

Social Networks of Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Media Industry: The Case of Iranian Immigrants in Canada



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Abstract Entrepreneurs connect with people in their networks to help them pursue their entrepreneurial activities. This article describes the results of a small pilot study focused on how Iranian immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada use their social networks during the process of starting and developing a business. Through in-depth interviews, qualitative data were collected from five Iranian entrepreneurs in the media industry. We analyze the members identified were in the entrepreneurs' social networks, how these individuals supported the entrepreneurs, and what the effects of the support were in both phases of the business lifecycle: start-up (phase I) and growth (phase II).

1 Introduction

With the revival of immigration to North America over the past four decades, research on immigrant adaptation and the attendant issues of assimilation has grown rapidly (Marger 2001). On the other hand, before the 1979 revolution, Iranians in Canada were mainly guest students. The 1979 revolution, and the outbreak of the war between Iran and Iraq caused a huge emigration of Iranians, voluntarily and involuntarily, to the Western countries, including Canada (Khosravi 1999).

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From 1990, the majority of people who immigrated to Canada each year were young (under 30 years old) (Citizenship & Immigration Canada 2011). On the other hand, Canada and other countries are faced with the problem of increasing unemployment which influences employment conditions for the immigrants as well. For instance, in 2012 the unemployment rate of the immigrants who landed more than 5 or less years earlier was 13.5%, considerably above the native Canadian average of 6.5% (Statistics Canada 2013). For more established immigrants who had been in Canada between 5 and 10 years the rate fell to 9.8%. This figure suggests that immigrants may choose self-employment when they cannot find employment. However, there are some issues that make life very difficult for all entrepreneurs, but more so for immigrant entrepreneurs (Sanders and Nee 1996): (1) language difficulties; (2) different business cultures and markets, regulations, and rules; (3) lack of networks—"who you know;" and (4) financing. Ardichvili et al. (2003) mentioned social networks (SNs) influence the development of small firms/entrepreneurial firms.

Some researchers believe that many of the personal attributes typical of the entrepreneur, such as self-confidence, perseverance, resourcefulness, risk-acceptance and achievement motivation, merge in networking competency (Ardichvili et al. 2003; Johannisson 1988). The interpersonal aspect of a social network is always fundamental because inter-organizational networks are maintained in practice by interpersonal communication between representatives or leaders of the respective organizations (Casson and Giusta 2007). It is generally accepted by entrepreneurship theorists that opportunities are recognized by individuals, not firms (Ellis 2011), and it is a cognitive and not a collective act (Shane 2003 cited in Ellis 2011) Furthermore, top managers who recognize and exploit opportunities in entrepreneurial processes of small firms are the principal force behind the initiation, development, sustenance and success of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) (Li et al. 2009). Furthermore, the findings of researchers show that the social network is a vital resource enabling immigrants to find their economic and social niches in the host society (Marger 2001).

The bulk of research on SNs in the field of entrepreneurship focuses on the network content and the network structure usually at a given moment in time (Ardichvili et al. 2003; Elfring and Hulsink 2003; Ellis 2011). The majority of prior research studied start-ups. In other words, researchers consider the function of SNs in forming a new firms such as identifying opportunities and mobilizing resources. However, the entrepreneurs in growth stage/development stage still use the SNs to identify opportunities and secure resources. Furthermore, the study of Elfring and Hulsink (2003) considered only obtaining legitimacy in the growth stage of business Therefore, we found a gap in prior study which did not explore SNs in the growth stage of a firm, even in terms of identifying opportunities for new products and mobilizing resources to develop business. We consider the starting up stage, identifying opportunity, and mobilizing resources and forming a firm, and the growth stage, the years after creating the firm. This study seeks to contribute new understandings in this area. The main research question and sub-questions are:

- How do Iranian immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada use their SNs in the different phases of their business lifecycle?
 - In the start-up phase (I) of a business, how do the managers of the Iranian small businesses of Canada employ their SNs for identifying entrepreneurial opportunities and mobilizing their resources?
 - In the growth phase (II) of a business, how do the managers of the Iranian small businesses employ their SNs for mobilizing their resources and even identifying new ideas?

To understand how SNs are employed by managers in each phase, the study seeks to realize who the members are of the entrepreneurs' social networks, how they provide support to immigrant entrepreneurs and what the perceived effects are, and finally whether is any difference between the stages of the entrepreneurial processes in terms of SNs.

2 Entrepreneurship and Social Networks

Brass et al. (2004) defined a network as “a set of nodes and the set of ties representing some relationship, or lack of relationship, between the nodes.” They point out that the content of the relationships between nodes is “limited only by a researcher’s imagination” (p. 795). Furthermore, Borgatti and Foster (2003) argued that a network is “a set of actors connected by a set of ties. The actors (often called “nodes”) can be persons, teams, organizations, concepts, etc.” (p. 992). The connection of pairs of actors through ties can be directed (i.e., potentially one-directional) or undirected and can also be dichotomous (present or absent, as in whether two people are friends or not) or valued (measured on a scale, as in strength of friendship) (Batjargal and Liu 2004).

