

Empirically Investigating the Presence of Positive Accounting Research as the Meta- Theory for Accounting Academics: Further Evidence from Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: This study empirically explores the extent to which accounting academics in Saudi Arabia apply the agency theory conceptually and methodologically. All accounting academics in Saudi Arabia have been awarded decorates abroad from various institutions worldwide, making them suitable subjects to investigate whether they are dominated by positive accounting methodology to assess its global impact. Fifty respondents volunteered to take a web-based questionnaire. Almost reaching an agreement that agency theory originated in accounting conventions, sampled accounting academics concur that such a theory is an accounting theory. Controversially, while they agree with the propositions of Jensen and Meckling (1976), they are unsure that agency theory is the most suitable theory for accounting research and is undecided in deeming the view that CEOs as agents and shareholders as principals is the only correct way to build an understanding of the nature of the corporation. They are generally aware of the positive accounting methodology and are exposed to it in their doctoral studies. Not constraining accounting inquiry to phenomena that behave rationally, they nonetheless assume rationality in almost all observed behavior in accounting.

Keywords: Accounting Academics; Accounting Sociology; Saudi Arabia; Agency Theory; Doctoral Education

JEL Classification: B0; B3; M1; M15; M41

1. Introduction

Nothing is probably more important for a caring accounting academic than being conscious of the theory one subscribes to and shapes and directs one's thinking. A theoretical structure contributes to shaping one's thinking. A theory that occupies one's thinking limits the perception of who subscribes to it (Al-Adeem, 2017) and may further lead to rejecting other theoretical foundations as good as the predominant theory in explaining and predicting observed phenomena in one's discipline (Al-Adeem, 2019a). Such a rejection can occur by treating them as concerns of other disciplines or treating them as anomalies (Kuhn, 1996). All sciences have anomalies, including accounting.

The training that an academic acquires in doctoral education has a lasting impact on one's perception of perceived reality and the ability to observe and interpret observed systematic behavior (Al-Adeem, 2017). After obtaining a position in an academic institution, an accounting academic is required to publish for tenure and promotion purposes. Business schools prefer and assume that their faculty members disseminate their work in prestigious journals in their fields (Tuttle and Dillard, 2007). Top-

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tier accounting journals in the United States are controlled by a small number of accounting academics who decide what is publishable (Al-Adeem, 2019a; Fleming, Graci & Thompson, 2000; Fogarty, 2009; Fogarty, 2011; Fogarty & Liao, 2009; Fogarty & Zimmerman, 2019; Fogarty & Jonas, 2013; Heck & Jensen, 2007; Oler, Oler & Skousen, 2010; Oler, Oler, Skousen & Talakai, 2016; Lee, 1997; Lee, 1995; Lee, 2001; Manninen, 1996; Reiter, 1998; Rodgers & Williams, 1996; Tuttle & Dillard, 2007; Williams & Rodgers, 1995)[1].

An accounting academic may continue his or her career without the need to question the predominant paradigm to which he or she subscribes or inquire about its fundamentals (Al-Adeem, 2017). Knowledge and the ability to execute an investigation by employing the *so-called* scientific inquiry does not elevate accounting to *the status quo* in the scientific arena (Demski, 2007; Fellingham, 2007), nor does it immune one from being ideologically oriented toward a particular dogma (Al-Adeem, 2020; Chalmers, 2003; see also Feyerabend, 1987; 2010; 2011)[2] despite the claimed objectivity in positivism as a deemed epistemology in the arena of science at the contemporary time. Objectivity, it is claimed, has reached an edge (Gillispie, 1960) or may not exist (see Gaukroger, 2012). Truth even in science “is forever impossible” (Kerlinger, 1979: 61). A scientist may, arguably, be left with his or her perception of truth (Al-Adeem, 2017).

The agency theory has been brought from the financial economics literature to accounting (Al-Adeem, 2017; Al-Adeem & Fogarty, 2010; Cushing, 1989; Wolk et al., 2004, p. 43). Watts and Zimmerman’s positive accounting traditions rely upon the paradigm of neoclassical economics, but certainly not an accounting paradigm (Cushing, 1989, 30) and is labeled “Watts and Zimmerman’s principal/agent literature” (Dyckman & Zeff, 2015). The agency theory serves as a theoretical foundation for empirical accounting research launched in 1968 after the publication of Ball and Brown (1968) and Beaver (1986) (see Reiter, 1998) (see figure 1). Despite the criticism of the positive accounting theory (Al-Adeem, 2017b, 2019b, 2019c, 2021; Al-Adeem & Fogarty, 2010; Avelé, 2014; Belkaoui, 1996; Boland & Gordon, 1992; Chabrak, 2005; Chabrak & Burrowes, 2006; Chambers, 1993; Christenson, 1983; Hines, 1988; Kabalski, 2016; Kabir, 2010; Kaplan & Ruland, 1991; Lowe, Puxty, & Laughlin, 1983; Major, 2017; Milne, 2002; Mouck, 1989, 1990, 1992; Ndjetcheu, 2012; Okcabol & Tinker, 1990; Persson, 2016; Sinha, 2008; Srivastava & Baag, 2020; Sterling, 1990; Sy & Tinker, 2009, 2011; Tinker, 1988; Tinker, Merino, & Neimark, 1982; Tinker & Puxty, 1995; West, 2003; Whitley, 1988; Williams, 1989, 2003, 2017; Whittington, 1987), its utility in accounting research is excessive to the extent that it dominates other competing theoretical structures that can potentially explain observed systematic behavior as well, for example, the institutional theory (see Collin, Tagesson, Andersson, Cato, & Hansson, 2009). Contemporary positive accounting research is established to test the positive accounting theory (Williams, 1989).

