

Micro-Mentalities of Owner-Managers of Small Businesses in the Cameroonian Context: What Relevance for Analyzing the Survival of their Organization?

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Abstract: The purpose of this work is the Highlighting the contribution of owner-manager micro-mentalities in the explanation of the sustainability of very Small Enterprises. The research is based on an exploratory approach. Following Churchill's paradigm (1979), we developed an interview guide used for the collection of data on a final sample of 12 owner-managers obtained by use of convenience sampling technique. After data processing, the results obtained show that micro mentality in its four dimensions are linkable with the sustainability of the small business in Cameroonian context. Indeed, the manager's priority values (work in family, custom, religion, etc.) are associable with the sustainability of the SME according verbatim analysis. The results of this study constitute a research avenue in the organizational field and more particularly on the issue of sustainability of SME.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Global economic dynamics are marked by the rise of small, very flexible structures in the occurrence of very small businesses (Marchesnay, 2003). The attention paid to the small business in general and the VSE in particular, perceived as a specific organizational form, provides research with a number of new or resurgent questions. In Cameroon, according to a survey conducted by the INS (2016), VSEs represent more than 90% of the entrepreneurial fabric and contribute more than 60% to the creation of jobs and wealth (INS¹, 2016; OECD, 2022). These VSEs, whatever their sector of activity, face numerous threats such as management deficits, which expose them to recurring failures and bankruptcies (INS, 2016). The question that therefore arises is the capacity of these VSEs to guarantee the protection of their assets and ensure long-term sustainability. Indeed, At the heart of the actions of owner-managers of very small businesses (VSEs) oriented towards fulfilling their obligations, or those of public authorities focused on the

development of sustainable entrepreneurship, the concept of sustainability is the subject of different interpretations. It should be emphasized that the manager of the SME exerts a very strong influence on the management system of his company, both on its structure and its operation (Ngok, 2007). This is the reason why in the field of entrepreneurship, several studies identify certain relationships between manager and company. For example, it seems possible to find reflections on the links between behavior and stages of evolution (Lorrain and Dussault, 1994), or on the vision performance relationship (Nkongolo-Bakenda et alii, 1994), or even on the link between managerial perception and strategic behavior (Paradas, 1998). Given the multiplicity of objectives (Marchesnay, 1997, 1998) and the strategic orientations of managers, their behaviors are not "naturally" oriented by a formal rationality (Ngok, 2007). It is generally assumed that SME managers adopt attitudes that are distant, or even contrary to, market logic and economic rationality. Indeed, an analysis conducted by Ngock (2007) reveals that research in the field of entrepreneurship and SME considers the

¹The National Institute of Statistics (INS) is the official service of [statistics of Cameroon](https://www.institut-statistique.cm/). Created by decree no. 2001-100 of April 20, 2001

entrepreneur as an essential figure at the heart of entrepreneurial activity, even though the profile of business leaders has been recognized for some time by many authors as an important factor in the strategic choices made (Ngok, 2007). In light of these arguments, it appears that a relevant analysis of the evolution of SMEs cannot be done without relying on a microanalysis of the behavior of its promoter or owner-manager. Indeed, according to Bouhaha (2007), in view of the literature from the sociology of professions (Bauer, 1993; Gresle, 1981; Zarca, 1986), we cannot address the question of the economic behavior of entrepreneurs managing very small businesses by referring solely to economic theory and explanations in economic terms.

Indeed, the personal projects of entrepreneurial managers influence the management and development of small businesses (Bouhaouala, 1999; Collins and Randolph, 1991; Gresle, 1981; Lahlou, Maffre and Moati, 1991; Moati, 1993; Zarca, 1986). Their behaviors can sometimes appear anti-economic (Bauer, 1993; Gresle, 1981; Zarca, 1986), inefficient from the point of view of sectoral competition (Porter, 1982) or disinterested (Herscovici, 1994). In other words, although they produce economic and commercial effects on the markets, their behaviors do not often seem to conform to the canon of economic rationality. Thus, the subjectivity of entrepreneurial managers allows us to understand the management methods of VSEs and their deviations and/or contradictions with respect to economic rationality. To this end, in view of the problem of the sustainability of VSEs which represents a major concern in the Cameroonian context, we believe that an analysis of the failure of these VSEs from the perspective of the micro-mentalities of their owner-managers deserves to be considered.