In networking literature, egos are single factors that are crucially under consideration. In addition, alters are the set of nodes that ego has ties with “The ensemble of ego, his alters, and all ties among these (including those to ego) are called an ego-network. Since ego-networks can be collected for unrelated egos (as in a random sample of a large population), ego-network studies blend a network-theoretic perspective with conventional, individual-oriented methods of collecting and processing data (Borgatti and Foster 2003, p.992)”. In this regard, Provan et al. (2007) addressed that theorizing about networks can come from two different but complementary perspectives: the view from the individual organization (actor level) and the view from the network level of analysis or micro-level versus a macro-level network focus (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1994 cited in Provan et al. 2007) or the egocentric network versus the whole network (Kilduff and Tsai 2003 cited in Provan et al. 2007). In fact, theories based on the individual or organizational actor have a long tradition in social research. These views are often referred to as egocentric, and Provan et al. (2007) argued that this view tries

“to explain how involvement of an individual or organization in a network affects its actions and outcomes” (p. 483). Provan et al. (2007) stated that egocentric level theories can help to answer questions such as “(a) the effect of ties on performance, (b) which types of relations are most or least beneficial, (c) which network positions might be most or least influential, and so on.

Brass et al. (2004) provided a pervasive look at organizational network research at the levels of analysis including interpersonal, inter-unit, and interorganizational. They also studied the phenomenon of SNs with a broad approach which focused on antecedents and the consequences of networks at each of these levels. However, the network members in each level can be linked by many types of connections and flows, such as information, materials, financial resources, services, and social support. Connections may be categorized as informal, for example, totally trust based, or more formalized, as through a contract (Emami et al. 2011).

Social network theories are of growing significance in various literatures and the most recent entrepreneurship research in the creation and sustaining of new ventures (Anderson and Jack 2002; Huggins 2000; Zhou et al. 2007). Social Network Theory is a social science concept that discusses the connection and relationship in a social structure (Jaafar et al. 2009). SN is defined as a manager’s relations and contacts with others (BarNir and Smith 2002). Lechner et al. (2006) defined the SNs as “relationships with other firms based on strong personal relationships with individuals such as friends, relatives, long-standing colleagues that became friends before foundation, and so forth” (p. 515). Peng and Luo (2000) used a broader approach. They mentioned the business ties and political ties of managers/entrepreneurs. Their ties may be based on conversation, affection, friendship, kinship, authority, economic exchange, information exchange, or anything else that forms the basis of a relationship (Jaafar et al. 2009).

With regards to the difference between social networks and social capital, social capital is as an asset that inheres in social relations and networks, which consist of the actual ties between individuals or entities (Burt 1997; Leana and Van Buren 1999 cited in Casson and Giusta 2007). The central proposition of social capital theory is that networks of relationships constitute a valuable resource for the conduct of affairs (Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998).

3 Methodology

To address the research questions, the study utilized In-depth interviews (qualitative approach—semi-structured interview) with five Iranian immigrant entrepreneurs-Iranian immigrants that voluntarily immigrated to Canada-selected through a snowball sampling technique to gather data on SNs of entrepreneurs.

The context of this study is media sector. Media markets are the markets where media products including news, entertainment, communication, advertising,

creative talents, dream and user information are exchanged (Khajeheian 2017; Okada and Dana 2017). The media industry has always been characterized by a high level of entrepreneurial activity, even before the digital era began (Naldi and Achtenhagen 2011). Risk (Doyle 2016; Picard 2004), uncertainty (Medina et al. 2016; Napoli 2016), innovativeness (Khajeheian 2017; Price Schultz and Jones 2017; Van Weezel 2010), competitiveness (Gershon 2013; Mierzejewska et al. 2017), and new business models (Gerpott and Niegel 2002) are among the specific characteristics of this industry that help align its operating firms with the entrepreneurial orientations (Emami and Khajeheian 2017).

Five entrepreneurial firms considered for the purpose of this study: (A) Film and Animation Studios, (B) Commercials, (C) Electronic games and interactive TV, (D) Magazines, and (E) Targeted media (marketing).

Two interviewees are experienced woman entrepreneurs about 50 years old, and three are male, the oldest being an experienced entrepreneur 58 years old, while the other two are young entrepreneurs-about 25 years., The age of two male entrepreneurs' companies was about 5 years old, so we call them young entrepreneurs, but the age of other entrepreneurs' companies was more than 7 years.

4 Data Analysis

In this study, the level of analysis is individual because we were studying entrepreneurs/managers, and the units of analysis are the activities, interpersonal connections, of managers. That is because we focus on social networks of managers/entrepreneurs. After transcribing all the interviews and field notes, we conducted a theme analysis to extract the information on social networks of managers utilized in the start-up and growth stages.

