making decisions under constraint.

First, the strong relationship between EIS and OE suggests that Jordanian founders should be particularly conscious of the influence of an activated EI when evaluating opportunities. A highly salient entrepreneurial role can focus attention on information that appears relevant to entrepreneurial action, but founders should distinguish between an opportunity that is attractive because it is objectively supported by available evidence and one that appears attractive partly because it strongly confirms how they see themselves as entrepreneurs (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Murnieks et al., 2014). Practically, founders can introduce deliberate reflection into OE by seeking external feedback, considering disconfirming information, comparing alternative opportunities, and separating personal enthusiasm for an entrepreneurial idea from evidence concerning its feasibility and potential value. Such reflective practices are particularly relevant to the finding that EmI attenuated the EIS–OE relationship, suggesting that emotional awareness and regulation may help prevent highly activated identity from exercising excessive influence over evaluative judgment.

Second, the stronger association between EIC and OD suggests that the enduring importance of entrepreneurship to a founder's self-concept can be particularly relevant during the demanding process of developing an opportunity. OD requires continued engagement with feedback, refinement, stakeholders, and uncertainty, and founders who regard entrepreneurship as an important part of who they are may be more inclined to sustain this engagement (Murnieks et al., 2020; Baker & Powell, 2020). For Jordanian founders operating under resource constraints, this identity-based commitment may be valuable when development is slow or external support is limited. However, founders should distinguish persistence from rigid commitment. Strong EI should support continued development when evidence remains favorable, but it should not prevent modification, postponement, or abandonment of an opportunity when market or stakeholder feedback consistently indicates that the original approach is not viable. Periodic review points, external mentoring, and explicit criteria for continuing or revising an opportunity can help founders combine identity-based persistence with strategic flexibility.

Third, the differentiated moderation findings provide a practical reason for Jordanian entrepreneurs to develop emotional awareness and regulation. EmI should not simply be understood as a capability that makes entrepreneurs more confident or persistent. The findings suggest a more selective function: emotional capabilities may temper identity-driven evaluation in some circumstances while supporting the translation of EI into opportunity-related judgment and developmental activity in others. Founders can therefore benefit from recognizing their emotional state before major opportunity decisions, particularly under stress, uncertainty, or strong personal attachment to an idea. Reflective practices, mentoring, structured feedback, and emotional-intelligence development may help founders distinguish between emotional commitment that supports productive persistence and emotional attachment that restricts objective reassessment (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020).

Fourth, the findings suggest that founders should manage EIS and EIC differently rather than treating a “strong entrepreneurial identity” as uniformly beneficial. EIS is more closely associated with immediate evaluative processes, whereas EIC is more strongly associated with sustained OD. A practical implication is that founders can become more aware of which aspect of their EI is operating at different points in their opportunity-related activities. During evaluation, reflective distance may be particularly valuable; during development, commitment and persistence may become more important, while still remaining responsive to new information (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2020). Identity awareness can therefore be treated as a reflective decision-making capability rather than as an attempt to strengthen EI indiscriminately.

These implications are particularly relevant to Jordan because founders may frequently need to make decisions while facing resource constraints and uncertainty. Under such conditions, entrepreneurs cannot necessarily remove external constraints, but they can improve how they respond to them. The present findings suggest that greater awareness of identity, combined with emotional regulation and structured external feedback, may help founders evaluate opportunities more carefully, persist when development remains justified, and reconsider opportunities when evidence no longer supports continued commitment. The practical contribution of the study therefore lies not in suggesting that identity or EmI can overcome structural constraints, but in showing how Jordanian founders may better manage their internal identity and emotional resources while navigating those constraints.

5.3.2 Implications for Entrepreneurship Educators and Mentors

The findings also have practical implications for entrepreneurship educators and mentors, particularly those supporting founder entrepreneurs in Jordan. Entrepreneurship education should extend beyond the development of technical knowledge, such as business planning, financing, and market analysis, to include greater awareness of how EI and emotions are associated with opportunity-related judgments and activities. Since the findings demonstrate different relationships between EIS and EIC and the processes of OE and OD, educational and mentoring programmes should avoid arguing that a strong EI is uniformly beneficial. Instead, entrepreneurs should be encouraged to reflect on when their EI becomes salient, how central entrepreneurship is to their self-concept, and how these dimensions may influence their responses to potential opportunities (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022; Baker & Powell, 2020).

In relation to OE, the strong association between EIS and OE suggests that educators and mentors can help entrepreneurs develop greater reflective awareness when assessing opportunities. Structured exercises can encourage entrepreneurs to distinguish between judgments supported by market evidence and judgments that may partly reflect personal identification with the entrepreneurial role. For example, educators can incorporate opportunity-evaluation exercises in which participants are required to identify evidence both supporting and challenging an opportunity, compare alternative opportunities, and explain how their personal motivations and entrepreneurial self-concept may have influenced their assessment. Reflection and experiential learning are particularly useful in entrepreneurship education because they allow entrepreneurs to examine how their own assumptions and experiences shape entrepreneurial learning and decision-making (Bradley et al., 2024).

The stronger association between EIC and OD also has implications for mentoring. Mentors can help founders recognize the value of identity-based commitment and persistence while simultaneously encouraging them to avoid rigid attachment to opportunities that no longer receive sufficient market or stakeholder support. Rather than simply encouraging entrepreneurs to "persist", mentoring can incorporate periodic reflection points at which founders reconsider the assumptions underlying an opportunity, evaluate feedback, and determine whether continued development, modification, or withdrawal is appropriate. In this way, mentoring can help entrepreneurs distinguish constructive persistence from escalation of commitment while preserving the motivational value associated with a central EI (Murnieks et al., 2020; Baker & Powell, 2020).

The moderation findings further suggest that EmI development should form part of entrepreneurship education and mentoring. However, EmI should not be taught simply as a means of increasing confidence, motivation, or persistence. The findings indicate that its practical value lies more specifically in regulating how EI is expressed across different opportunity-related processes. Educators and mentors can therefore incorporate activities concerned with emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, reflection under uncertainty, empathy, and the management of emotional responses to feedback and setbacks (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). Such activities may help entrepreneurs recognize when emotions provide useful information and when strong emotional attachment to an entrepreneurial role or opportunity may interfere with balanced judgment.

These implications support a more experiential and reflective approach to entrepreneurship education. Case discussions, simulations, reflective journals, peer feedback, mentoring conversations, and opportunity-evaluation exercises can be used not simply to strengthen EI, but to help entrepreneurs understand and regulate its influence. Mentors can play a particularly important role by providing an external perspective that challenges assumptions without undermining the founder's entrepreneurial commitment. This approach is consistent with the use of self-reflection, storytelling, experiential learning, and mentorship to support identity awareness and emotional development in entrepreneurial education (Bradley et al., 2024). For the Jordanian context, such approaches may be particularly valuable because they can complement conventional financial and technical support by strengthening founders' capacity to reflect on how identity and emotion are associated with their responses to uncertainty and resource constraints.