Thus, the objective of this article is to highlight the micro-mentalities of latent leaders in the Cameroonian entrepreneurial field while exploring their link in relation to the sustainability of the VSE.

The rest of the paper includes a theoretical framework presented in Section 2. In Section 3 we present the methodological approach. Section 4 serves as a presentation and discussion of results. In Section 5 we proceed to the conclusion and formulate managerial implications.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This first subsection highlights two main concepts: micro-mentality and sustainability. We first present the controversy over the concept of sustainability; and secondly, we highlight the approach of identifying micro-mentalities as relevant factors for predicting the sustainability of the SME. At the end of each presentation, a theoretical proposition is formulated.

A. Sustainability: A Diffuse and Protean Concept

The concept of sustainability is marked by a semantic vagueness that denotes its multidimensionality (Benghozi, 2005). Many researchers agree on its conception in terms of longevity (Djoutsa Wamba and Hikkerova, 2014; Cheriet et al., 2012). This longevity refers to that which lasts a long

time. Sustainability has a multidimensional character which is due not only to the number of variables that can explain it, but also to the interdependencies that can exist between them. Indeed, it seems that beyond this plurality of dimensions, sustainability symbolizes the very purpose of managing an organization (Mignon, 2010).

It most often refers to the viability, longevity and sustainability of the company. Based on the work of Abalo Kodjo (2010), we can conclude that sustainability is a cross-cutting theme that allows us to refine our thinking on the success, performance and long-term profitability of companies.

➤ *The Concept of Longevity*

For many years, sustainability has been understood through the prism of what lasts a long time. This concept explains the existence of a temporal duration of the company, referring to its longevity. Indeed, there is a debate among researchers on the time it takes for a company to be considered sustainable. Bruyat (1993) notes that the choice of limits varies according to the authors. Brought back to the level of VSEs, this period seems long due to the daily management observed among these owner-managers in their companies. The work of the GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) marks the possibility for a company to be eligible for sustainability. This eligibility is measured by the ability of its owner-manager to pay salaries to the company's employees for a period greater than or equal to forty-two (42) months. There is some controversy over when something can be said to have lasted a long time.

➤ *The Concept of Viability*

The viability of a business is literally defined as "the company's ability to survive." It explains the primary role of the company in the environment in which it operates. Thus, brought back into the academic sphere, this viability refers to the creation of value for the company's stakeholders (Gartner, 1990). For this author, value creation is at the heart of entrepreneurship and constitutes the objective of all owner-managers to ensure the long-term survival of their businesses (Verstraete & Fayolle, 2005). This satisfaction thus becomes the objective to be achieved by owner-managers of VSEs, or even their obligations to fulfill.

B. *The Concept of Micromentality and its Variations*

Several studies have shown that the reasoning of entrepreneurial managers is not always consistent with the reasoning models of economic theory (Bouhaouala., 2007). Indeed, the personal projects of entrepreneurial managers influence the management and development of the small business (Bouhaouala, 1999; Collins and Randolph, 1991; Gresle, 1981; Maffre and Moati, 1991; Moati, 1993; Zarca, 1986). Their behavior can sometimes appear anti-economic (Bauer, 1993; Gresle, 1981; Zarca, 1986), inefficient from the point of view of sectoral competition (Porter, 1982) or disinterested (Herscovici, 1994). In other words, although they produce economic and commercial effects on the markets, their behaviors do not often seem to conform to the canon of economic rationality (Bouhaouala., 2007). It is thus clear that the subjectivity of entrepreneurial leaders, therefore their micro-mentalities, allows us to understand the

management methods of small businesses and their deviations and/or contradictions in relation to economic rationality is not new. Micro-mentalities determine specific relationships to profit, work, business, competition, social success, sport, and produce logics of action specific to groups of entrepreneurial leaders and management methods. According to a study by Bouhouala (2007), the concept of micro-mentalities of the entrepreneur can be broken down into seven dimensions, including: social values, conception of work, conception of business, socio-economic objective, conception of success, conception of money and conception of sport.