First, we attempted to find each sentence or phrase related to social networks. We wanted to answer this question: how did entrepreneurs use interpersonal connections to solve their problems or facilitate the Phase II process of business? We conducted an open coding regardless of different dimensions of social networks in which we found 55 sentences and phrases related to social networks. In fact, we were looking for stories or believes of entrepreneurs which show when they faced difficulties, whom they relied on and they were helped, and finally what was the effect of this support.

Once we separated the relevant sentences, we realized four themes which were almost obvious in the data. They include (1) phases of business lifecycle (2) "who" are in the entrepreneur's network such as customer, family and so on (3) "how" did their SNs help the entrepreneurs? For instance, when colleagues of the entrepreneur provided some administrative information for him/her (4) the "effect" of social networks' supports has been seen. So we needed to know what exactly was the effect of this information.

Then we analyzed the sentences and phrases related to SNs based on emerging main themes in two different ways (see result section). Before this, we explain the

phases of the business lifecycle by presenting some examples. First, we analyzed each case in terms of members of the SNs, the kind of support and the effect of SN support. We also provide a table for each case to make it easier for ourselves and readers to understand the condition of each entrepreneur and relationship between these main themes. For example, we explained who (member of SN) supported the entrepreneur in terms of information or advertisement in phase I and its differences with phase II.

Second, we had an across case analysis which compared the cases regarding their SNs. In this part, we were looking patterns between the entrepreneurs from different dimensions. To find patterns, we needed to compare the case on several levels. (1) We compared each main theme between cases with regard to the phases. For instance, we attempted to find who the majority of members of entrepreneurs' SN were in phase I or to what extent was the source diversity of SNs of the entrepreneurs in phase II. Furthermore, after analyzing and comparing cases in both phases we could provide some subthemes for some of last three main themes, members of SN, kind of support and effect of SN support. For example, we found information support divided two subthemes information related to input and information related to process. These new subthemes and patterns helped us to find gap among prior studies. (2) At this level of analyze, we considered relationship between main themes, phases and entrepreneurs (their characteristics). For instance, is there any difference between young and experienced entrepreneurs to have advertisement as a kind of support? If we add phases I and II to last question, how we can analyze these factors together? If also add other new factor to last question, new factors such as who supported the entrepreneurs in terms of advertisement and in which phase and what will be their effects, now what will be our analysis and results. In this example, we analyzed the factors such as entrepreneurs (young or experienced), advertisement, phases, who supported simultaneously.

5 Results

Although our cases had had a good lifestyle condition before immigration to Canada because of their rich families, they still faced many problems in establishing their businesses when they immigrated to Canada. In order to solve the difficulties during the establishment of their business, they attempted to employ their previous interpersonal connections and make up a series of relationships in Canada (Iranian or non-Iranian). Understanding of SNs regarding the stages of the entrepreneurship was the purpose of the study, so we analyzed and compared the social networks of whole cases together in each stage to make a conceptual picture. Our findings can be explained in three sections. First, we needed to identify a clear classification of the lifecycle of businesses. Second, each small firm and entrepreneur were studied to give information in relation to their SNs. Finally, we explained the patterns across cases on different dimensions of SNs of entrepreneurs in Phase I and II.

Social networks and lifecycle of business—regarding the assertion of the entrepreneurs, two businesses were in a risky stage and they needed time to be established. In fact, they were young entrepreneurs with the businesses of young ages—business “A” with 5 years old and business “C” with 3 years. Other businesses achieved to a constancy stage—business “B”—18 years, business “D”—33 years, and business “F”—8 years. When we reviewed the interview data, it was hard to identify SNs in each stage of the business development. However, we could recognize two stages: start-up/phase I and growth/phase II (i.e., increase in sales, employees, or market share).

5.1 Case Analysis

In the first and second series of iterations, we identified three main themes and subcategories of those main themes. This includes: first, the life cycles of the business (born vs. growth) as mentioned above.

Second was “Who” are in the entrepreneur’s network which influences the businesses and entrepreneurs—positive or negative. In this category, we found six groups of people consisting of family/relatives, customers, colleagues (previous), government officials, own employees and friends. For clarity, we used this classification; otherwise all those people could be the friends. The entrepreneurs utilized these people in forming their businesses and growing them.

The third main theme was “support”. In other words, “how” did these SNs of entrepreneurs help the entrepreneurs? Regarding the second series of the iterative process of moving back and forth between the data, we found five types of supports by SNs including “time”, “information”, “financial resource”, “emotional/motivation”, and “advertisement”.

Although research questions (who supported, how supported, where supported) were almost answered by analyzing the interview data, a new theme—namely the “effect” of social networks’ supports—has been seen. In other words, “what” were the “effects” of social networks’ supports on the businesses of entrepreneurs? These effects have been seen in several parts of business including inputs (recognizing opportunities and ideas and financial support and equipment. . .), process (hiring employees, facilitating the administrative process. . .) and output (increasing market/customers). Therefore, there are three subthemes—input, process and output—under the main theme of “effects”. We could not break these subthemes down into precise units because the interview data did not give us more information. Regarding these emerging themes, we currently explain the themes in terms of each entrepreneur and their firms.