5.3.3 Implications for Policymakers and Entrepreneurship Support Organizations

The findings also have practical implications for policymakers and entrepreneurship support organizations in Jordan, including incubators, accelerators, entrepreneurship centres, and other institutions supporting founder development. Entrepreneurship policy and support programmes have traditionally placed considerable emphasis on external resources, such as finance, technical assistance, business skills, and access to networks. While these forms of support remain essential, the present findings suggest that founder-level psychological resources should also receive attention. In particular, the significant associations between EI and opportunity-related processes indicate that support programmes may benefit from complementing conventional business assistance with initiatives that encourage identity awareness, reflective decision-making, and emotional regulation. Such an approach recognizes that entrepreneurial action involves not only economic and cognitive processes but also identity and affective mechanisms (Cardon et al., 2020; Baker & Powell, 2020).

The differentiated relationships between EIS and EIC and OE and OD also suggest that support programmes should avoid assuming that strengthening EI is uniformly beneficial. Instead, interventions can help founders understand how different aspects of EI may become relevant at different points in opportunity-related activity. During OE, incubators and accelerators can provide structured assessment mechanisms, external expert feedback, peer review, and mentoring that encourage founders to critically examine the evidence supporting an opportunity rather than relying primarily on personal enthusiasm or identification with the entrepreneurial role. During OD, support organizations can provide longer-term mentoring and milestone-based reviews that help founders sustain commitment while remaining responsive to market, stakeholder, and resource feedback. This distinction is consistent with the different functions associated with identity salience and centrality in Role Identity Theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Burke & Stets, 2022; Murnieks et al., 2020).

The findings concerning EmI provide a further practical implication for the design of entrepreneurship support. Because EmI did not uniformly strengthen all identity–opportunity relationships, programmes should not approach EmI merely as a means of increasing confidence, motivation, or persistence. Instead, EmI development can be positioned as a regulatory capability that assists founders in recognizing and managing emotional responses during OE and OD. Training, mentoring, and coaching initiatives can incorporate emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, stress management, and reflective responses to feedback and failure (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). This may be particularly relevant in uncertain and resource-constrained entrepreneurial environments, where founders frequently need to make consequential decisions while managing pressure and limited resources.

For incubators and accelerators, these findings suggest the value of integrating founder-development activities alongside venture-development activities. Mentoring programmes could, for example, include structured reflection on founders' motivations and entrepreneurial self-concepts, while periodic venture reviews could examine whether continued commitment to an opportunity reflects favorable evidence or excessive attachment to the venture. Peer mentoring, role modelling, entrepreneurial storytelling, and reflective exercises may also provide founders with social validation while exposing them to alternative perspectives and approaches to entrepreneurial action (Baker & Powell, 2020; Bradley et al., 2024). Such interventions should aim not to prescribe a particular EI, but to enable founders to understand how their identity and emotions may be associated with their judgments and behaviors.

At the policy level, the findings therefore support a more integrated approach to entrepreneurship development in Jordan. Financial assistance, infrastructure, market access, and technical support remain fundamental and should not be replaced by identity- or emotion-focused interventions. Rather, the findings suggest that these forms of structural support can be complemented by founder-development initiatives that strengthen reflective awareness and emotional regulation. This distinction is especially important in the Jordanian context: identity and EmI should not be presented as solutions to structural resource constraints, but as internal capabilities that may help founders navigate those constraints more effectively. Policymakers and entrepreneurship support organizations can therefore consider both the external conditions surrounding entrepreneurial activity and the founder-level processes through which opportunities are evaluated and developed.

Finally, the findings can inform the evaluation of entrepreneurship support programmes. In addition to conventional indicators such as venture creation, funding obtained, or business growth, support organizations could consider developmental indicators related to founders' capacity for reflective OE, responsiveness to feedback, adaptability, and emotional self-regulation. This broader approach would recognize that effective entrepreneurial support concerns not only whether founders pursue opportunities, but also how they evaluate, adapt, and develop those opportunities under conditions of uncertainty. However, because the present study did not directly evaluate specific policy interventions or entrepreneurship support programmes, these recommendations should be regarded as implications derived from the empirical findings rather than as evidence of the effectiveness of any specific intervention.

Feasibility and Scalability in Resource-Constrained Contexts

The feasibility and scalability of identity-awareness and EmI interventions also require consideration in a resource-constrained context such as Jordan. These recommendations should not be interpreted as requiring the creation of costly stand-alone programmes. A more feasible approach would be to integrate short identity-reflection and emotional-awareness components into existing entrepreneurship education, incubation, acceleration, mentoring, and founder-development programmes. Activities such as structured self-reflection, peer discussion, entrepreneurial storytelling, feedback exercises, and guided consideration of emotional responses can be incorporated into existing workshops or mentoring sessions with relatively limited additional infrastructure (Baker & Powell, 2020; Bradley et al., 2024). Similarly, EmI-related development can focus on practical capabilities such as emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and responses to uncertainty and feedback rather than requiring extensive specialist programmes (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020).

Scalability could also be improved through a train-the-trainer approach in which entrepreneurship educators, incubator staff, and mentors are equipped to incorporate identity-awareness and emotional-regulation activities into their existing interactions with founders. Group workshops, peer-mentoring formats, and standardized reflective exercises may enable these practices to reach larger numbers of entrepreneurs than individual coaching alone. A tiered approach may also be appropriate: basic identity- and emotion-awareness activities could be provided broadly, while more intensive mentoring or coaching could be targeted toward founders facing particularly demanding opportunity-development decisions. Such integration would reduce the need for separate programmes and make the recommendations more compatible with environments where entrepreneurship-support resources are constrained.

However, these recommendations should remain proportionate to the evidence generated by the present study. The study examined relationships among EI, EmI, OE, and OD; it did not evaluate the effectiveness or cost-effectiveness of specific training interventions. Therefore, the findings provide a rationale for incorporating identity awareness and emotional capabilities into founder support, but they do not demonstrate that any particular training programme will improve entrepreneurial outcomes. Pilot programmes should consequently be evaluated before large-scale implementation, using indicators such as participation and completion, changes in reflective identity awareness and emotional-regulation capabilities, responsiveness to feedback, and opportunity-related decision processes. Where feasible, pre- and post-intervention assessment or comparison groups could be used to determine whether the intervention produces meaningful changes before substantial resources are committed to wider implementation.

Most importantly, identity-awareness and EmI interventions should complement rather than substitute for structural entrepreneurship support. Jordanian founders continue to require access to finance, markets, networks, technical expertise, and appropriate institutional support. Identity awareness and emotional capabilities cannot remove these external constraints. Their practical value lies instead in potentially helping founders navigate uncertainty, feedback, and opportunity-related decisions more reflectively while operating within those constraints. The most feasible policy implication is therefore not to redirect scarce resources away from structural support, but to embed relatively low-resource founder-development components within existing entrepreneurship-support mechanisms.