Some accounting researchers may find optimality in following the herd instead of confronting the ideological institution imposed on the United States accounting academy (Al-Adeem, 2019a). They may have been trained to think about such an inquiry, and addressing such research questions is what accounting research is mainly about (Al-Adeem, 2017). An academic ultimately is a product of a doctoral program and how he has been led to think. Scope-narrowed doctoral programs produce accounting academics who may see the world from the perception they have been exposed to or, probably, imposed upon them. The American Accounting Association’s Doctoral Consortium (Fogarty & Jones, 2010) and advice for accounting researchers by experts in the field, e.g., Kinney (1990) and Zimmerman (1989), are to institutionalize the academy of accounting discipline (Fogarty, 2011). For example, some of this advice, Kinney’s advice, is populated and recommended by fellow researchers

(see Beyer et al., 2010). The same can be argued to occur elsewhere in other accounting academic communities worldwide, particularly when accounting graduates from doctoral programs are dominated by mainstream accounting research.

This study empirically explores the extent to which accounting academics in Saudi Arabia apply the agency theory conceptually and methodologically. All accounting academics in Saudi Arabia have been awarded degrees abroad from various institutions worldwide. Such diversity in their doctoral education makes them suitable subjects to investigate whether they are dominated by a single paradigm, as a governing theoretical structure embedded in their minds and thinking.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews related literature on the theory dominance in an academy, sheds light on the agency as a dramatic structure prevailing in the accounting academe and justifies the suitability of Saudi Arabia in studying the influence of the agency theory among accounting academics. Section 3 describes the study's research method. Section 4 presents our research findings. Section 5 discusses the results and possible implications. Section 6 concludes that the accounting academe in Saudi Arabia appears to be directed toward neither a specific accounting ideology nor a school of thought. However, the issue is that there is no apparent preference toward multiplicity in accounting research. An avenue for future research is presented in Section 6.

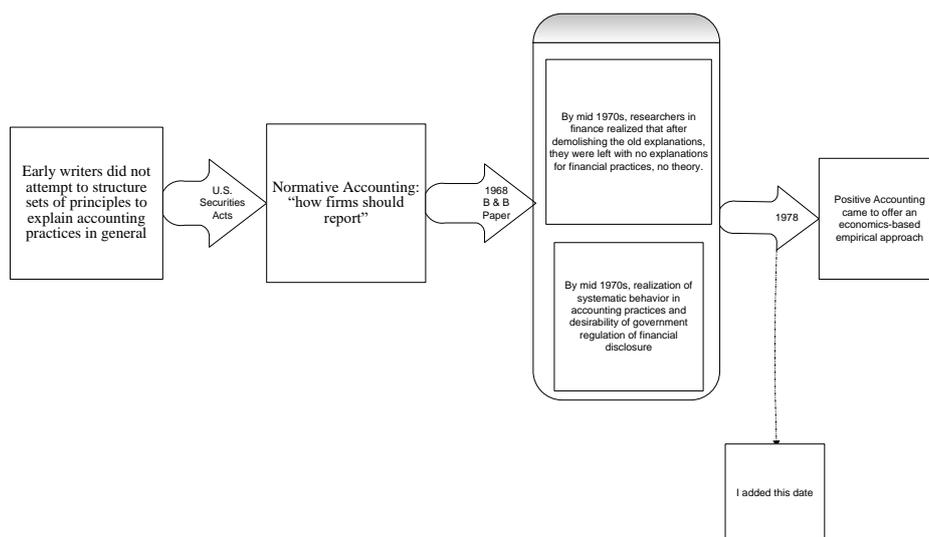


Figure 1. Timeline of Accounting Research in the U.S.A. from Introducing the So-Called Scientific Research.

Source: Watts and Zimmerman (1986, ch. 1) with the addition of the researcher to link positive accounting methodologies to the emergence of empirical accounting research

2. Literature Review

2.1. Agency Theory as a Theatrical Structure for Conceptualizing Corporation

The fact that corporations emerged as a form of conducting business calls for a need for professional managers who can capitalize on their managerial skills and talents in running giant corporations for the benefits and interests of all stakeholders, including passive owners and stockholders. The divorce between ownership and management (Berle & Means, 1932) initially brings the two main parties. First, capital suppliers, the shareholders, who may not be contemptuous, run the business to benefit all

interconnected parties that collectively make up a corporation. The law views the corporate model as a “nexus of contract” (e.g., Kornhauser, 1989; p. 2; Hoyden et. al., 2011). The second party is professional managers whom shareholders delegate to lead and direct nexus parties’ efforts for the benefit of the corporation and all parties who have interests in it. The role of executive management is to maximize the value of a corporation, but not the value of shareholders (see Stout, 2012)[3]. The extent to which the interest that executive managers are serving is aligned with that of shareholders has been addressed by various theoretical foundations, one of which is the agency theory. According to the agency theory, shareholders who are conceived principals delegate their agents, namely managers of their corporations. However, research has shown that shareholders’ interests, the so-called owners, are not always aligned with others, including executive managers (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

Greed may govern human nature, leading individuals to become economic agents maximizing their utility (Jensen & Meckling, 1994; Watts, 1977). When cooperating parties’ joint efforts are placed to achieve mutual benefits, the hazard becomes the extent to which cooperating parties are serving the interest of this “mutual aid” and not their interest at the expense of the interest of their jointness. The aspect that they presumably maximize their self-interests (Watts, 1977) makes the agency theory a suitable theoretical explanation for the behavior observed when cooperation among parties is in place. Jensen and Meckling (1976, p. 309) observe “...agency costs arise in any situation involving cooperative effort... by two or more....”

Agency-related issues and costs are neither newly developed concepts nor associated with corporations. Agency as a concept was rediscovered with the emergence of corporations (Fogarty et al., 2009). Venture and partnerships that existed before the emergence of the corporation in Italy back then were managed on an agency base (Baskin & Maranti, 1997). The agency theory is a universal theoretical structure that suits and contributes conceptually to understanding the behavior of conjoining individuals’ efforts to collectively carry responsibilities toward a predetermined end.

The writings of Watts and Zimmerman (1978, 1979, 1986, 1990) demonstrate their understanding of the political environment within which accounting operates mainly in the U.S.A. and probably in other markets where similar regulatory mechanisms exist. The importance of standard settings and their impact on public accounting is a promising perspective that enriches accounting research when founded on a suitable theorization. With the utility of the agency theory, nexus interactions among managers, regulators, shareholders, creditors, and external auditors can be conceptualized (Watts & Zimmerman, 1983, 1986).