A: Film and Animation Studios This company was a family business owned by two brothers. An interview was conducted with the older brother who was the main

Table 1 SNs of entrepreneur A

	Members of SN	Kind of support	Effects of SN support
Phase I	Family Friend	Information Financial resource Emotional support–NO	Input-(financial support)
Phase II	Family Friend Customer	Information Advertisement	Input process

founder and current manager of the firm. He is studying marketing (part time) and managing the firm simultaneously despite the fact that he is only 26 years old. He immigrated in 1998 and registered their company in 2006. At the beginning, he wanted to have their own business, so he was looking for business ideas with low cost. He experienced some service business related to the TV. In 2008, he began their current business. To develop their new idea and mobilize financial resources, interpersonal connections and consultation with his friends played an important role. He found and employed an experienced accountant with a low wage through his social networks. Furthermore, he avoided some mistakes through information, consulting his friends and social networks. He believed in SNs for meeting financial sources and attracting the costumers. He is interested in using technology, so his business is web-based and his future plans emphasize technology and would like to increase the market by applying new technologies. Regarding his expression, the business still is in the risky stage and not stable. However, his net income is rising and the business is increasing steadily year by year. His family and friends provided information support, financial support and advertised his company as shown in Table 1. We can see these members of SN in both phases, and the majority of their support was information support, for instance,

First we had an accountant; he was so busy and did not spend sufficient time for our business. Then my friend recommended his father as accountant. . . he was a good option for us because he was professional with a lower wage. Also, he (accountant) was connected with the Canada government and could guide us correctly. Furthermore, he consulted us about managing business in terms of financial issues. He also helped us to receive our loan sooner [6 a M].

Furthermore, his customers advertised his products in the second stage. We could find the effects of SN support only in input section at phase I and in input and process sections at phase II.

. . . he (his father) introduced me to an institution which supports businessmen—English language—we could have both free consulting and financial support. For instance, this institution introduced us to a financial institution for loan and competition of young entrepreneurs which led to \$35,000. Also, this institution asked some successful and famous entrepreneurs to consult us about managing our business free of charge. However, this consulting by such entrepreneurs would otherwise have been too expensive [1 a M].

This entrepreneur also had relevant academic knowledge—marketing. Furthermore, he benefitted from each opportunity for introducing and advertising his

business to attract new ideas and customers. In this regard, he had a different SN unlike other entrepreneurs of this study. This new SN was the professors of university as stated:

I also consider the student opportunity as I am a student. For instance, I connect to the professors and present my business and they tend to take my business as a case for their class. Consequently, I will present my business and problems, and the student will give their opinion without any charge [9 a M].

However, this entrepreneur did not have an emotional support from his family as he said “My father disagreed with us for working and he attempted to change my opinion. . .” [1 a M].

B: Commercial She was from a rich family, and she wanted to immigrate Germany, but fate directed her to Canada in 1990. At that time, she was a young girl who was studying computer science and working at factory. Starting a common life led to changes in her life style and her major (from computer science to marketing). She and her husband decided to have their own business. They registered a firm for exporting and importing in 1995 because of their experiences and familiarities with two communities (Iran-Canada). They launched with importing Iranian handicrafts. In this regard, her colleagues in Canada, her friends and families in Iran helped them to find a good place, suitable products, and have financial resources. After saturation of the Iranian handicrafts market, they decided to start a new business to provide two types of services (1) radio advertisement and (2) marketing consulting services because of their access to a big market and their familiarity with market assessment. She stated that the work style and the type of connection are different in comparison with Iran. Her business was in an established stage generally. The currency transfer section faced some problems after new sanctions for Iran, and stopped the support of her family. However, commercial services are in a good state with some new branches. To understand how this entrepreneur employs SNs, we put relevant information into Table 2. In addition to family, friends and the colleagues, the entrepreneur was supported by her customers and employees in phase II. In other words, she had the highest diversity of SNs (all kinds of SNs).

Regarding the study of Peng and Luo (2000) related to managerial ties with government, we designed an interview protocol to ask about ties with government

Table 2 SNs of entrepreneur B

	Members of SN	Kind of support	Effects of SN support
Phase I	Family Friend Colleague	Time Information	Input Process
Phase II	Family Friend Customer Colleague Government Employee	Information Financial support Advertisement	Input Process Customer

officials as well. In this regard, the entrepreneurs did not receive any support from government. For instance, entrepreneur “B” said “We cannot make a relationship with government broadcasting employees because of conflict of interest. So, no support from government.” [16 b F].

In the early part of my business, my sister, younger brother and father helped me as the secretor of my firm because my husband had to go Iran for. . . and he was not here [18 b F].

Furthermore, she had much information supported in both phases through all members of her SNs with the exception of her customers. As such,

The owner of the last businesses where I worked there helps me a lot. He helped me to find a place and appropriate office equipment as well my brother [17 b F].