5.4 Acknowledgement of Limitations

As with any empirical research, this study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. These limitations relate primarily to the cross-sectional research design, sampling approach and representativeness, reliance on self-reported data, measurement and construct distinctiveness, contextual and cross-cultural boundaries, model specification, and the study's focus on individual founder entrepreneurs. Acknowledging these limitations does not invalidate the findings; rather, it defines the boundaries within which the results should be interpreted and provides a foundation for the future research directions presented in the following section.

First, the cross-sectional design limits the extent to which temporal conclusions can be drawn from the structural relationships identified in this study. EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI were measured at a single point in time. Consequently, although the hypothesized relationships were theoretically grounded in Role Identity Theory and the structural model was consistent with the proposed direction of the relationships, the results cannot establish that EI temporally precedes subsequent OE or development (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Reciprocal relationships remain possible; for example, continued engagement in OE and development may itself reinforce the salience or centrality of an EI. Accordingly, the path coefficients reported in this thesis should be interpreted as theoretically specified associations rather than definitive causal effects.

Second, the sampling approach places important limitations on the generalizability of the findings. The study employed non-probability snowball sampling to access established founder entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial networks and referrals in Jordan. Although this approach facilitated access to a population that can be difficult to identify and reach, it means that members of the target population did not have a known and equal probability of selection. The resulting sample may therefore reflect the characteristics of the entrepreneurial networks through which participants were recruited. This issue is particularly relevant to the demographic composition of the achieved sample, including its gender and educational profiles. While some demographic characteristics show correspondence with the broader Jordanian entrepreneurial context, the sample cannot be considered statistically representative of either the Jordanian population as a whole or all founder entrepreneurs in Jordan. Although the questionnaire was available in both Arabic and English, thereby reducing language accessibility as a sufficient explanation for this pattern, the recruitment networks and snowball process may have contributed to the demographic composition of the final sample.

Third, the study relied on self-reported measures collected from the same respondents, which introduces the possibility of common method variance and other response-related biases. Procedural measures were incorporated into the research design, including anonymity, separation of questionnaire sections, and the use of reverse-coded items. Statistical assessments did not indicate that a single common method factor adequately explained the observed relationships. Nevertheless, these procedures cannot completely eliminate the possibility that common method variance, social desirability, consistency motives, or respondents' subjective perceptions influenced some of the observed associations. This consideration is particularly relevant because EI, EmI, and opportunity-related processes involve perceptions and self-assessments that may be difficult to separate entirely from respondents' interpretations of their own entrepreneurial behavior.

Fourth, although the measurement analyses provided evidence supporting the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI, statistical thresholds should not be interpreted as guaranteeing complete construct validity. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, factor loadings, and AVE provide evidence regarding internal consistency and measurement quality, but construct validity also depends on the theoretical meaning and conceptual boundaries of the constructs (Hair et al., 2022). This issue is particularly relevant to EIS and EIC because both represent related dimensions of EI. The moderate correlation between EIS and EIC and their differentiated structural relationships support treating them as distinguishable constructs, with EIS representing the relative prominence and activation of the entrepreneurial role and EIC representing its more enduring importance to the self-concept (Lobel & Clair, 1992; Phinney, 1992; Murnieks et al., 2020). Nevertheless, their conceptual relatedness means that absolute independence between these identity dimensions should not be assumed.

Relatedly, the positive correlations among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI indicate some degree of shared variance. Particular caution is warranted regarding the relatively stronger correlations involving EmI, including those between EmI and EIS and between EmI and OE. Although the multidimensional measurement structure, discriminant-validity evidence, differentiated structural relationships, and poor fit of the single-factor model support retaining the constructs as theoretically distinct, these findings do not completely exclude the possibility that part of their covariance reflects a broader higher-order phenomenon, such as entrepreneurial engagement or motivation. The present model was theoretically specified to distinguish EIS, EIC, OE, OD and EmI, and the results support this distinction; however, alternative higher-order or common-factor specifications were not comprehensively compared with the proposed theoretical model. The findings should therefore be interpreted as supporting construct distinctiveness rather than establishing absolute conceptual independence.

Fifth, the use of established measures developed largely in prior research raises questions concerning their cross-cultural applicability to the Jordanian context. The questionnaire underwent translation and back-translation procedures, and the Arabic version was reviewed to maintain consistency with the original measures. The measurement analyses also provided acceptable psychometric evidence within the present sample. Nevertheless, EI and emotional processes may be expressed differently across cultural and institutional environments, and statistical reliability within one national sample does not establish measurement equivalence across cultures. This is particularly relevant to constructs such as identity salience and centrality, whose expression may be influenced by social expectations, institutional conditions, and the meanings attached to entrepreneurial roles (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021; Burke & Stets, 2022). The findings should therefore be understood as evidence derived from the Jordanian context rather than assumed to apply identically across national or cultural settings. This caution is particularly important given recent arguments that findings derived from WEIRD entrepreneurship samples should not automatically be assumed to generalize to non-WEIRD contexts (Shepherd et al., 2025). Contextual differences can influence entrepreneurial phenomena, making cross-context generalizability an empirical question rather than an assumption. Accordingly, while the present Jordanian findings may provide theoretically relevant propositions for other contexts, their empirical applicability requires direct comparative testing.

Sixth, the theoretical model is necessarily selective and does not capture every factor that may be associated with OE and development. The study deliberately focused on EI and EmI in order to examine their theoretically specified relationships with OE and OD. Most demographic control variables were not significantly related to the opportunity outcomes, with venture age providing the principal exception. However, the non-significance of these controls should not be interpreted as indicating that identity fully dominates entrepreneurial decision-making. Other individual-level characteristics, including personality, resilience, risk profiles, and entrepreneurial intentions, as well as contextual influences such as resource availability, market volatility, institutional support, and social networks, may contribute to opportunity-related processes (Gieure et al., 2020; Haşim & Soppe, 2023). Consequently, omitted-variable explanations cannot be completely excluded, and the explanatory boundaries of the present model should be recognised when interpreting the strength of the identity-related relationships.