The wide application and per chance of the overuse of positive accounting traditions by contemporary accounting researchers can be attributed to meeting the *make-believe* needs of society. The organization of positive research for accounting encompasses the audit function (Watts & Zimmerman, 1982, 1983) and justifies auditor independence on a market-based rationale (Watts & Zimmerman, 1981). A positive accounting enterprise aims at explaining and predicting behavioral-oriented phenomena in an attempt to mitigate agency issues. Some applied mitigating strategies include internal auditing, board of directors’ compensations, performance evaluation systems, and incentive-based schemes (Subramaniam, 2006). The board of directors may not be an effective mechanism in Saudi Arabia (Al-Adeem & Al-Sogair, 2019). From the standpoint of agency, governing corporations ought to start afresh (Al-Shabeeb & Al-Adeem, 2019).

Watts and Zimmerman were well-heeled for conceivably identifying the needs of American society and, more specifically, the American economy. The main characteristic of the United States economy is the separation between ownership and management, where passive investors are a recognized segment of society. Davis (1897, 282) asserts that “[t]he prevalence of corporations is... characteristic of a state of society... [where] individual[s] and not state initiative is relied on, and... individual responsibilit[ies] ...[are] expected to serve as a steadying force.” In such a society, the role of public accountants is to tell investors (owners) how the management’s choice affects accounting numbers among accounting producers. That is, conveying whether accounting numbers in financial statements represent investors’ wealth and what happens to their wealth becomes a corporate reporting function (Harris, 2016; Ittonen, 2010; Jamal & Sunder, 2011; O’Connor, 2002; Ronen, 2010). A proper role of accounting should consider the behavior of managers and try to measure the impact of their decisions on the products of corporations. Managers have the power to make decisions and choose among alternatives, one of which is accounting procedures (Watts & Zimmerman, 1979).

Watts and Zimmerman have constructed their argument on the agency model where conflicting interests exist. Thus, the existence and accuracy of positive accounting research rely on the trustworthiness of such a model (Al-Adeem, 2021). Suppose competing models for the firm other than the agency theory, for example, Mudarabah (Amer & Sajjad, 2014), prevail. In that case, accounting may have to undertake a new role, and therefore positivist accounting researchers who view the firm from an agency perspective might have to learn new skills and master other research methods. Since knowledge and expertise are among the primary investments required by a researcher to survive the struggle for research productivity (Bricker, 1987, pp. 37–44), researchers are expected to resist changes when a research paradigm shifts (Kuhn, 1996).

2.2. Dominance of Agency Theory Possibly through Imposition

Theories are not accepted merely because of their utility in explaining observed systematic behavior and predicting phenomena, as it may be thought. Chamler (2003, p. xxii) asserts, “choices between scientific theories boil [*sic*] down to choices determined by the subjective values and wishes of individuals.” In accounting, an established isomorphism exists in United States accounting research (Tuttle and Dillard, 2007). The agency theory is the predominant theory in the empirical financial paradigm, the mainstream academic accounting research that may have been dogmatically imposed (Al-Adeem, 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Al-Adeem & Fogarty, 2010).

The importers and promoters of the agency theory in accounting, Watts and Zimmerman (1986, 12), decide, “competing theories arise because theories are imperfect and cannot be proven to be correct.” Conjecturing that their economics-based research style may be profoundly faulty, Watts and Zimmerman (1990) agree that the evaluation research approach is a no-account conquering state of affairs. Notwithstanding, Watts and Zimmerman designate themselves as victors (Mouck, 1991) by utilizing the contemporary accounting academics’ norm of applying positive accounting traditions as preeminent over other theoretical foundations available for accounting academics (Watts & Zimmerman, 1990, as cited in Tinker & Puxty, 1995).

However, some accounting academics have opposed this claim. In their critiques, they argue that positive accounting research is a shame (Tinker & Puxty, 1995), is limited based on equilibrium economic analysis (Boland & Gordon, 1992), suffers from gaps (Kabir, 2010), and is developed in isolation from previously proposed theorized models (Sinha, 2008) with no logical or philosophical

foundation (Williams, 1989). Hence, it may not be fully developed (Srivastava & Baag, 2020) and is best classified as a “cottage industry” resting outside the domain of accounting thought (Sterling, 1990). Assessing the language in which positive accounting traditions are addressed toward their audience, Chabrak and Burrowes (2006) conclude that signifies ideological dimensions.

Accounting researchers educated under the contemporary positive accounting paradigm may not be true advocates (Rieter, 1998). They may have been *normalized* to accept as accurate that agency theorization is the only possible or suitable viewpoint when intellectualizing accounting phenomena observed in accounting, mainly systematic behavior detected in financial accounting and auditing research (Al-Adeem, 2017). Controlling editorial board of top tier accounting journals is a means to force a particular dogma upon researchers (Al-Adeem, 2019a; Brinn & Jones, 2008; Fogarty & Jonas, 2013; Fogarty & Liao, 2009; Fogarty & Zimmerman, 2019; Lee, 1997, 2001; Williams, 1985; Lee & Williams, 1999; Rodgers & Williams, 1996; Williams & Rodgers, 1995). Positive accounting research dominates prominent accounting journals at the expense of others (Jeanjean & Ramirez, 2009). Dyckman and Zeff (2015, p. 515) observe:

“Beginning, it seems, in the 1970s, standards for achieving tenure at U.S. universities were stiffened, and it was not long before the leading business schools—in an inexorable trend that has spread throughout North America and now overseas— places inordinate emphasis on publishing empirical and analytical research mostly in a small set of favoured journals. If a newly minted PhD graduate cannot satisfy the tenure requirement within, say, seven or eight years, the young person must move to a tenure track at another university, take a non-tenured position, or leave academe entirely. This pressure on young and aspiring researchers has apparently induced many to engage in ‘turn-key’ research, involving exploiting an accessible and typically large database for whatever hypotheses might be generated in advance or by initially snooping the available data set prior to formulating the primary issues to be addressed.”