Additionally, her customers and friends advertised her services only in phase II. Finally, by looking at kinds of her supports, she had all of them with the exception of emotional support (though we realized, her husband was as a good motivation). We found the effects of her SN supports only in process and input section in both phases.

C: Electronic Games and Interactive TV He was interested in computers and relevant issues; for instance, he created his own website individually at the age of 12. After living in Iran and then Dubai with his family, he came to Canada in 2007 to study Computer science at Canada. He and his friend had also worked on IT projects since high school. He decided to follow media activities professionally, so he registered a firm in 2010 when he was student. He confronted administrative issues and language difficulties at the beginning; For instance, filling out French forms, opening a banking account, unsupported by a government or bank in terms of information and financial resources. His early customers were Iranian people because of langue limitations (French). Currently, he tends to work with non-Iranians because Iranian customers compared the cost of services with Iran, so he had difficulties with receiving his remuneration. His family did not agree with him working instead of studying, so he did not have serious support from his family, with the exception of his sister in filling out the French form. Now he has four employees in Canada, of which three of them are Iranian and one was Canadian (and knows the French and English language), there are also two employees in Dubai because support of the gaming services is 24-h, so it was useful idea to have employees in other countries with time zone difference. In Table 3, we addressed some information related to his SNs. First point was that we did not find any support in phase II. Second, he had a low diversity of members in the SN, only his family and friends. Third, we found that his SNs provided only information support. His family did not support him in terms of emotional support:

My parents disagreed about my working because my father is an engineer and my Mather is a doctor, so they wanted me to study [1 c M].

Table 3 SNs of entrepreneur C

	Members of SN	Kind of support	Effects of SN support
Phase I	Family Friend Government	Information Emotional support No support	Process
Phase II	–	–	–

Table 4 SNs of entrepreneur D

	Members of SN	Kind of support	Effects of SN support
Phase I	Colleague Friend Family: no support	Financial support Information	Input Process
Phase II	Employee	Information	Output

D: Magazines He immigrated Canada in 1974 to study Financial Management. To pay his tuitions and cost of living, he began working at a newspaper. Therefore, he gained considerable experiences of writing and editing because he worked at different positions and got familiar with different parts of the publishing industry. In 1980, his friend introduced a bankrupted magazine for buying. He found that magazine was suitable and said “I can revive it”. Finally, they bought it, and he had managed and developed it since 1980. He had nine employees who were mainly his colleagues at the previous newspaper. His employees mainly are bilingual—French and English—, especially in the customer relationship part. His friend (investor) helped him in terms of administrative issues and employing an accountant (accountant of his friend’s factory). His employees also are loyal especially his chief editor, and it is essential for a magazine because the quality of work increased erratically. The entrepreneur was supported by his SNs in phase I more than phase II as shown in Table 4. Although he was not supported by his family, his friend provided good support in terms of information and financial support. Here are some examples

My wife does not like the works of publishing, and just she signs some checks when I am not in Canada. . . my older daughter is studying in X country. . .” [5 d M] “One of my friends-my classmate—had a business here and he told me, hey x there is a magazine being sold, go and look at it and examine its condition, if it is appropriate, we can launch it together. . . I visited it (same place), it was good and I told my friend that I can manage it (at the same time, I was the manager of another company). So, he invested in it and gave financial support and I managed it because I had experience. . . Now I am managing this magazine. . . [1 d M].

My friend who had factory introduced his accountant in order to do the works of tax and accounting of my business [3 d M].

His SN support affected the output of his business in phase 2 because of his loyal employees as he stated

I employ persons who are bilingual . . . “I have an employee who has worked for me about 15 years, and my chief editor is working about 5 years. They know their work well and are loyal. This is an important point to keep the quality of work high [4 d M]”.

E: Targeted Media Targeted marketing or Targeted media is a kind of direct marketing where online advertisers can employ modern techniques to target the most receptive audiences with certain traits, based on the product or person the advertiser is advertising. These traits include demographic, psychographic, or behavioral variables (Plummer et al. 2007).

Demographic variables are focused on race, economic status, sex, age, the level of education, income level and employment. Psychographic is focused on traits such as consumer’s values, personality, attitudes, opinions, lifestyles, and concerns. And the behavioral variables, including browser history, purchase history, and other recent activity.

Targeted marketing is focused on certain traits and the consumers who are likely to have a strong preference will receive the message instead of those who have no interest and whose preferences do not match a product or service’s property.

When she immigrated Canada in 1992, she had graduated from a university in Iran in Laboratory Sciences and English literature. Then she studied management at a university of Canada, and finally she decided to study marketing. This is because she was interested in this field and she practiced operational auditing, so she could utilize her knowledge well. After graduating, she worked with an experienced business consultant for 4 years because she needed to gain more knowledge about managing a marketing agency. She had to work 6 days a week to pay off her debts—loans. She bore many difficulties during her study because she had two kids—one suckling—and she had to learn French. Her husband, who has since passed away, said to her “many new single immigrants expressed that we want to start a business, but they cannot do it while you have two kids”. She believed that living in a foreign country will lead to be a realistic human and she did not let herself to be a spoiled person. She was a very active person and played different roles and was involved in different communities related to her professional and other communities. She believed that her business is high-tech because she attempts to utilize new technology such as machine learning algorithms and marketing automation and link with customers through the web. Regarding more experts and new technology, her customers have increased, and she experienced 78% growth in her incomes.