Seventh, the moderation findings concerning EmI should also be interpreted within the boundaries of the model and measurement approach. EmI significantly moderated three of the four identity–opportunity relationships, but its influence was neither uniform nor consistently positive. It attenuated the EIS–OE relationship, strengthened the EIS–OD and EIC–OE relationships, and did not significantly moderate the EIC–OD relationship. These findings support the interpretation of EmI as a selective and context-sensitive regulatory mechanism rather than as a general catalyst that uniformly strengthens EI effects (Goleman, 2013; Cardon et al., 2020). However, the present study does not directly identify the psychological processes responsible for these different moderation directions. Moreover, EmI was incorporated into the structural model at the overall construct level, meaning that the analysis does not establish whether particular EmI dimensions are responsible for the observed buffering, strengthening, or non-significant effects. The theoretical mechanisms proposed to explain these patterns should therefore be regarded as theoretically informed interpretations rather than directly observed psychological mechanisms. Accordingly, describing EmI as a regulatory condition represents a theoretically informed interpretation of the moderation pattern rather than a directly observed mechanism. The relatively strong correlations of EmI with EIS and OE further warrant caution, as shared higher-order variance cannot be completely excluded despite the evidence supporting construct distinctiveness.

Eighth, the quantitative survey design did not directly capture the micro-cognitive and emotional processes through which EI becomes relevant during real-time OE and development. The study identifies systematic associations among identity, EmI, and opportunity-related constructs, but it cannot observe how entrepreneurs interpret ambiguous information, respond emotionally to feedback, reconsider an opportunity, or enact their identities during specific decision episodes. Research on entrepreneurial cognition indicates that opportunity-related processes can involve evolving cognitive representations and experimentation (Shepherd et al., 2023). Because process-tracing, think-aloud, observational, or repeated-measures techniques were not employed in the present study, the mechanisms proposed to explain the observed structural relationships remain inferential rather than directly observed.

Finally, the study focused specifically on established individual founder entrepreneurs. This focus was theoretically appropriate because founders are directly involved in establishing their ventures and in the evaluation and development of entrepreneurial opportunities. However, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other entrepreneurial actors, including nascent entrepreneurs, non-founder owner-managers, successors in family businesses, corporate entrepreneurs, and members of entrepreneurial teams. Identity processes may operate differently for individuals who inherit, purchase, or manage an existing venture rather than founding it themselves. Similarly, OE and OD within entrepreneurial teams may involve multiple and potentially competing identities rather than the identity of a single founder. Team-level sense-making and identity dynamics may therefore produce relationships that differ from those observed at the individual founder level (Wood & McKinley, 2020; Kaffka & Krueger, 2021).

Taken together, these limitations define the appropriate boundaries for interpreting the findings of this thesis. The study provides theoretically and empirically grounded evidence of relationships among EI, EmI, OE, and OD within a sample of established founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, but it does not establish universal, context-independent, or causal relationships. The findings should therefore be understood as evidence supporting the proposed theoretical relationships within the methodological, measurement, sampling, and contextual boundaries of the study. These limitations also generate several specific opportunities for extending the research through alternative samples, contexts, levels of analysis, model specifications, and research designs, which are developed in the following section.

5.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research can extend the findings of this thesis in several important directions. These directions arise both from the boundaries of the present research design and from questions generated by the differentiated relationships among EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI. Rather than simply replicating the present model, future studies could examine the mechanisms, temporal dynamics, contextual conditions, and levels of analysis through which EI becomes associated with opportunity-related processes.

First, future research may broaden the range of individual-level factors examined alongside EI. The present study focused specifically on EIS, EIC, and EmI, but opportunity-related processes may also be associated with factors such as personality, resilience, risk profiles, entrepreneurial intentions, and other cognitive and motivational characteristics. Incorporating these variables would allow researchers to determine whether EI retains explanatory value when competing individual-level explanations are considered. For example, future studies could use hierarchical SEM to compare models that introduce personality, resilience, or risk-related variables before and after EIS and EIC. Researchers could also employ latent profile analysis or cluster analysis to identify different configurations of entrepreneurs, such as founders characterized by high EIS but lower EIC or vice versa, and examine whether these profiles differ in OE and OD. Such approaches would provide a more nuanced account of heterogeneity among entrepreneurs rather than assuming that identity operates uniformly across individuals.

Second, future research should examine the cross-cultural and contextual generalizability of the model. Although the present study provides evidence from founder entrepreneurs in Jordan, the relationships identified here cannot be assumed to operate identically across different institutional, cultural, or economic environments. Comparative studies could replicate the measurement and structural models using samples from Jordan and other countries, particularly those that differ in resource availability, institutional support, or entrepreneurial ecosystems. Multi-group SEM would allow researchers to test measurement invariance before comparing structural path coefficients across countries or regions. This would be particularly useful for establishing whether EIS, EIC, OE, OD, and EmI retain comparable meanings across settings and whether the differentiated relationships observed in Jordan are context-specific or more widely generalizable. Cross-cultural research could also incorporate institutional support, cultural factors, market volatility, and resource availability as moderators to identify the contextual boundary conditions of identity–opportunity relationships. Recent calls for more non-WEIRD entrepreneurship research further reinforce the importance of such comparative work. Shepherd et al. (2025) argue that the dominance of WEIRD samples may limit understanding of entrepreneurial phenomena and that research embedded in underrepresented contexts can both contextualize existing theories and potentially contribute theoretical insights relevant beyond those contexts. Future research could therefore compare the present model across Jordan, other Arab and non-Western environments, and Western contexts using measurement invariance testing followed by multi-group SEM.

Third, future research should examine more explicitly the mechanisms and sequencing connecting EI with opportunity processes. The present findings show that EIS is more strongly associated with OE, whereas EIC is more strongly associated with OD, but the cross-sectional design cannot establish whether these differences represent a temporal process. Future research could therefore test process models in which OE and development are examined as potentially sequential and iterative rather than solely as separate outcomes. Longitudinal designs could measure EIS, EIC, and OE at an initial stage and subsequently assess changes in OE and OD at multiple later points. Cross-lagged panel models could then examine whether EI predicts subsequent opportunity-related activity, whether opportunity activity subsequently reinforces EI, or whether reciprocal relationships exist. Mediation models could additionally examine whether variables such as entrepreneurial intention link identity to opportunity-related behavior, as suggested by previous research on the relationship between intention and entrepreneurial action (Gieure et al., 2020; Haşim & Soppe, 2023). Such designs would provide a stronger test of the process-based interpretation suggested by the current findings. Moreover, future research should directly test the proposed regulatory interpretation by disaggregating EmI into its constituent dimensions and examining whether self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills account differently for the observed moderation effects (Goleman, 2013).

Fourth, future studies can move beyond the individual founder as the sole level of analysis. The present study examined individual founder entrepreneurs, although OE and OD frequently occur within entrepreneurial teams. Future research could collect data from multiple founders or team members within the same venture and use multilevel modelling to distinguish individual-level identity effects from team-level processes. Researchers could examine whether similarity or divergence in team members' EIS, EIC, and EmI facilitates or constrains collective OE and OD. Social network analysis could also be used to examine how identity-related influence and opportunity interpretations move through entrepreneurial teams, while configurational approaches could identify combinations of identity and emotional characteristics associated with different team outcomes (Wood & McKinley, 2020; Kaffka & Krueger, 2021). This would extend the current individual-level model toward a more socially embedded understanding of EI.