In the era of the post to the shift in contemporary accounting research to the empirical financial paradigm (Al-Adeem, 2019a; Al-Adeem & Fogarty, 2010), important courses have been dropped from accounting doctoral curricula (Al-Adeem, 2017; Committee, 2016; Dyckman & Zeff, 2015; Gaffikin, 1988; Heck & Jensen, 2007; Tinker & Puxty, 1995; Zeff, 1989). Most contemporary accounting academics are uninformed of the accounting literature written before the 1960s (Granof & Zeff, 2008). Accounting researchers in some doctoral programs may have been put on a normal footing during their doctoral studies (Al-Adeem, 2017; Committee, 2016; Rieter, 1998).

2.3. Suitableness of Saudi Arabia Accounting Academe in Assessing the Influence of the Agency Theory

As a product of the doctoral program from which they graduated, academics, including accounting, are constrained by exposure, abilities, skills, and talents trained to do and think to perceive the reality in the universe (Al-Adeem, 2017; see also Kuhn, 1996). A vital role of doctoral education is to shape minds and thinking (Al-Adeem, 2017). After earning their doctorates, some of those who returned home from abroad founded doctoral programs in their institutions that were duplicated to those from which they graduated (Chau, 1996, as cited in Reiter & Williams, 2002, p. 576).

The government of Saudi Arabia has always encouraged its citizens to further their education and become elevated to higher degrees. Generous scholarship programs established by the government soon after the country's unification never stopped, even during tough economic times and recessions.

In 1927, the first Saudis were sponsored by the government and sent abroad to study (Almoussa, 2009). Another one to Egypt of 14 further followed this small mission of nine people in 1929[4] (see figure 2). Some of them, Abdullah AlDeraaigi, undertook leading positions in the government that strengthened the nation and modernized it. Abdullah AlDeraaigi [5] was sent later to the U.S. to become the first Saudi student who landed on U.S. soil sponsored by the Saudi government. He served as a petroleum and mineral resource in the government cabinet and became the first Saudi leader. Cultural missions sponsored by the Saudi government lasted to date with significant expansion in the field of studies in various countries [6].

Education in business and accounting, including doctoral studies offered in the United States' prestigious universities and institutions, has always been the field of study Saudis have enrolled in. Doctoral education in business offered in Saudi Arabia is relatively new. Only four public universities offer doctoral degrees in accounting majors. King Saud University was the first to launch a Ph.D. program in business in 2010 with help from Toledo University in the United States of America. Courses are offered in English following the rigorous American style with a course menu, a comprehensive examination with two components: oral and written, a proposal defense, and a dissertation defense. The first graduate who was awarded a Ph.D. was a marketing major in 2015. The first accounting cohort was admitted to the doctoral program at King Saud University in the fall of 2020.

Accounting departments at King Abdulaziz, King Khalid, and Umm Al-Qura universities established doctoral programs. Arabic is a means of delivering and communicating in such programs. None of them had produced a graduate. To date, no single doctorate in accounting has been awarded by a Saudi university. All those who held doctorates in accounting were awarded from universities abroad. Therefore, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are a suitable population to assess the extent to which the influence of the agency theory is present and whether accounting academics are aware of it. They have been educated in various accounting departments where positive accounting traditions may exist or dominate other theoretical structures in accounting academies where they study and earn their doctorates. Studies have observed the influence of positive accounting traditions in the Jordanian accounting literature (Alkhdash, 2006), Saudi accounting literature (Almotairi & Mitwali, 2002; Jazar, 2019), and the Iraqi accounting literature (Alshamam & Abdula Alhafez, 2020). Accounting researchers in the Arab region are aware of the different approaches in accounting research (e.g., Almotairi, 1997; Alameen, 1997). In Africa, accounting academics stimulate, assess, and pore over the positive accounting approach (Alameen, 1997; Ibraheem, 2002, 2008; Hassan, 2014; Saraj, 1989; Yousof, 2006), relate and contrast it with other research traditions (Othamn, 2000). This study adds to the accounting literature by addressing the following proposition:

Proposition: The extent to which accounting researchers in Saudi Arabia know the theoretical structure relied upon in empirical studies.



Figure 2. Saudi Students were wearing Egyptian costumes when they were sent to Egypt in one of the early missions. Abdullah AlDeraaigi, first in the upper fourth row at the right, was the first Saudi who landed in the U.S. to further his education. According to the Alriyadh Newspaper, the Saudi Government sent this cultural mission in 1929 (1348 H).

Source: <https://www.alriyadh.com/1036160> last visit 2/24/2021

3. Research Method

A web-based questionnaire was developed to collect data needed to address the research question underlying this study. The survey consists of two parts. The first part includes 32 items that explore whether an accounting academic in Saudi Arabia is considered a believer in the agency theory, is quantitatively oriented in research methods or others, has a tendency to accept manuscripts only to review empirical studies that employ multivariate analysis, and finally has an attitude toward particular research traditions (quantitative or others). These four dimensions are explored to examine whether positive accounting research forms a meta-theory for accounting academics in Saudi Arabia.

A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the variability in opinions among the sampled accounting academics. Following Alamry (2011, p. 17), Al-Shabeeb and Al-Adeem (2019: 68), and Al-Khonain and Al-Adeem (2020, p. 112), among others, the means of items scaled at a 5-point weighbridge are analyzed using the following formula: Class width = (the maximum value - the minimum value)/the number of scale points. Accordingly, a class width of 0.80 is obtained. Table (1) presents the class intervals.

Table 1. Weighted Values of the Point Scales and Class Intervals

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Do not know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Values of the scale points	5	4	3	2	1
Class intervals	4.21–5	3.41–4.20	2.61–3.40	1.81–2.60	1–1.80

The second part of the questionnaire includes a list of questions about the subjects' demographics and items inquiring about the subjects' experience in reviewing manuscripts for peer-reviewed journals and backgrounds about their education.