In phase I, she was supported by her family and previous colleagues, but over time, she could increase the diversity of members of her SNs, friend, customer, colleague and employee in phase 2. Here are two example related phase I and II respectively.

When my colleague wanted to sell this agency to me, he gave me useful guidelines and information about administrative process of Canada and also managing such business [7 e M].

Table 5 SNs of entrepreneur E

	Members of SN	Kind of support	Effects of SN support
Phase I	Family Colleague	Time Information Emotional support	
Phase II	Friend Customer Colleague Government Employee	Information Emotional support Advertisement	Output

I have a loyal employee, and she introduces me to new customers. In fact, when her husband had cancer and she was involved in that problem, also she could not do her duties well; I helped her until she could stand on her own feet. . . [8 e M].

Furthermore, some of these SNs played roles in both phases. The Entrepreneur stated that her mother always did some of housework of the entrepreneur, and she could focus on her works more as you can see here

When I was a student, my mother came to Canada for 7 to 8 month and took care of my children. She always supports me for study and my goals in my career path . . . [12 e F].

With the increasing diversity of members of her SNs, she gained more diverse support than at an earlier stage of her business such as information support, time, emotional support and advertisement (see Table 5). For instance,

My customers are my capitals. In fact, I have specific behavior with my customer. . . for example I always spend 15 min more for each customer and speak with them. . . they introduce me to new people [9 e M].

5.2 Across Case Analysis

When we compared the cases, we found some new emerging themes according to across case analysis. These are the members of SNs, kinds of support, and their effect regarding phase I and II.

Members of SN In phase I, the interview data revealed that all entrepreneurs were supported by their family, with the exception of entrepreneur D, and friends. In phase II, it is hard to address a specific member of SN supporting all the entrepreneurs since entrepreneur C did not mentioned any SNs in phase II of his business, and entrepreneur D was supported only by his employee in phase II. Generally, SNs played a weaker role in phase II of the entrepreneurs’ businesses. Another point related to members of SN is that customer and employees emerged as SNs only in phase II. On the other hand, the role of family became weaker in phase II or by

passing time, as did previous colleague. Finally, no entrepreneur was supported by the government.

In terms of members of SN, we can point out some more detailed explanation. First, employees and colleagues were only in SNs of three experienced entrepreneurs—B, D and E. Second, The customers were in the SN of three entrepreneurs, B, E and A. Entrepreneurs “B” and “E” were experienced in attracting customers, but entrepreneur A was a young entrepreneur. The reason for the success of this entrepreneur was among his interviews

I am so aggressive. For example, when I face the janitor of the building, I make friends with him. I need this friendship because sometimes I cannot find a parking spot, but he lets me park my car in front of the building and do my works [8 aM].

Third, B and E were female entrepreneurs which had the highest diversity of SNs (all kinds of SNs), but entrepreneur C had the lowest diversity—family and friend. In this regards, entrepreneur C said

I prefer to find solutions of my problems myself through searches on the web and not ask friends or professors. Maybe I like learning by myself when there is no person to help for example my professor [8 c M].

Fourth, it was hard to find differences or similarities among these entrepreneurs in regard to the types of their business or their educational backgrounds, by analyzing members of their SNs.

Kind of Support After analyzing the member of SNs, we need to have an across case analysis in term of kind of support. Information was the only kind of support which was observed among all entrepreneurs in both phases. Customers did not provide any information for the entrepreneurs. Then we found “advertisement” and “time” kinds of supports only in phase II. In regards to emotional support, there was a negative feedback, particularly for young entrepreneurs by their family. Finally, all entrepreneurs did not have this type of support. The experienced female entrepreneurs (B and E) had more diverse kinds of supports, information, advertisement, time, in comparison with the male entrepreneurs. Friends and customers played an important role for advertising, and as colleague and family do for time support; in other words, they are complementary parts.

Financial support was not found when we looked at whole cases in terms of information support, we found some sub-themes. These sub-themes include information related to *the input* part of a business and information related to *process*. The last kind of information, process, is divided into two subparts including information related to administrative issues and the technical information or specialized knowledge. Here are some examples,

Information—input. Entrepreneur “B” started their business of an opportunity introduced by one of her relatives. “A cousin of my husband had a big advertising company in Tehran. He suggested us this business to us (commercials). He was looking for a person to establish a base in North America. On the other side, he was

a fulcrum point for us because he had many relationship and high credit in the market.” [13 b F].