Finally, future research may use longitudinal, experimental, and process-based methods with the intent of providing stronger evidence concerning temporal ordering and the mechanisms underlying the observed relationships. The cross-sectional design used in this thesis identifies theoretically specified associations but cannot establish whether changes in EIS or EIC precede changes in OE or OD. A longitudinal panel design could follow founders across several stages of OE and OD and measure changes in identity salience, identity centrality, EmI-related responses, and opportunity activities over time. Diary or experience-sampling methods could be particularly valuable for EIS because salience is theoretically sensitive to situational activation; founders could report identity activation, emotions, and opportunity-related judgments repeatedly across real entrepreneurial situations. Process-tracing and think-aloud methods could additionally capture how founders interpret information while evaluating opportunities, addressing cognitive processes that could not be observed through the present survey design (Shepherd et al., 2023). Where feasible, experimental or scenario-based studies could manipulate identity-relevant cues or emotionally demanding opportunity conditions and examine subsequent evaluative responses. Together, these approaches would provide stronger evidence regarding temporal ordering and mechanisms than is possible using cross-sectional SEM alone.

An additional interesting point emerging from this study, specifically from the moderation findings, points to where further investigation is required to examine why EmI operates differently across identity–opportunity relationships. The present study found that EmI attenuated the EIS–OE relationship, strengthened the EIS–OD and EIC–OE relationships, and did not significantly moderate EIC–OD. Future research should therefore avoid assuming that EmI functions as a universally positive entrepreneurial resource. Researchers could use longitudinal or experimental designs to examine whether specific dimensions of EmI, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, or social skills, account for these different moderation patterns (Goleman, 2013). Examining the dimensions separately may reveal whether particular emotional capabilities produce buffering effects during evaluation while others facilitate persistence or adaptation during OD. This would provide a more precise explanation of the selective and context-sensitive regulatory role suggested by the present findings.

Overall, these suggested directions would extend understanding beyond establishing whether EI is associated with opportunity processes, towards explaining when, how, over what period, and under what contextual conditions, these relationships occur. Combining longitudinal, experimental, multilevel, cross-cultural, and person-centred methods would also provide stronger tests of the theoretical boundaries identified in this thesis and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between EI, emotion, and opportunity processes.

5.5.1 Contextual Generalizability

The applicability of these findings should be considered with awareness of the nuances of the Jordanian context in which the data was gathered. The theoretical mechanisms examined in this study—particularly the distinction between EIS and EIC and their relationships with OE and OD—are derived from Role Identity Theory and are not inherently specific to Jordan (Stryker & Serpe, 1994; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2022). Accordingly, there are theoretical grounds for expecting EI to be relevant to opportunity-related processes in other national contexts. However, the strength and expression of these relationships may vary according to cultural, institutional, economic, and resource conditions. The present findings therefore provide evidence of these relationships within Jordan rather than evidence of their universal applicability.

The findings may be particularly relevant to other non-Western and resource-constrained entrepreneurial environments that share some contextual characteristics with Jordan. In such settings, founders may similarly operate under uncertainty, resource limitations, and varying levels of institutional support, making the relationship between internal identity-related resources and opportunity processes potentially important. Nevertheless, non-Western countries should not be treated as a homogeneous category. Differences in cultural values, institutional arrangements, economic development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and access to resources may alter how entrepreneurial identities are constructed and enacted. Therefore, the findings from this thesis may offer theoretically relevant propositions for other non-Western contexts, but their applicability should be empirically established rather than assumed (Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the findings may also have relevance to Western entrepreneurial contexts because the underlying theoretical distinction between identity salience and identity centrality is not culturally restricted. For example, the finding that EIS is more strongly associated with OE whereas EIC is more strongly associated with OD may represent a broader identity-based differentiation in opportunity processes. However, the relative importance of these relationships may differ in Western settings where entrepreneurs may operate within different institutional environments and levels of resource availability. Similarly, the selective moderating role of EmI may not necessarily reproduce the same pattern found in Jordan because the emotional and contextual demands associated with entrepreneurial activity can vary across settings (Cardon et al., 2020; Goleman, 2013).

Accordingly, the principal contribution of the Jordanian evidence should be understood in terms of theoretical transferability rather than statistical generalizability. The study demonstrates that the proposed identity–opportunity relationships are empirically meaningful within a comparatively underrepresented, non-Western context, but it cannot determine whether the magnitude or direction of these relationships is equivalent across countries. Direct comparative research is required before concluding that the findings generalize either to other non-Western environments or to Western entrepreneurial contexts.