The research instrument has been evaluated by accounting academics working in different institutions in Saudi Arabia. The evaluation was performed in two rounds. The instrument was sent to five accounting academics with different academic ranks in different academic institutions nationwide in Saudi Arabia in the first round. One of the evaluators held a meeting with the researcher to go over the comments thoroughly, inquire further information about some items, and discuss the objective of this study. Comments supplied to the researcher have been addressed, and accordingly, all the survey items have been revised. Three accounting academics, who had not previously evaluated the revised questionnaire, reviewed and provided neither material comments nor concerns in employing the research instrument to collect data needed to address the research question. A polite study was also conducted to confirm the usability of the survey. Fourteen accounting graduate students with sufficient knowledge of accounting research and who English is their second tongue participated in the pilot study. No issues that may prevent intended subjects from sharing their views and opinions have been reported. The questionnaire was then distributed to accounting academics in Saudi Arabia using the mailing list of accounting academics in Saudi Arabia provided by the Saudi Organization for Accounting and Auditing (previously known as the Saudi Organization for Certified Public Accountants (SOCPA)). Additionally, the researcher gathered email addresses from accounting departments' websites manually in all universities and colleges in Saudi Arabia to ensure that they all had a chance to participate. The researcher also distributed it through Whatsapp messages to encourage participation.

4. Research Findings

Fifty-four respondents volunteered to participate in the survey. Four subjects who participated in the survey were neither Saudis nor employed in Saudi Arabia. Since the study is focused on the accounting academe in Saudi Arabia, those subjects were excluded from the analysis, leaving the sample 50, 54% of whom are Saudis.

4.1. The Demographic of the Sampled Accounting Academics

The accounting academics included in the study represent a diverse time-span and schools. They graduated between 1969 and 2021. Slightly more than half of them graduated from the U.K. and Austrian universities, as Table (2) presents. Fifty different institutions, universities, and colleges in 12 different countries worldwide awarded the sampled accounting academics their doctorates (see Appendix 1 for a list of universities).

Table 2. Countries Where the Sampled Accounting Academics Were Awarded Their Doctorates

Country	The number of accounting academics included in the sample.
U.S.A.	3
U.K.	18
A.U.	8
Egypt	9
Malaysia	2
China	1
Sudan	1
Tunisia	2
Soviet Union (SU)	1
Jordan	1
India	3
Algeria	1
N	50

They have been trained in diverse research traditions and methodologies. Specifically, while 52% identified the research method used in his dissertation as quantitative, 32% and 16% of them revealed that they have employed mixed methods and qualitative research methodologies, respectively, in their dissertations. They show respect to both types of research with a positive attitude toward different research methodologies (quantitative and others). As Table (3) presents, on average, accounting academics express relatively high opinions toward both research methodologies, quantitative and qualitative, 3.84 and 4.14, respectively.

Table 3. Attitude of Accounting Academic toward Different Research Methodologies (Quantitative or Others)

Statement:	Mini	Max	Mean	SD
Qualitative accounting studies are respected in accounting research.	2	5	3.84	0.912
Quantitative accounting studies are respected in accounting research.	2	5	4.14	0.7

Moreover, 86% of accounting academics have serviced various administrative positions such as Deans, Vice-Deans, Chairpersons, and others. Currently, 50% of the sampled accounting academics assume the Dean, Vice-Dean, and Chairpersons positions in their universities. Seventy-four percent of the sampled accounting academics are aged between 35 and 55 years. Table 4 presents the age distribution of the accounting academics included in the sample. They are also diverse in academic ranks, as Table 5 presents. Forty-eight percent of the sample was promoted during their academic careers. They are relatively active researchers. On average, they publish 2.54 articles per year. Their research productivity ranges between 1 and 10[7] articles per year. Sixty-two percent of them affirm that they have contributed at the theoretical level to the accounting literature, as Table 6 presents.

Table 4. Age Distribution of the Sampled Accounting Academics

Less than 30 years	1
More than 30 years but less than 35 years	3
More than 35 years but less than 40 years	10
More than 40 years but less than 45 years	13
More than 45 years but less than 50 years	6
More than 50 years but less than 55 years	8
More than 55 years but less than 60 years	4
More than 60 years	5
N	50

Table 5 Academic Ranks of Sampled Accounting Academics (N=50)

	Number	%
Assistant Professor	26	52%
Associate Professor	13	26%
Professor	11	22%

Table 6. Sampled Accounting Academics' Theoretical Contributions to the Accounting Research

	Number of accounting academics	%
Yes (I have contributed)	31	62.0
No (I have not contributed)	6	12.0
I am not sure	13	26.0
N	50	100.0

Table (7) presents that the sampled accounting academics have obtained experiences reviewing manuscripts for journals and files for promotions for universities. Fifty-four percent of them indicate that they accept to review for journals and files for promotions only when research is in the area of financial accounting.

Table 7 Sampled Accounting Academics' Activities in Reviewing (N=50)

	Yes	No
I worked as a reviewer for scholarly journals	34 68%	16 32%
I have reviewed files of accounting academics for promotion purposes.	28 56%	22 44%
I accept to review files of other academics for promotion purposes only when their research is in the area of financial accounting.	27 54%	23 46%

4.2. Whether an Accounting Academic Considers Him or Herself A Believer in the Positive Accounting Theory (PAT)

As Table (8) presents, sampled accounting academics are familiar with the works of Watts and Zimmerman and have read such works in their doctoral programs. However, they are neutral whether they have mainly cited research articles based on the positive accounting theory (PAT) while in their doctoral programs. They are also undecided to agree with Watts and Zimmerman's view of how accounting research should be based.