Information—process—*Administrative issues*: information related to administrative issues such as law and rules, hiring employee, administrative process of government, and introduction to financial institutions, for instance, “When my colleague wanted to sell this agency to me, he gave me useful guidelines and information about the administrative process of Canada, and also how to manage such a business” [7 e F].

Information—process—*The technical information or specialized knowledge*: this kind of information can include information related to products, technology and so on. In this regards, entrepreneur “D” cited their employee as valuable forces because of their knowledge, which led to the development and stability of business. . . “I have an employee who works for me about 15 years, and my chief editor is working about 5 years. They know their work well and are loyal. This is an important point to maintain the quality of work”.

Although we found some evidence related to information for output and feedback sections of a business, they were not sufficient to convince us and be accounted as a sub-theme. However, the data show that all entrepreneurs had information supports through their SNs in both phases. Furthermore, the information was from both non-Iranians and Iranians. However, we found the majority of members of SNs in phase I were Iranian people.

After analyzing information support regarding the entrepreneurs and phases, now we consider the member of SNs to have a better understanding of information support. In other words, we would like to consider interaction between the members, phases, and entrepreneurs in regards to information support as shown in Table 6. This table does not mention the number of information support appeared among entrepreneurs’ interviews, but presents the diversity of source of information.

Table 6 shows that entrepreneur B had more diverse sources for gaining information than entrepreneur C. In other words, entrepreneur B received help from her

Table 6 Information support regarding the members of SN, phases, entrepreneurs

		A	B	C	D	E
Phase I	Friend		X	X	X	
	Family	X	X			
	Colleague		X		X	X
	Customer					
	Employee					
Phase II	Friend	X				
	Family	X	X			
	Colleague		X			X
	Customer					
	Employee		X		X	X

Table 7 Advertisement regarding the members of SN, phases, entrepreneurs

		A	B	C	D	E
Phase II	Friend	X	X			X
	Family					
	Colleague					
	Customer	X	X			X
	Employee					X

friends, family, colleagues and employees, but the only source for entrepreneur C was his friends. Furthermore, we can see friends and colleagues provided more information support for the entrepreneurs in phase I than phase 2. On the other hand, employees played an important role in terms of information support in phase II. Finally, customers did not play any role in providing information support for the entrepreneurs.

A second kind of support mentioned by the entrepreneurs was “advertisement”. The entrepreneurs had new customers through advertising by their SNs. For example,

My customers are my capitals. In fact, I have specific behavior with my customer. . . for example I always spend enough time for each customer and speak with them. . . they introduce me to new people [9 e F].

Like the information support analysis, we provide Table 7 for Advertisement. As you can see, there is no advertisement support in phase I. Second, entrepreneurs A (young entrepreneur), B (experienced female entrepreneur) and E (experienced female entrepreneur) benefited from advertisement. Finally, friends and customers of entrepreneurs played a highlighter role in introducing the entrepreneurs’ products, but their family and colleagues did not.

A third kind of support was “time”. In fact, members of SN spent time without pay. The time support has been only seen in phase II. These SNs were a combination of Iranian and non-Iranian. Entrepreneur B and E, experienced female entrepreneurs, had this kind of support by their colleague and family. Here is an example

The owner of last business in which I worked there helps me a lot. He helped me to find a place and appropriate office equipment. He came with me to make a contract for renting . . . as well my brother. . . [17 b F].

A fourth kind of support was “financial support”. All entrepreneurs did not have this type of support, and it is hard to present an analysis in terms of phases and members of SN. A last type of support was “emotional support”. It is important because the entrepreneurs not only did not have this support, but also they faced negative feedback at times, particularly by their families. Two young entrepreneurs (A and C) in the study stated this issue. For instance,

“My parents disagreed about my working because my father is engineer and my mother is a doctor, so they wanted me to study” [1 c M] . . . “My father disagreed with us for working and he attempted to change my opinion” [1 a M].

Effects of SN Support SN support of the entrepreneurs impacted on input and process of their business in both phases though most entrepreneurs (A, B, C and D) benefited from them in phase I. In other words, their effect on input and process were stronger in phase I than in phase II. On the other hand, their effect on output of the business has only been seen in phase II. In terms of members of SN, it is hard to give further analysis in relation to this theme—“effect” regarding different aspects like other themes discussed because of lack of sufficient data.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study listed six types of members of entrepreneurs’ social networks including family, friends, colleagues, customers, employees and government. The findings showed entrepreneurs had a larger proportion of kin in their network during the earlier stages than in later stages of their business like the study of Greve and Salaff (2003). On the other hand, there was no certain kind of member for all entrepreneurs in phase II. Three experienced entrepreneurs (B, E and D) showed that their colleagues—people the actor knows, or who are known by others that the actor knows—were as SNs for both stages in line with the study of Burt and Ronchi (1994). Therefore, some of these relations may be formed on the basis of professional networks, reaching friends, and colleagues from earlier jobs (Hansen 1995). Before creating the business, other entrepreneurs (A and C) did not work for other companies, so could not find colleagues as members of their networks unlike three above entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, customers and employees emerged as SNs in phase II, and family and colleagues played a weaker role in this phase. If the entrepreneurs before creating their business became senior-level employees at established firms, they typically built extensive networks relevant to their domains of work. Consequently, work experience in the other’s companies can extend variety and number of members of social networks. It is necessary to distinguish between age and work experience.