C. Micromentalities and Sustainability: Theoretical Marking of the Predictive Link

In view of the literature from the sociology of professions (Bauer, 1993; Gresle, 1981; Zarca, 1986), Bouhouala (2007) specifies that the issue of behavior cannot be addressed economics of SMEs with sole reference to economic theory and to explanations in economic terms. This is how the studies carried out by Zawadzki, (2013), Dupuy (2007), reveal that beyond formal internal control procedures, there are specific informal control mechanisms within organizations that can contribute to reducing risks and explaining their sustainability. To this end, as highlighted by Bouhouala (2007), the idea that subjectivity leading entrepreneurs helps to understand management methods of small businesses and their deviations is possible for the present study because the objectives, aspirations and profile of the leaders, the passion which founds the micro-mentalities of the leaders constitute explanatory alternatives to the sole parameters of the market in the analysis of the economic trajectories of SMEs (Bouhouala and Chifflet, 2001; Bouhouala, 2007). Indeed, The success of the entrepreneur (self-made man) does not depend solely on his personality traits and psychological characteristics. Indeed, "the entrepreneur is formed gradually, influenced first emotionally by his family, then symbolically by the workplace and its entrepreneurial models, and finally sociologically by his gradual involvement in an environment, his rooting and his integration in the latter" (Schmitt, 2008). In other words, the individual dimension of the entrepreneur

is nothing without an adequate environment "The environmental variables characterizing individuals have therefore become, themselves, real objects of analysis" (Tounés, 2003). Numerous publications have shown the importance of the sociocultural environment, the personal and professional network, the family context and the political and economic framework in explaining entrepreneurial behavior (Bowen and Hisrich, 1986; Hisrich and O'Kinneide, 1986; Aldrich et al, 1987; Fillion, 1991; Saglio, 1991; Casson, 1991). The behavioral approach is therefore interesting in that it is concerned with the behavior of the entrepreneur in the exercise of his activity, which is part of a cultural, social, economic and political environment. (Gartner, 1988) In the 1990s, research in entrepreneurship turned towards the study of the behavior of entrepreneurs (behavioral approach). The logic underlying this approach is that we can predict the performance of entrepreneurs by observing the "doing of entrepreneurship" and not the "being of entrepreneurship." In other words, the behavioral approach has focused on defining the entrepreneur by what he does, that is to say by the actions and behaviors he engages in throughout the business creation process rather than by his personality traits (Chandler and Jansen, 1992) seems important for theorizing the link between the micro-mentality of the owner-manager and the sustainability of his SME.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this article is to explore the relationship between micro-mentalities and the sustainability of the VSE. The choice made to constitute a sample has a decisive impact in terms of both external and internal validity of the study. In the context of this research, we used a sampling method from the group of non-probabilistic methods due to the impossibility for us to constitute an exhaustive list of all the VSEs in Cameroon. The Very small business constitute our theoretical sample. To achieve our objective, we conducted a qualitative exploration to test the reality of micro-mentalities in the Cameroonian empirical field. The sample is constituted by 12 owner-managers. Verbatim and contains analysis are carried out for the purpose. The related interview guide is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Maintenance Guide