Table 8. Considering Oneself A Believer in Positive Accounting Theory (PAT) (N=50)

Statement	Mini	Max	Mean	SD
I am familiar with the works of Watts and Zimmerman, for example Watts, R. L., and Zimmerman, J. L. (1986). <i>Positive Accounting Theory</i> . New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.	2	5	3.82	0.825
I have read in my doctoral program papers and books that Watts and Zimmerman have authored, for example Watts, R. L., and Zimmerman, J. L. (1986). <i>Positive Accounting Theory</i> . New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.	2	5	3.84	0.792
I have mainly cited research articles based on the positive accounting theory (PAT) in my doctoral program.	1	5	3.26	1.226
I totally agree with Watts and Zimmerman in their view of how accounting research should be based.	1	5	3.12	1.003
Grand Mean	3.51			

4.3. Whether an Accounting Academic Considers him or herself a believer in Agency Theory

Table (9) presents that sampled accounting academics agree with the premises of Jensen and Meckling (1976). Almost reaching an agreement that such a theory originated in accounting conventions, sampled accounting academics concur that the agency theory is an accounting theory. They are unsure that the agency theory is the most suitable theory for accounting research and is undecided in deeming that CEOs as agents and shareholders as principals is the only correct way to build an understanding of the nature of a corporation. They disagree that top-tier accounting journals should only consider accounting research carried out using agency theory as the meta-theory and that accounting researchers should mainly rely on the agency theory if they want their submissions to be considered by journal reviewers.

Table 9. Whether An Accounting Academic Considers him/herself a believer in Agency Theory (N=50)

Statement	Mini	Max	Mea n	SD
The agency theory is an accounting theory.	1	5	3.88	1.154
The agency theory was initially originated in accounting conventions.	1	5	3.4	1.178
The agency theory is the most suitable theory for accounting research.	1	5	3.14	1.195
Viewing CEOs as agents and shareholders as principals is the only correct way to build an understanding of the nature of a corporation.	1	5	2.86	1.107
I agree with the premises of Jensen and Meckling (1976) in their paper: Jensen, M. C., and Meckling, W. H. (1976). Theory of the firm: Managerial behavior, agency costs, and ownership structure. Journal of financial economics, 3(4), 305-360.	2	5	3.52	0.886
Top-tier accounting journals should only consider accounting research carried out utilizing agency theory.	1	5	2.42	1.263
Although other theories can be considered, accounting researchers should mainly rely on agency theory if they want their submissions to be considered by journal reviewers.	1	5	2.48	1.182
Grand Mean	3.1			

4.4. Whether Rational Dictates Perceptions Toward Observed Behavior in Accounting

Table (10) demonstrates that while sampled accounting academics agree that almost all behaviors observed in accounting (e.g., identified by accounting researchers as phenomena in their research) are relatively rational, they are nonaligned that only rational behavior is deemed a phenomenon worthy of investigation in accounting research.

Table 10. Whether Rational Dictates Perceptions toward Observed Behavior in Accounting (N=50)

Statement	Min i	Max	Mea n	SD
Almost all behavior observed in accounting (e.g., identified by accounting researchers as phenomena in their research) is relatively rational.	1	5	3.52	1.092
Only rational behavior is deemed a phenomenon that is worthy of investigation in accounting research.	1	5	3.32	1.236
Grand Mean	3.42			

4.5. Tendency of an Accounting Academic to Accept only Empirical Research that Employs Multivariate Analysis as an Example of Quantitative Research Method

Table (11) details the tendency of accounting academics in Saudi Arabia to accept only empirical studies that employ multivariate analysis. The sampled accounting academics perceive empirical research as neither the only type of research that should be done in accounting nor the only type of research that benefits accounting practice. Equally, they disagree that all articles and studies executed without data contribute nothing to the body of accounting knowledge. However, they appear neutral toward appreciating and comprehending accounting research executed using methods other than multivariate modeling and analysis. Similarly, they seem not to have opinions on whether all accounting researchers must use multivariate modeling and analysis and whether not using quantitative research methods in accounting threatens the *status quo* of accounting as a scientific discipline. They even seem nonaligned about accepting to review for journals only manuscripts where multivariate modeling and analysis are employed. They do not form a belief whether an accounting study or article without data should not be attempted and published. They express no opinions about why some accounting academics write articles and studies without data and publish them. Finally, they are middle-of-the-road whether all articles and studies executed without data are theoretical and whether such studies contribute little to the accounting literature.

Table 11. Tendency of an Accounting Academic to Accept only Empirical Research that Employs Multivariate Analysis (N=50)

Statement	Mini	Ma x	Mean	SD
I have had difficulties appreciating accounting research executed using methods other than multivariate modeling and analysis, for example, multiple regression.	1	5	2.92	1.226
I have had difficulties comprehending accounting research executed using methods other than multivariate modeling and analysis, for example, multiple regression.	1	5	2.94	1.236
All researchers in accounting must use multivariate modeling and analysis, for example, multiple regression.	1	5	2.72	1.246
Not using quantitative research methods in accounting threatens the <i>status quo</i> of accounting as a scientific discipline.	1	5	2.76	1.188
I accept to review for journals only manuscripts in which multivariate modeling and analysis, for example, multiple regression, is employed.	1	5	2.84	1.218
I am a firm believer that a study or an article in accounting without data should not be attempted.	1	5	3.04	1.442
I am a firm believer that a study or an article in accounting without data should not be published.	1	5	2.82	1.41
Empirical research is the only type of research that should be done in accounting.	1	5	2.4	1.161
Empirical research is the only type of research that benefits accounting practice.	1	5	2.44	1.198
I do not understand why some accounting academics write articles and studies without data and try to publish them.	1	5	2.66	1.189

All articles and studies that are executed without data are theoretical.	1	5	3.28	1.10 7
All articles and papers that are executed without data contribute little to the accounting literature.	1	5	2.74	1.22 6
All articles and papers that are executed without data contribute nothing to our knowledge.	1	5	2.32	1.22
Grand Mean	2.76			