The last member of the entrepreneur’s network was government officials. The study of Peng and Luo (2000) and Li et al. (2009) emphasized on the political ties of the managers that cause small firms to achieve supports such as interpreting regulations, settling negotiations, and enforcing contracts in emerging countries. Therefore, here was a question: what about the entrepreneurs from emerging countries in a developed country? In other words, will they have the same procedure in Canada? The answer was no. Government officers were not in their networks because of conflict of interest as said by entrepreneur “B”.

In terms of gender, the female entrepreneurs of the study had more variety of members in their social networks than the men. This difference may be derived from several reasons, in our opinion; we need to consider the business environment and even social condition for women in their home countries and in the new environment (Emami 2017). In other words, these female entrepreneurs had limitations in terms of cultural and religious aspects (in Iran) and rules to make connection with others easily, and they do not face this problem in the new country. Entrepreneur “C” (young entrepreneur) had less variety in his network than entrepreneur A (young). That means type of character can be more important than age of the entrepreneur.

Consequently, we found that the effects of SN in phase II is less than in phase I. however, there is SN in phase II along with changes such as the kind of members and the extent of their participation.

The next finding of the study was how the social network members supported the entrepreneurs. We addressed five types of supports including time, information, financial support and advertisement. The most supportive element that received by the entrepreneurs was “information” in both phases which is in line with prior studies (Casson and Giusta 2007). Furthermore, the entrepreneurs gained most of their information through their colleagues and friends in phase I. On the other hand, employees played an important role in providing information on relation to input and process sections of a business in phase II. That is because the entrepreneurs need technical information over time. We did not find sufficient evidence for output section of the business. Additionally, customers did not play any role for providing information. We can say the entrepreneurs neglected to use this source of information to increase their market and quality of their products and so on. In the next finding, the entrepreneurs used Iranians in phase I for information support because of language difficulties and common culture.

Another type of supportive element was time which only has been seen in phase I. The entrepreneurs received this support from their family and colleagues. In fact, only these strong ties can lead to these sacrifices. Prior studies did not mention this type of support.

In terms of financial support, almost all entrepreneurs did not have financial support in this study. To access financial support the entrepreneur needed to live for a long time in their new country and build their connections and credit.

The entrepreneurs did not have the motivation or emotional support, particularly young entrepreneurs from their family. Despite the lack of the emotional support and having negative feedback, the young entrepreneurs continued their activities. Their reactions may be derived from favourable conditions of work in the new country and the social influence of their social networks established in the new country regarding their norms.

The last main theme was “effect”. Elfring and Hulsink (2003) argued that instead of linking the network structure directly to performance/effect, it will be useful to distinguish entrepreneurial processes that are affected in a positive or negative way by the presence of weak and strong ties. In other words, they emphasized that types of supports such as introduction of opportunities, securing resources, and obtaining legitimacy were identified before we consider their effects as we considered this

point in our study. However, we found some evidence related to the SNs' effect which derived from the type of support and who supported. We found the effects of SN support in input and process parts of a business in both phases, but there were these effects on the output part of a business only in phase II.

7 Limitations and Future Research

This study examined SNs for Iranian immigrants in the context of media venturing. In other words, we studied the entrepreneurs who experienced at least two environments with different cultures and norms. As mentioned, the social influence of the home country and the new country has been seen for the young entrepreneurs and for the women entrepreneurs. However, scholars who research immigrant entrepreneurs and SNs are advised to consider cultural differences and ecosystems and their effects on forming SNs. Furthermore, we could not study the ethnic groups and their effect on SNs, particularly for immigrant entrepreneurs. We attempted to realize the similarities and differences between the entrepreneurs in terms of gender and experience among necessity entrepreneurs (individual who start small enterprises out of necessity), but the researchers need to study also opportunity entrepreneurs (individual who start small enterprises because they spot an opportunity in the market) and find out if SNs impact immigrant entrepreneurship differently. Furthermore, the effects of subjective (perceptions, attitudes and behavior of the entrepreneur) and objective (how many languages known, educational background) characteristic of entrepreneurs on SNs should be explored by scholars as our study mentioned some findings in this regard. Future studies need to have a precise classification of different kinds of information in the phases of the entrepreneurship process and gaining information related to output and feedback sections of a business.

In terms of the effect of SNs, there is no idea about the effect size of each type of support in the short term and long term. Furthermore, what is the effect of high value social capitals on the performance of firms and what will happen, if such supports are stopped? Finally, there is a critical question that is the existence of SNs is always as an advantage or an opportunity. In other words, can we consider the lack of SNs as an opportunity sometimes? If so, when?

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