	Axes of Micromentalities	QUESTIONS	SEMI-MANAGEMENT
1	values	How do you rate the following relationships?	-Religion and business -Beliefs in ancestors and business -Polygamy/monogamy and business -Loyalty and business -Independence and Business -Creativity, Innovation and Business
2	socio-economic objectives	What is the main objective for which you created your company?	-Is it for Living your passion? -Is it for To be socially useful? -Is it to leave a legacy or know-how to descendants?
3	business design	What does your business mean to you?	-Family heritage -place of creation, place of learning -Development instrument for the benefit of everyone
4	work design	What does work mean to you and how do you go	-Is work a means to live? -Do you prefer to recruit based on qualifications or do you also consider recommended candidates?

		about recruiting in your company?	-is work a family skill?
5	design of success	In your opinion, at what point can we say that a person has succeeded in life?	-Is it to make money and pass the business on to descendants? -Is heCreate and maintain jobs, act socially? -Is he becoming independent?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section we present the results of the exploratory qualitative survey.

A. Results of the Exploratory Qualitative Survey

In accordance with the interview guide presented above, semi-directive interviews were conducted with two owner-managers residing in the cities of Douala and Bafoussam respectively. The verbatim or transcripts are presented in the following table. Upon analysis of these verbatim, it follows that the micro-mentalities of managers in the Cameroonian context are a reality and refer to diverse and variable axes from one individual to another. Indeed, the exploratory survey that we conducted further confirms our assumption that there would be a link between micro-mentalities, that is to say the apprehensions and behaviors of the owner-manager and the sustainability of his SME. Indeed, entrepreneurs find that religion allows them to stay in business, on the one hand,

and that polygamy is a source of expenses and therefore can weaken sustainability.

"...No, religion is pretty good, it keeps you going...even your business

[...]..... Yes, when you are honest in all things, it works and it makes you prosper."

For others, ancestral beliefs and values can lead to the sustainability of the business. "...Yes, and the ancestors protect my business..."

Polygamy is also seen as a negative factor for business development by SME managers. The following table shows the following response from one interviewee: "QUESTION: Do you think having multiple wives can impact your business? ANSWER: Yes, because it's too costly."

Table 2: Verbatim

VERBATIM	
Owner-manager A	Owner-manager B
QUESTION :Um,...What is your assessment of religion and entrepreneurship, that is to say, does religion have an impact on your business? ANSWER :No, religion is pretty good, it even helps you maintain your business.	QUESTION :What is your assessment of the relationship between religion and entrepreneurship, i.e. does religion have an impact on your business? ANSWER :Yes
QUESTION :You believe in skulls, do you often pour oil on the skulls in the village to bless your business? ANSWER :No, I used to, but now I only believe in God ;	QUESTION :You believe in skulls, do you often pour oil on the skulls in the village to bless your business? ANSWER :Yes
QUESTION :Do you think having multiple wives can impact your business? ANSWER :Yes, because it costs too much	QUESTION :Do you think having multiple wives can impact your business? ANSWER :Yes, as a beginner, for the moment it can have an impact, but after that it cango
QUESTION :Is honesty a good quality in business? ANSWER :Yes, when you are honest in everything, it works and it makes you prosper.	QUESTION :Is honesty a good quality in business? ANSWER :Yes, it is the basis of life.
QUESTION :Can you work for someone? ANSWER : Hmmmmm, I started working for someone but now I can't anymore, I like being independent and employing people appeals to me.	QUESTION :Can you work for someone? ANSWER :No
QUESTION :Do you employ your family members? ANSWER :No, they are just ordinary people.	QUESTION :Why? Have you ever had this experience? ANSWER : Yes, the pay was lousy and it wasn't easy at all.
QUESTION :Don't like working with family members? ANSWER :No, because it's difficult to find an honest and reliable family member.	QUESTION :Do you have any other business ideas? ANSWER :Yes, I already plan to make this a brand.
QUESTION :Why did you start your business? ANSWER :I liked being independent so it was just out of love	QUESTION :Why did you start your business? ANSWER :I did it out of conviction, because at the beginning I wanted someone else to do it and I was duped
QUESTION: What does your business represent for you? ANSWER :It means a lot and I still have to do it to become a supermarket in the long run....	QUESTION :Was he a family member or a stranger? ANSWER :A stranger
QUESTION :Do you learn from your customers on a daily basis? Do you actually already know the mentality of your customers?	QUESTION :Can you still recruit people after this? ANSWER :Yes, that doesn't prevent it.ace
	QUESTION :Will you employ family members or strangers? ANSWER :Anyone as long as the person wants to work
	QUESTION: Do you have any other activities? ANSWER :No
	QUESTION :Are you doing well in this business?

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>ANSWER :Yes Yessss... I know</i></p> <p>QUESTION :How do you carry out your recruitment?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>ANSWER :I just look at the job and not the degree</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>ANSWER :We can say yes</i></p> <p>QUESTION :What does happiness mean to you?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>ANSWER :It is first of all to have peaceheart and money just comes along</i></p> <p>QUESTION :Are you able to help your loved ones with this business?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>ANSWER: Yes</i></p>
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Moreover, other entrepreneurs find that working with family contributes to the failure of the business. Indeed, to the question "You don't like working with family members?", Manager A answers, "No, because it's difficult to find an honest and reliable family member."

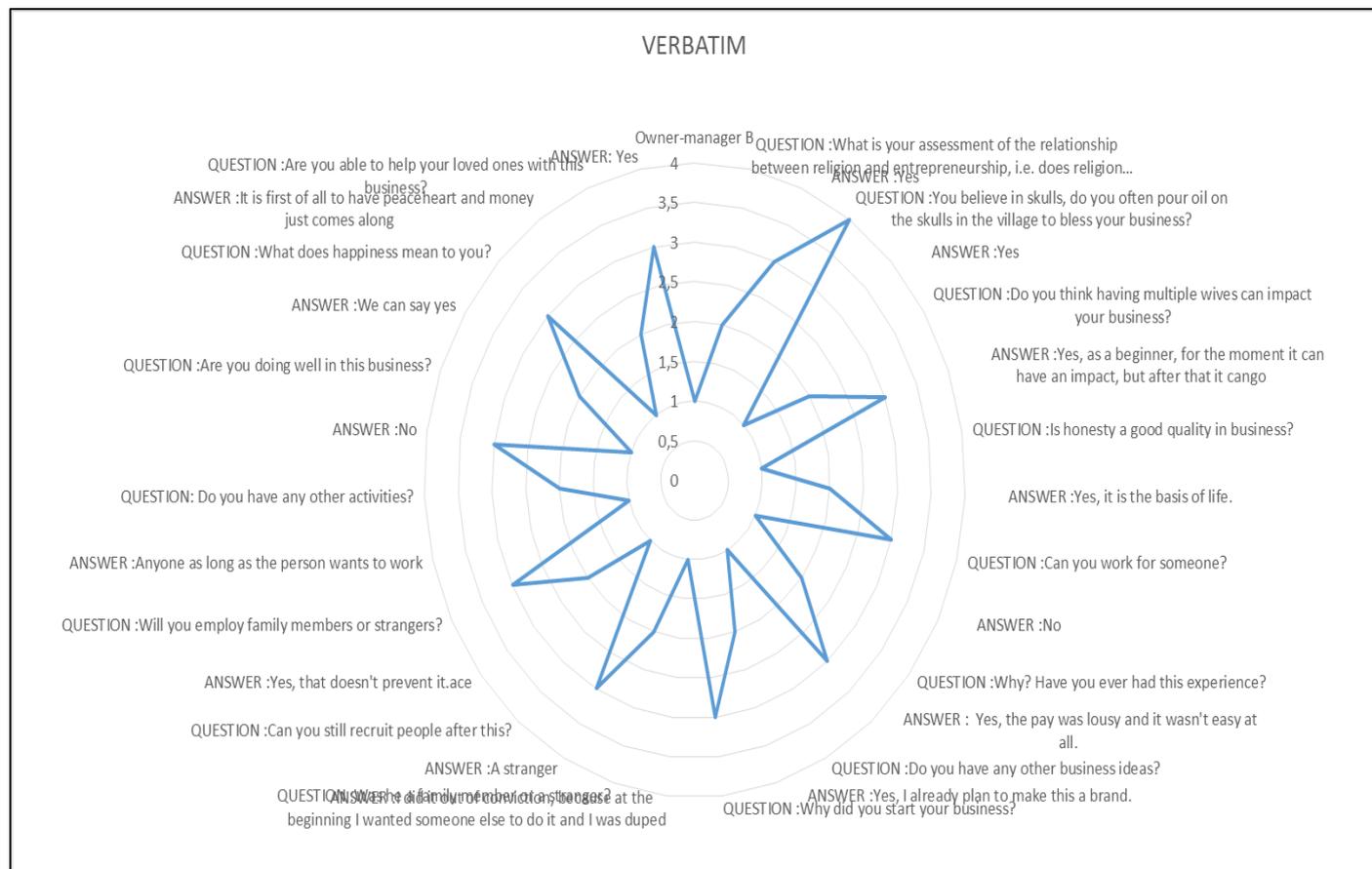
It also follows that, in the wake of micromentalities, the conception of business as a means of gaining independence is firmly anchored in the Cameroonian entrepreneurial field. Thus, to the question: Why did you create your business? One of the interviewees replied: "I liked being independent, so it's simply out of love."