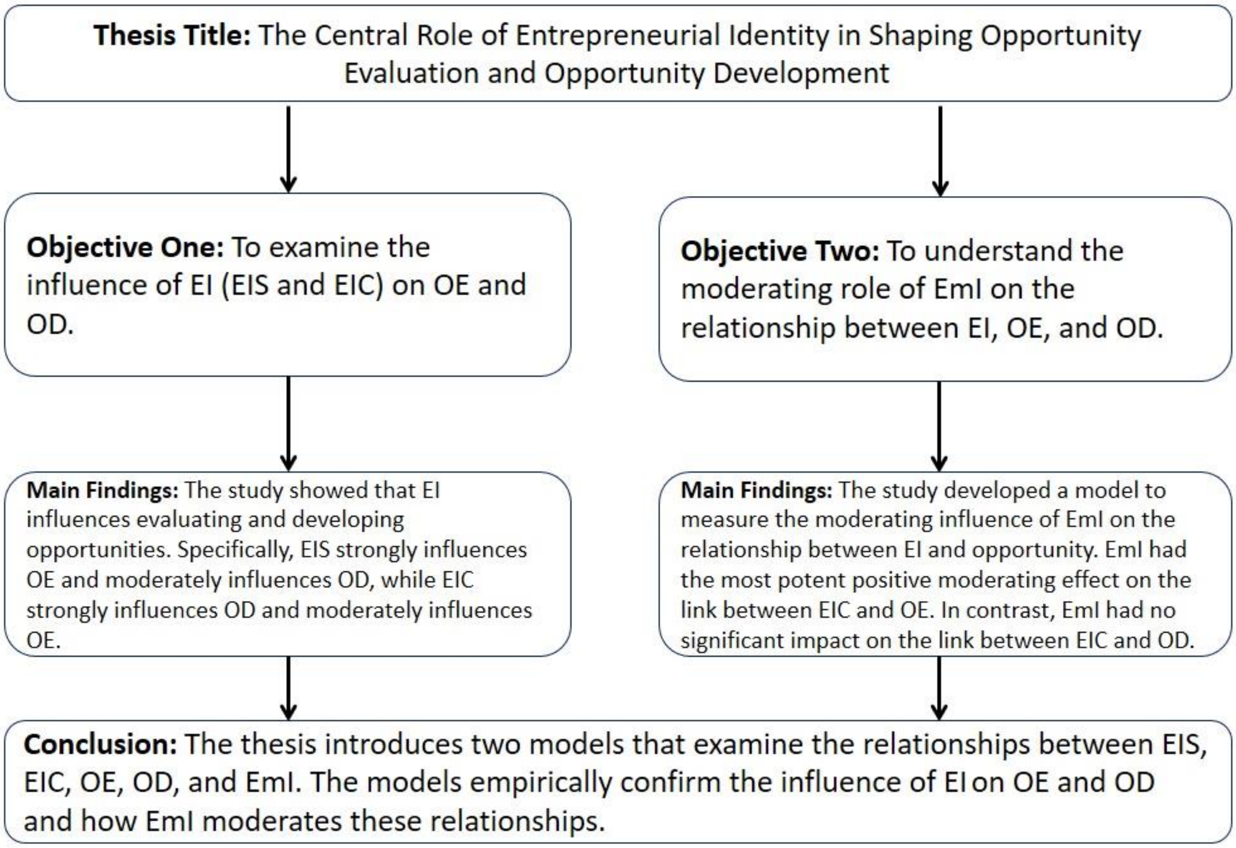
5.6 Conclusion

This thesis builds on identity theory and role identity theory to extend understanding of the relationship between entrepreneurial identity and opportunity assessment and development. The findings confirmed that EI is more complex than a one-dimensional construct, particularly where identity salience is a significant predictor of the opportunity assessment process. This finding is due to the activation of the entrepreneurial role in different situations. The findings also confirmed that identity centrality is a significant predictor of the opportunity development process. This is due to a constant commitment towards the entrepreneurial self-concept. The study also confirmed that the relationship between EI and opportunities is influenced by emotions.

The thesis has important action-oriented implications in developing entrepreneurship for practitioners, as well as specifying identity-based and affective mechanisms that explain how founders move from opportunity evaluation to development, thereby offering a more integrated process model of entrepreneurial action. In addition, the thesis assists in extending existing understanding on role identity, in that it was clearly shown in the thesis that identity strength was not sufficient; in fact, identity strength is guided or measured by emotional principles and capacity to ensure that identity constructs a positive or creative pursuit of opportunities and does not lock oneself into rigid commitment. This thesis also highlights the importance of identity entrepreneurship education, emotionally intelligent mentoring, and policy-based initiatives that promote reflective self-consciousness. Linking the dimensions of identity to the processes of opportunity and EmI provides a behaviorally and emotionally enhanced understanding of the role of self-concept in entrepreneurship.

The integration of EIS and EIC with specific opportunity processes and the positioning of EmI as a regulatory condition serves to enhance clarity on the importance of who the entrepreneur is, how they feel, and what they do in dealing with opportunities. The findings and conclusions of this study, as presented in Figure 5.1, serve to address the objectives of this thesis.

Figure 5.1: *Overview of the Thesis*



Findings from this thesis also serve to reaffirm that entrepreneurship is an economic and strategic activity that has underpinning psychological and emotional processes. Using the context of an emerging entrepreneurial setting in Jordan contributes to the global importance of advancing understanding of the interplay between identity and emotion in the maintenance of opportunity creation in the face of constraints.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics Application Approval

Gmail

Omar Radwan <eng.orm@gmail.com>

Ethics Application Approved

1 message

amanda.sircombe@waikato.ac.nz <amanda.sircombe@waikato.ac.nz> 14 December 2022 at 22:14

To: eng.orm@gmail.com

Cc: jenny.gibb@waikato.ac.nz

Dear Omar

Re: Ethics Application WMS 22/185 – The role of entrepreneurial identity in evaluating and developing opportunity and entrepreneurial performance: The influence of emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial behaviours.

The above application has been reviewed by the WMS Ethics Committee, and they have granted ethics approval for the project outlined in this application.

Please note: should you make changes to the project outlined in the approved ethics application, you may need to reapply for ethics approval.

Good luck with your research

Amanda Sircombe<

Appendix B: Co-Authorship Forms

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

Co-Authorship Form

Postgraduate Studies Office
Student and Academic Services Division
Wāhanga Ratonga Mātauranga Akonga
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240, New Zealand
Phone +64 7 838 4439
Website: http://www.waikato.ac.nz/sasd/postgraduate/

This form is to accompany the submission of any PhD that contains research reported in published or unpublished co-authored work. **Please include one copy of this form for each co-authored work.** Completed forms should be included in your appendices for all the copies of your thesis submitted for examination and library deposit (including digital deposit).

Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

The Impact of Entrepreneurial Identity on Opportunity Evaluation and Development.
Paper accepted in Australasian Consortium for Entrepreneurship Research Excellence (ACERE 2024).

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	Collaboration on developing research ideas, data collection, data analysis, findings interpretation, and manuscript writing.
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	90

CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Omar Radwan Almasri	Collaboration on developing research ideas, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings.
Jenny Gibb	Collaboration on findings interpretation and manuscript editing.
Albert Sunyer	Collaboration on findings interpretation and manuscript editing.

Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and

Name	Signature	Date
Omar Radwan Almasri		19/11/2024
Jenny Gibb		20/11/2024
Albert Sunyer		19/11/2024

July 2015

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Co-Authorship Form

This form is to accompany the submission of any PhD that contains research reported in published or unpublished co-authored work. **Please include one copy of this form for each co-authored work.** Completed forms should be included in your appendices for all the copies of your thesis submitted for examination and library deposit (including digital deposit).

Please indicate the chapter/section/pages of this thesis that are extracted from a co-authored work and give the title and publication details or details of submission of the co-authored work.

The Impact of Entrepreneurial Identity on Entrepreneurial Performance with the Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Behavior. Paper accepted in European Academy of Management (EURAM 2025).

Nature of contribution by PhD candidate	Collaboration on developing research ideas, data collection, data analysis, findings interpretation, and manuscript writing.
Extent of contribution by PhD candidate (%)	90

CO-AUTHORS

Name	Nature of Contribution
Omar Radwan Almasri	Collaboration on developing research ideas, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings.
Jenny Gibb	Collaboration on findings interpretation and manuscript editing.
Albert Sunyer	Collaboration on findings interpretation and manuscript editing.