5. Discussion

While accounting academics should be firm that the agency theory is not an accounting theory and ought to know that the agency theory was originated in financial economics traditions, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia believe the opposite. Such a finding is a concern in that accounting academics in Saudi Arabia may not differentiate between accounting theories and imported theories from other disciplines utilized to guide and interpret empirical accounting research. Acknowledging that theory-importation from other disciplines threatens accounting autonomy (Jeanjean & Ramirez, 2009), weaken the distinctiveness of accounting (e.g., Mattessich, 1972), and contributes to questioning the *status quo* of accounting as a discipline (see Demski, 2007; Fellingham, 2007), the belief that such imported theories to the accounting disciplines are accounting theories signifies the embeddedness and grounds of such a theory in the minds of Saudi accounting academics to believe so and not differentiating it from accounting theories. However, such a belief does not force them not to be neutral about the tendency of top-tier accounting journals to consider only accounting research utilizing the agency theory and nonaligned toward accounting researchers in relying mainly on an agency in their submissions to accounting journals. Nevertheless, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are positioning themselves in a state of neutrality to affairs related to the publishing market of accounting research. It is conjectured that an accounting academic who firmly believes in multiplicity in research methods and methodologies would disagree that an accounting study without data should not be published or even attempted. In the same vein, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are not taking sides toward narrowing the scope of research in empirical inquiry and are neutral whether it is the only type of research benefiting accounting practice. They are not even sure that studies executed without data would contribute to our knowledge and the accounting literature and are uncertain that they understand why some accounting academics write articles and studies without data and try to publish them.

Controversially, while accounting academics in Saudi Arabia agree with the propositions of Jensen and Meckling (1976), they are unsure that agency theory is the most suitable theory for accounting research and are undecided in deeming the view that CEOs as agents and shareholders as principals is the only correct way to build an understanding of the nature of the corporation.

Furthermore, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are generally aware of positive accounting methodologies and are exposed to work related to it in their doctoral studies. While not constraining accounting inquiry to a phenomenon that behave rationally, they assume rationality in almost all observed behaviors in accounting. Such a finding could signify diversity and multiplicity in the way that accounting academics were trained. Accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are trained in various research methodologies, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-research-methods designs, may disagree that all articles and papers executed without data contribute nothing to the body of accounting knowledge. Such a fact may also contribute to their disagreement that top-tier accounting journals

should only consider accounting research utilizing the agency theory for publication, and accounting researchers should mainly rely on the agency theory if they want their submissions to be considered by journal reviewers.

Since positive accounting methodology cannot become global (Kabir, 2010), the accounting academe in Saudi Arabia is in a suitable environment for accounting academics who are diverse in their perceptions about research methods and methodologies [8]. Arguably, avenues for accounting researchers interested in publishing are vulnerable to employing qualitative methods, models, and other theoretical structures in their study. For example, institutional theory can be utilized as a meta-theory for conceptualizing accounting phenomena, assuming irrational devising behaviors.

Seemingly, accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are open-minded to review manuscripts submitted for journals without restricting the research method to multivariate design employed in such manuscripts. Nonetheless, this apparent openness is accompanied by neutrality about appreciating and comprehending accounting research executed using methods other than multivariate modeling and analysis. From the perspective of accounting academics in Saudi Arabia, whether all researchers in accounting must use multivariate design and whether not using such models threatens the *status quo* of accounting as a scientific discipline is uncertain.

6. Conclusions and Future Research

Accounting research is experiencing defective clutches that limit innovative awareness and forms of knowledge (Hopwood, 2007). Without a doubt, restraining theoretical grounds precludes accounting research from evolving from other fields of knowledge (Al-Adeem, 2017, 2019a; Al-Adeem & Fogarty, 2010). Whereas Watts and Zimmerman's positive accounting methodology dominates and colonizes doctoral programs in accounting in the United States of America with its values (Whitley, 1988: 643; see also Al-Adeem, 2017), accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are aware of but do not seem occupied by it. Given the way the academic profession system operates in the U.S.A., probably promoters of the positive accounting methodology are successful even though it is earnestly flawed (e.g., Christenson, 1983; Demski, 1988; Gaffikin, 1988; Hines, 1988; Mouck, 1989; Sterling, 1990; Tinker, 1988; Tinker, Merino, & Neimark, 1982; Whitley, 1988; Whittington, 1987) and rests on theories of the scientific method that are incoherent and not fitting to accounting research (Whitley, 1988, p. 643). The founders and advocates of positive accounting methodology in accounting research acknowledge that "...economics-based research methodology may be fundamentally flawed in ways we do not now understand" (Watts & Zimmerman, 1990, p. 147).

The prevalence of positive accounting methodology does not emerge as an issue in the accounting academy of Saudi Arabia. Graduates from diverse schools worldwide coexist in the Saudi accounting academe. Additionally, the generous scholarship program that the government of Saudi Arabia launched, which goes back to the time when Saudi Arabia was newly established and being built and developed, has been designed virtually with a broad and diverse scope. The experience of the accounting academe that appears directed toward neither a particular accounting ideology nor a school of thought is evident of such broadness. Additionally, accounting academics whose nationality and who are part of the accounting academy in Saudi Arabia do not seem dogmatized toward specific accounting research methodologies.

However, the issue with accounting academics in Saudi Arabia is that there is no determined preference for multiplicity in accounting research. Whether accounting academics in Saudi Arabia are willing to promote diversity in accounting research and methodologies is not supported.

Furthermore, they do not seem to entirely comprehend the underlying assumptions of positive accounting methodology, although they have been exposed to it during their doctoral studies. For example, while accounting academics in Saudi Arabia agree with the propositions of Jensen and Meckling (1976), they are unsure that the agency theory is the most suitable theory for accounting research and are undecided in deeming the view that CEO.s as agents and shareholders as principals is the only correct way to build an understanding of the nature of the corporation. While not constraining accounting inquiry to phenomena that behave rationally, they assume rationality in almost all observed behavior in accounting. They are unaware of the origins of the agency theory. Instead, they believe that it is an accounting theory. Accounting is a discipline that has not yet developed a theory to guide empirical accounting research. Members of an academia should be aware of the abstract structure representing the meta in their discipline and not deem such a conceptual construction as a theory of their discipline if it does not correspond to reality as perceived or should be perceived in their discipline. Awareness of the meta-theory dominating one's perception contributes to the way that one perceives reality.