Through this verbatim, micro-mentalities as dimensioned by Bouhoula (2007) are reconstructed and explored in relation to sustainability in the Cameroonian empirical field. These dimensions of micro-mentalities are: the priority values of the leader, his conceptions of work, of the company and of success.

Thus, the explorations carried out above have led us to the design of a theoretical model as follows.

B. Proposed theoretical conceptual model

The conceptual model is a schematic representation of the operating mode of each concept of the study on all the other concepts. In the following developments, we schematically show how micro-mentalities contribute to sustainability. These components will subsequently be operationalized; this will allow us to better understand their definitions and measurements. It appears that the sustainability of the VSE is determined essentially by its micro-mentalities as well as behavioral contingency variables (gender, age, level of education, etc.). These behavioral contingency variables were integrated into our model as control variables.



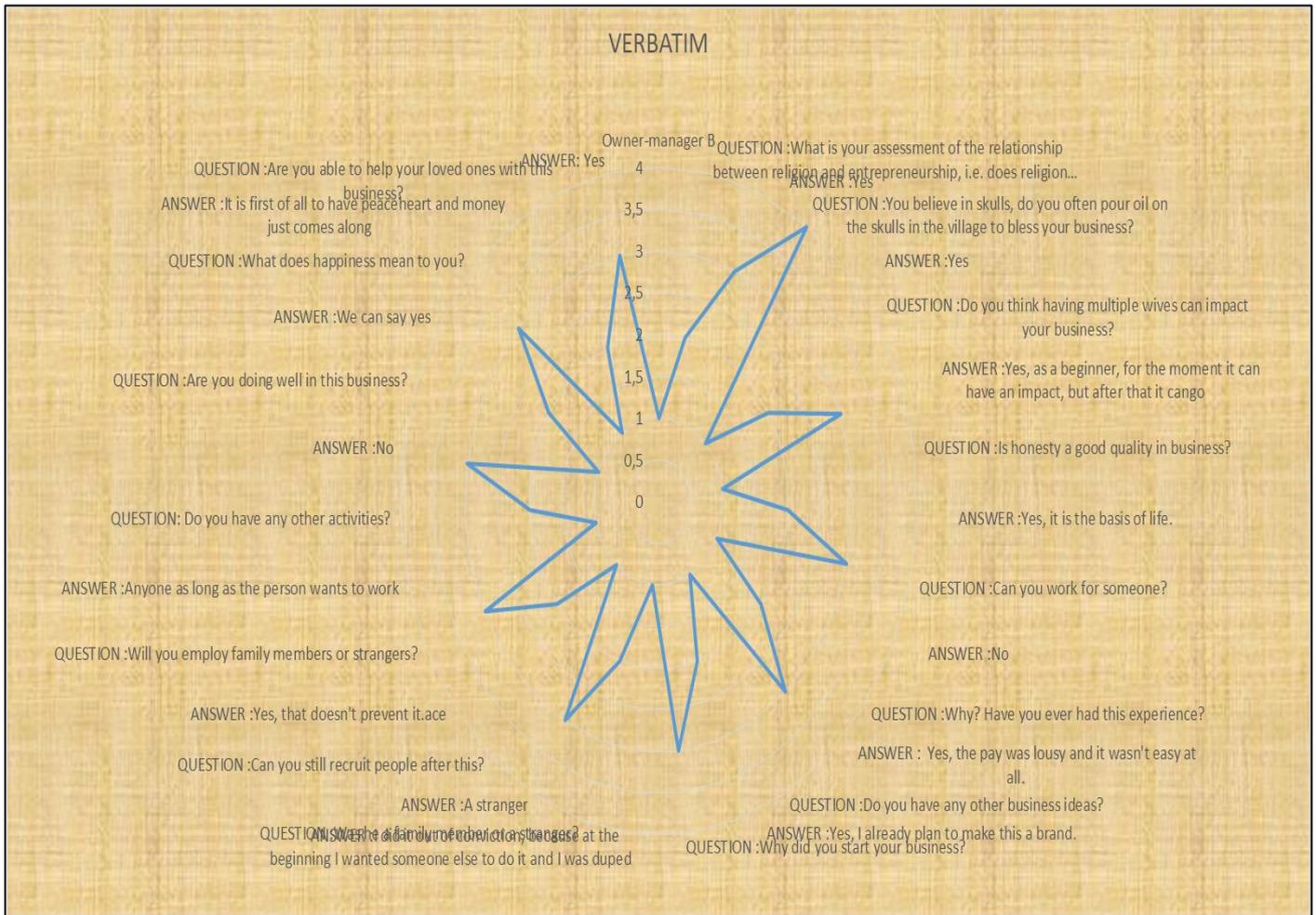


Fig 1: Contains Analysis of Micromentalities / Survival

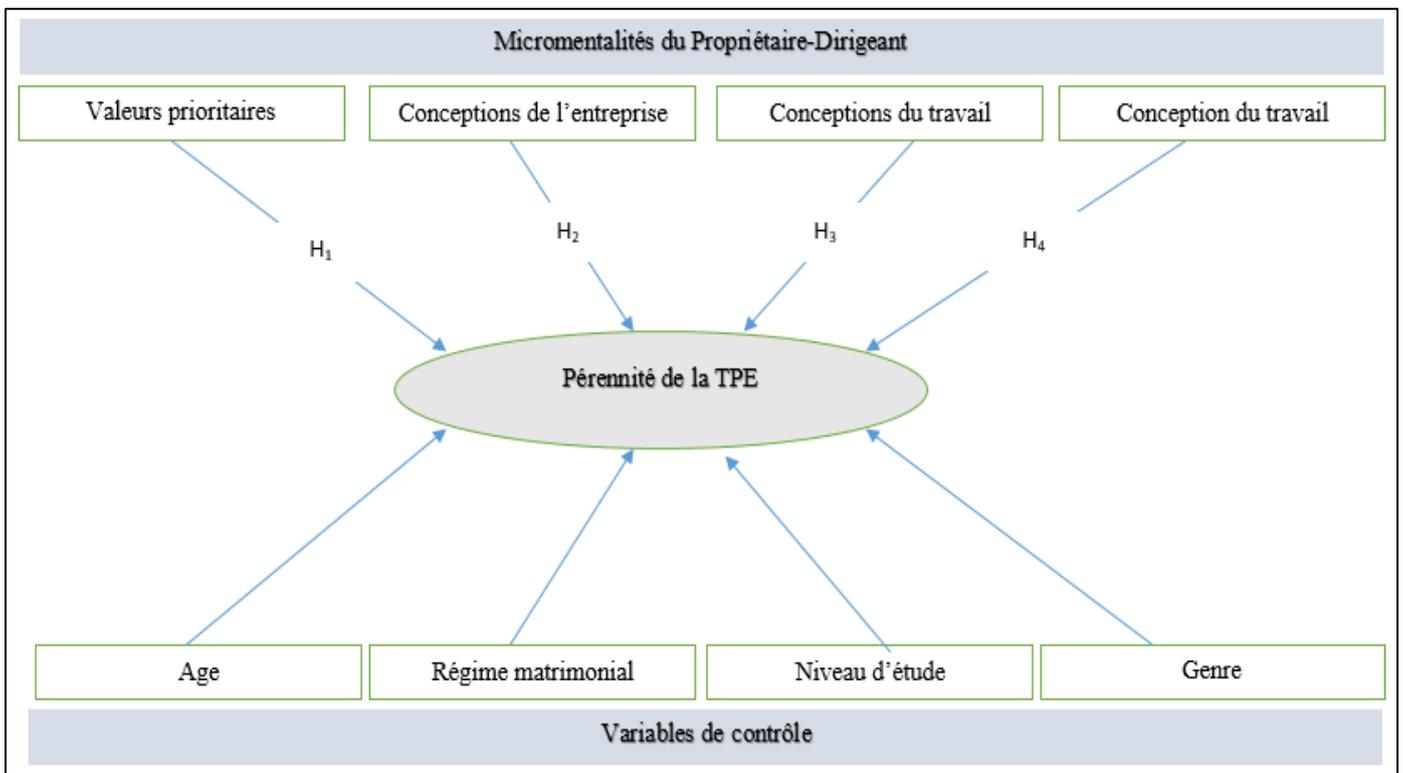


Fig 2: Conceptual Model of the Study
Source: Author

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