Certification by Co-Authors

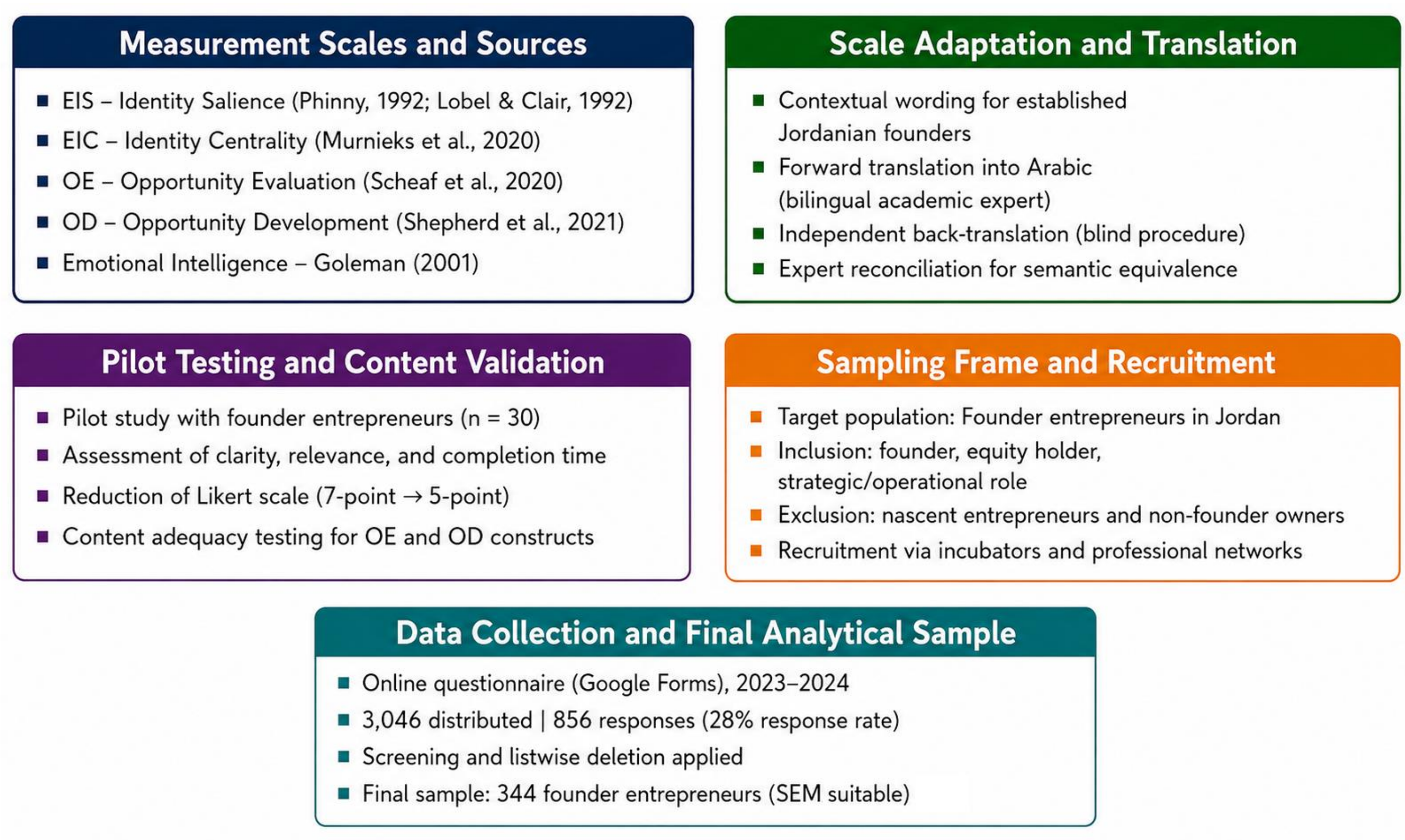
The undersigned hereby certify that:

- the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and

Name	Signature	Date
Omar Radwan Almasri		12/06/2025
Jenny Gibb		15/06/2025
Albert Sunyer		16/06/2025

July 2015

Appendix C: Scale Sources, Adaptation, Translation Procedures, Sampling Frame, and Data Collection Procedures



Appendix D: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability, Validity, and Model Fit Results

Table D1: *Descriptive Statistics of Latent Constructs*

Construct	Mean	SD
EIS	3.47	1.36
EIC	3.5	1.2
OE	3.45	1.33
OD	3.57	1.12
EmI	3.49	0.91

Table D2: *Correlation Matrix*

	EIS	EIC	OE	OD	EmI
EIS	1.0	0.36	0.52	0.32	0.6
EIC	0.36	1.0	0.39	0.41	0.5
OE	0.52	0.39	1.0	0.45	0.66
OD	0.32	0.41	0.45	1.0	0.55
EmI	0.6	0.5	0.66	0.55	1.0

Table D3: *Reliability and Convergent Validity Statistics*

Construct	Cronbach α	CR	AVE
EIS	0.821	0.88	0.65
EIC	0.781	0.88	0.64
OE	0.857	0.89	0.67
OD	0.814	0.87	0.66
EmI	0.834	0.9	0.62

Table D4: *Model Fit Indices for SEM Models*

Index	Model 1	Model 2
CMIN/DF	1.6	2.61
RMSEA	0.061	0.076
CFI	0.939	0.923
NFI	0.921	0.917
IFI	0.939	0.923

Appendix E: The demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table E.1: *Demographics Profile of the Sample*

<table>
<tr><th>Gender</th><th>Nationality</th><th>Age</th><th>Educational Level</th><th>Educational Background</th><th>Entrepreneurial Experience</th><th>Age of the Company</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Male
225
(65.4%)</td><td rowspan="2">Jordanian
344
(100%)</td><td>(18–25)
9
(2.6 %)</td><td>Vocational Training
2
(0.6%)</td><td>Business/Economic
108
(31.4%)</td><td>Less than one year
10
(2.9%)</td><td>Less than one year
30
(8.7%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>(26–33)
74
(21.5%)</td><td>High School
9
(2.6%)</td><td>Engineering
103
(29.9%)</td><td>(1-less than 5) years
61
(17.7%)</td><td>(1-less than 5) years
141
(41%)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Female
119
(34.6)</td><td rowspan="4">Others
0
(0.0%)</td><td>(34–41)
140
(40.7%)</td><td>Bachelor
185
(53.8%)</td><td>IT
88
(25.6%)</td><td>(5-less than 9) years
106
(30.8%)</td><td>(5-less than 9) years
94
(27.3%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>(42–49)
103
(29.9%)</td><td>Higher Diploma
3
(0.9%)</td><td rowspan="3">Science
45
(13.1%)</td><td>(9-less than 13) years
106
(30.8%)</td><td>(9-less than 13) years
46
(13.4%)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">(50–57)
18
(5.2%)</td><td>Master
119
(34.6%)</td><td rowspan="2">(13 years or more)
61
(17.7 %)</td><td rowspan="2">(13 years or more)
33
(9.6 %)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Doctorate
26
(7.6%)</td></tr>
</table>

Sample Size n=344

Appendix F: The Questionnaire of the Thesis

Research Topic

The Role of Entrepreneurial Identity in Evaluating and Developing Opportunity and Entrepreneurial Performance: The Influence of Emotional Intelligence and Entrepreneurial Behavior

Overview

This research examines the relationship between entrepreneurial values, emotions, and evaluating opportunities. In addition, this research seeks to explain how entrepreneurial values and behaviors influence business performance. Findings from this research will provide valuable insight to the academic community and entrepreneurial practitioners.