This study is descriptive. "Descriptive investigations are the beginning of quantitative studies" whose primary objective is to "allow describing, characterizing the phenomenon [,] or facts to be studied" (Ochoa-Pachas, 2021, p. 2). This study empirically describes a phenomenon concerned with the meta-theory-occupied accounting academe in Saudi Arabia. Future studies on topics such as the sociology of accounting academe and the development of accounting thought in Saudi Arabia can further consider causes for what this study reveals, such as no apparent inclination toward diversity in accounting research.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to Obaid AlMotairy, PhD, Professor of Accounting and Dean, Sulaiman Alrajhi School of Business; Murya Habbash, PhD, Professor of Accounting and director of accounting doctoral program at King Khalid University; Abdulaziz M. Alwathnani, PhD, Associate Professor of Accounting, Dean of College of Business Administration, and Acting Dean of Graduate Studies and Research; Mohammed Al-Bader, DBA Director General of Consultation, Institute of Public Administration; and Faisal Alharbi, PhD, Hail University for evaluating the research instrument and for their time and comments that truly helped improve and revise the survey that is used for data collection. I also thank Maysa Basoudan, PhD and Head of the accounting department at Taiba University; Nawal Abdullah Alebraheem, PhD, at King Saud University; and Hanan Almarhabi, PhD at King Saud University for evaluating the improved and modified version of the questionnaire and for their comments. Additionally, I thank participants in the pilot study for their time to ensure the usability of the research instrument. Amira Alomran needs not to escape the list of acknowledgments for her administrative help in the data collection phase of the study. Her patience and professionalism are exceptional. All remaining errors mine.

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Appendix 1

The Names of the Schools from which Sampled Accountign Academics Earned Their Doctorates

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
Ain shams university	1	2.0	2.0	4.0
Al-azher	1	2.0	2.0	6.0
Alexandria university	1	2.0	2.0	8.0
Allgarh Muslim University	1	2.0	2.0	10.0
AMU	1	2.0	2.0	12.0
Arizona	1	2.0	2.0	14.0
BAHkt . U	1	2.0	2.0	16.0
Cairo university	1	2.0	2.0	18.0
Cairo University	1	2.0	2.0	20.0
Carded	1	2.0	2.0	22.0
CU	1	2.0	2.0	24.0
Dundee	1	2.0	2.0	26.0
Durham	1	2.0	2.0	28.0
Durham University	1	2.0	2.0	30.0
Essex university	1	2.0	2.0	32.0
Exeter	1	2.0	2.0	34.0
Faculty of Business	1	2.0	2.0	36.0
Faculty of Economic, Business and Management Sciences	1	2.0	2.0	38.0
Fu	1	2.0	2.0	40.0
Griffith University	1	2.0	2.0	42.0
Hefei University of Technology	1	2.0	2.0	44.0
Helwan University	1	2.0	2.0	46.0
IHEC carthage Tunisia	1	2.0	2.0	48.0
Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur	1	2.0	2.0	50.0
Jordan	1	2.0	2.0	52.0
Malaysia	1	2.0	2.0	54.0
Melbourne university	2	4.0	4.0	58.0
Monash University	1	2.0	2.0	60.0
New Engalnd	1	2.0	2.0	62.0
OUMDURMAN ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY	1	2.0	2.0	64.0
PORTSMOUTH	1	2.0	2.0	66.0
School of Accounting	1	2.0	2.0	68.0
School of management at Southampton University	1	2.0	2.0	70.0
Southampton Business School	1	2.0	2.0	72.0
Suez Canal University	1	2.0	2.0	74.0
uni of bristol	1	2.0	2.0	76.0
University	1	2.0	2.0	78.0
University of Essex	1	2.0	2.0	80.0
University of sfax	1	2.0	2.0	82.0
University Of Sheffield	1	2.0	2.0	84.0
University of Strathclyde	1	2.0	2.0	86.0
University Utara Malaysia	1	2.0	2.0	88.0
VCU	1	2.0	2.0	90.0
Victoria	1	2.0	2.0	92.0
Wales	1	2.0	2.0	94.0
WALLS	1	2.0	2.0	96.0
Westminster university business school	1	2.0	2.0	98.0
Wollongong	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

[1] For more about the theory of elitism, see Whitley (2000) and Bourdieu (1988).

[2] For more about this, see Preston (2018). Also, more information is available on this website: <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/entries/feyerabend/>

Last visit 2/12/2021.

[3] An issue of *Accounting, Economics, and Law: A Convivium* is dedicated to reviewing the book.

[4] *Al-Riyadh* Newspaper April 4, 2015, <https://www.alriyadh.com/1036160> last visit 2/24/2021

[5] Sending students abroad establishes a generation that led the development. The article states the following:

“Abdullah AlDeraaigi, who became the minister of petroleum and mineral resources and who was the first Saudi minister for of petroleum and the founder of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) with the Venezuela minister of petroleum, was the first Saudi Student who sent to the U.S. to further his education.”

"عبدالله بن حمود الطريقي - وزير البترول والثروة المعدنية سابقاً، وأول وزير بترول سعودي ومؤسس منظمة أوبك مع وزير البترول الفنزولي ألفونسو، وأول مبتعث سعودي للدراسة إلى الولايات المتحدة"

<https://www.alriyadh.com/1036160> last visit 2/24/2021

[6] I benefited from the program of the Saudi Government for the scholarship that I was awarded for nine years through King Saudi University to study in the U.S.A. English as a second language in ELS-Cleveland located on the campus of Case Western Reserve University and in ELP-Extension at Berkeley University. The scholarship was generous to cover my studies to do both my master's and Ph.D. at Case Western Reserve University. I am indebted to the government

[7] This could include coauthored papers. No item in the survey asks subjects to reveal whether the papers they author were sole or coauthored with other academics.

[8] Hence, the research method is included and is a part of the research methodology. This is based on the *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, which defines research methodology as “a theory of how the inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (that, in turn, governs the use of a particular method” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 161).