Our study notes the potential role played by the entrepreneur's micro-mentalities on the sustainability of their SME. Indeed, the results revealed that the owner-manager's priority values, as relayed by them, have a perspective on the survival of their entity. We also found that the owner-manager's ideas about success, work, and the business are associated with the sustainability of their SME. Although, to our knowledge, empirical work closely related to this issue is not common, we provide some theoretical insights on the question here. A reading of these results through sociocognitive theories is of paramount importance.

Indeed, In the humanities, values are among the theoretical concepts fundamental to explaining the behavior of individuals and systems social. They constitute mental representations, sometimes unconscious, and are part of the personality of the individual, whether they predispose to certain behaviors. Personality can be defined as the relatively stable characteristics of an individual (Julien and Marchesnay, 1988). Personal values are made up of the set of principles morals, cultural preferences and psychological attitudes that structure judgments of leaders (Strategor, 1991). Thus, attitude structures are organized around extremely broad goals (Newcomb, Turner, and Converse, 1970). Then, values can be considered the ultimate development of the many selection and generalization processes that give individual behaviors a constant and a long-term organization. Let us recall the definition given by Milton Rockeach (cited in Gauthey, Ratiu, Rodgers and Xardel, 1988): "To say that a person has values means that he has within him the deep belief that a specific mode of conduct is personally or socially preferable to others." Values are (normative) standards for what is considered "good", "desirable" or "preferable" and attitudes are derived values (Bamberger and Gabele, 1980) or related expressions to one or more values (Gauthey, Ratiu, Rodgers and Xardel, 1988). Empirical research on VSEs increasingly establishes more detailed the relationships existing between the leader, his personality, his profile, his style management, its vision, on the one hand, and the strategic, organizational behaviors and performance of the company, on the other hand. Bouhaouala (2007) tries to connect micro-mentalities and logics of action. Our work also finds meaning from his. He shows that according to micro-mentalities, we distinguish four types of entrepreneur with different logics of action and management. This would justify the divergence of levels of entrepreneurial performance and sustainability of Very small business.

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