- The research is conducted by Omar Radwan Almasri, a doctoral student at the University of Waikato-School of Management and Marketing. Email: oa106@students.waikato.ac.nz
  Supervised by
  Dr Jenny Gibb, Senior Lecturer & PhD Convenor, School of Management and Marketing, University of Waikato. Email: jennyg@waikato.ac.nz
  And
  Dr Albert Sunyer, Associate Professor, Dept. of Management, Universitat Politècnia de Catalunya. Email: albert.sunyer.torrents@upc.edu
- This research is supported by The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship of Jordan. All participants in this survey are established founders of entrepreneurial companies in Jordan.
- As a participant you are asked to answer some background information questions followed by the questions of this study that are designed on a Five-Point Likert scale, ranked from (1) strongly disagree, to (5) strongly agree. Notably, (3) indicates that neither agree nor disagree means a neutral answer.
- Please note that the survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Participation is entirely voluntary. Please be assured that confidentiality and anonymity are strictly respected, and all responses will only be used in this research only once prior consent is obtained from the participants, and the survey questionnaire is completed. A participant returning the questionnaire can be taken as consent for the information to be used.

Declaration to participants

If you choose to take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question or opt-out of the study at any time before starting the data analysis, which will be on May 1, 2023.
- Ask further questions about the study that occurs to you during your participation.
- A summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded.
- Discuss any potential concerns to the researcher or the supervisors.

What will happen to the information collected?

The collected responses will be coded and tabulated to identify key organizational themes present at the time of the study. This information will be used to write a 'Report of an Investigation'. Only my supervisors and I will have access to the information provided through this process. Upon completion of this project, any non-essential data required for potential further research will be destroyed, and I will only retain a digital copy of the final database. All material will be stored electronically on the researcher's password-protected computer. The research respondent's answers will be destroyed two years after completing and submitting the researcher's PhD.

Each valid completed survey will earn one entry into the 100 JOD award; 2 winners will be selected in a random drawing to win the prize. If you are interested, please write your email.

Section (A): Demographic Data

Please select your right Choice:

1. **Gender:**

☐ Male ☐ Female

2. **Nationality:**

☐ Jordanian ☐ Others (please specify)

3. **Age:**

☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-33 ☐ 34-41 ☐ 42-49 ☐ 50-57 ☐ 58 and above

4. **Educational Level**

☐ Vocational Training ☐ High school or below ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Higher Diploma

☐ Master's ☐ Doctorate

5. **Educational Background**

☐ Business/Economic ☐ Engineering ☐ IT ☐ Sciences ☐ Medical ☐ Law

☐ Pharmaceuticals ☐ Art/Humanities ☐ Others (please specify)

6. **Entrepreneurial Experience**

☐ Less Than 1 Year ☐ (1- Less than 5) Years ☐ (5- Less than 9) Years
☐ (9 – Less than 13) Years ☐ 13 Years or More

7. **Age of the Company**

☐ Less Than 1 Year ☐ (1- Less than 5) Years ☐ (5- Less than 9) Years
☐ (9 – Less than 13) Years ☐ 13 Years or More

Section (B): You are kindly asked to mark in the appropriate box that expresses your viewpoint about each of the following sentences.

#	**Item**	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The major satisfactions in my life come from my entrepreneurial work.					
2	The most important things that happen to me involve my entrepreneurial work.					
3	I am an entrepreneur and a family person but lean a bit more towards entrepreneurial work.					
4	I have spent time trying to find out more about my entrepreneurial work, such as its history, traditions, and customs.					
5	Being an entrepreneur is something I frequently think about.					
6	Entrepreneurship is an important part of who I am.					
7	I would feel a loss if I were forced to give up being an entrepreneur.					
8	Being an entrepreneur means more to me than just making a living.					

9	If there is a potential opportunity, I see large potential gains for myself in pursuing it.					
10	If there is a potential opportunity, I want to learn more about pursuing it.					
11	If there is a potential opportunity, the overall riskiness of pursuing it is high for me.					
12	If there is a potential opportunity, I would love working on making it a reality.					
13	Looking into the immediate future, I plan to consult next to further develop a business opportunity.					
14	I see interaction(s) with the team as good for developing an opportunity.					
15	I focus on improving existing features and functions (Time & effort on developing opportunities).					
16	I am aware of any other contacts my team is reaching out to develop an opportunity.					

As an established founder						
17	I am always aware of my moods.					
18	I have good insight into what makes me tick.					
19	I have difficulty describing my feelings to others.					
20	I can often shrug off a foul mood and go on with my day.					
21	I feel negative emotions more strongly than other people.					
22	I can regulate my moods so that they don't overwhelm me.					
23	I have the will to accomplish my goals.					
24	I have too little motivation to try hard enough to do well.					
25	I am what others call a self-starter.					
26	I am keenly aware of feelings of other people.					
27	I am gifted at sensing what others around me are feeling.					
28	I am astute at reading others' reactions and feelings.					
29	I have good people skills.					
30	People seem to avoid interacting with me.					
31	I could be described as a good team player.					
In my company						
32	We are careful not to commit more resources than we could afford to lose.					
33	We are careful not to risk so much money that the company would be in trouble if things did not work out.					

34	We are careful not to risk more money than we are willing to lose with our initial idea.					
35	We use a substantial number of agreements with our stakeholders to reduce the amount of uncertainty.					
36	We use pre-commitments from customers and suppliers as often as possible.					
37	We prefer long-term partnerships and prior commitment from our suppliers and customers.					
38	We are flexible to allow the business to evolve as opportunities emerge.					
39	We are flexible to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.					
40	We adapt our processes to make the best possible use of the resources we have.					
41	We avoided courses of action that restricted our flexibility and adaptability.					
42	We continuously experiment with different products/services that we provide.					
43	The product/service that we now provide is substantially different than we first imagined.					
44	We continuously experiment with our business process.					
45	We tried a number of different approaches until we found a business model that worked.					
In my company						
46	Over the past 3 years, our revenue (sales) growth has been outstanding.					
47	Over the past 3 years, our revenue growth rate has exceeded our competitors.					
48	Over the past 3 years, the revenue growth of the product was as planned.					
49	Over the past 3 years, the product met revenue goals.					
50	Access to large range of products, services and information, and other participants is provided.					
51	The costs of general management activities (e.g., planning and accounting costs) have been substantially reduced.					
52	The costs of coordinating with suppliers, customers, and business partners have been substantially reduced.					
53	Inventory costs for participants in the business model are reduced.					

Please add any additional comments or thoughts that you may have.

End of the questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this survey

This survey is conducted with the assistance of the Jordan Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship.