**BUILDING INTERORGANIZATIONAL NETWORKS IN AN EMERGING ECONOMY: THE ROLE OF COGNITIVE LEGITIMACY**

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**ABSTRACT**

We take an organizational legitimacy perspective and use data from a large-scale nationally representative study on the state of small business in Saudi Arabia, to explore the antecedents to the formation of entrepreneurial ventures’ interorganizational networks in the context of an emerging economy (n = 316). Our major premise is that entrepreneurial ventures need to overcome a threshold of cognitive legitimacy in order to develop interorganizational ties with a diverse set of large, established firm. Results indicate that having a written business plan and a formal organizational structure are positively associated with the diversity of the new venture’s interorganizational network, while the education level of the entrepreneur does not have a significant effect. In addition, the effect of having a formal organizational structure is stronger for younger ventures. Implications are discussed.