



## SOCIAL NETWORK AND TACIT KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION: THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURS' SOCIAL SKILL

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the impact of entrepreneurs' social skills on the social network and tacit knowledge acquisition. The conclusion of the study indicates that entrepreneurs' social skills including impression management and social perception influence fostering social networks by promoting face-to-face interactions to understand reactions, reciprocity and even motives of others. The impact of entrepreneurs' social skills on tacit knowledge acquisition is further determined by strong social networks and preserving affable business relations of an entrepreneurial firm.

Keywords: social skill, social network, tacit knowledge, entrepreneurship

### Introduction

An entrepreneurial competitive position of a firm, which is operating in the local or international context, is fundamentally based on numerous factors such as social networks and tacit knowledge among others. It is the entrepreneurs who have the desire of social network and tacit knowledge acquisition not only to accomplish higher extent of competitive position in the respective

markets or industry wherein they operate but also to ensure sustainability in the long-run. Both the perceptions i.e. social network and tacit knowledge can be duly considered as the major human resource management (HRM) practices that help the entrepreneurs and their respective firms to attain long-term success.

Conceptually, in an entrepreneurial setting, the social network is said to

emerge from the social skills of entrepreneurs with the development and the maintenance of effective personal interconnection. Social skills are sharpened either through verbal or non-verbal, face-to-face or direct conversations. It is believed that possessing greater social skills facilitate the individuals such as the entrepreneurs to have a better impression over others, thereby supporting the expansion of individual social networks at large. In this context, there exist three specific skills that contribute to a successful social network. In contrast “social adaptability”, “social perception” and “express expressiveness” (Baron & Markman, 2000).

From a theoretical perspective, “social adaptability” is something, which is needed by a person to adapt to a wide assortment of societal settings. On the other hand, the capacity to identify goals, attributes and characteristics of others successfully is often regarded as “social perception.” In contrast, “express expressiveness” is significant in articulating the emotions of others, which in turn, creates enthusiasm within the social networks (Huang, 2017). It has been apparent that social networks become ineffective if social capital is not considered. This is owing to the reason that social capital comprises certain kind of communal structures that define social network contents and promote the same in any specific setting.

In this regard, with the consideration of social capital, the impact of entrepreneurs’ skills on the social network can be determined by attaining organizational success thereby creating an appropriate environment of innovation (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Tacit knowledge, on the other hand, is estab-

lished on the social network because it delivers a platform for making face-to-face interactions (Muthuveloo, et al., 2017). Based on these notions, the study intends to analyze the impact of entrepreneurs’ social skills on the ‘social network’ and tacit knowledge acquisition in an organizational setting.

## Literature Review and Proposition Development

### *Social Skill and Social Network*

Social networks are described by a sequence of actors such as individuals or organizations and a set of associations persisting amid these actors (Zhao et al., 2010). These networks are identified to be vital in the procedure of accomplishing a greater intensity of entrepreneurship success by enabling the entrepreneurs to understand its nature and its impact on organizational engagements (Zhao et al., 2010). As per the definition provided by Bolander et al. (2015; p. 1), “A social network is a complex pattern of interpersonal social ties whereby the presence of a tie between parties serves as a conduit for information and resource flow”.

In relation to the study findings presented by Tang (2010; p. 469), “Social skills refer to entrepreneurs’ overall effectiveness in interacting with others”. The various dimensions of social skills that tend to become useful for the entrepreneurs are maintaining precision in observing the intentions or the goals of others and enhancing the talent to learn something in varied communal situations. In addition, the other dimensions associated with social skills are changing behavioral attitudes or standpoint of others by making face-to-face interac-

tions and implementing broader techniques to induce optimistic reactions in others (Tang, 2010).

In the sphere of social effectiveness constructs, Banister and Meriac (2015) identified political skill to gain vast attention amid the entrepreneurs as a forecasting approach to work outlooks and performances in the workplace. To be precise, political skill takes into concern only that social effectiveness constructs that have a strong influence over the work outcomes and the entire performances of a specific entrepreneurship firm (Tocher et al., 2012; Lans et al., 2015). As stated by Banister and Meriac (2015), the notion i.e. political skill engages purposeful endeavors and interpersonal influences towards successful accomplishment of positive work-related outputs. Therefore, in this context, Banister and Meriac (2015; p. 776) described political skill as “the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives”. This definition of political skill denotes the fact that a politically skilled individual holds social abilities that certainly develop their personal and/or organizational objectives by understanding the activities that need to be performed by others.

Furthermore, it also involves one entrepreneur getting influenced by the other (Fang, et al., 2015). With regard to the study findings of Banister & Meriac (2015), political skill entails four specific elements i.e. ‘social astuteness’, ‘apparent sincerity’, ‘interpersonal influence’, and ‘networking ability’. These identified constituents eventually portray the positive association between the ac-

quired social skills and the created social network of the entrepreneurs.

Bolander et al. (2015) also revealed that an entrepreneur’s social skills are developed through social networks by enabling them to learn non-obvious prospects. Moreover, exerting strong impacts on the decision makers who shape the opportunities and weaknesses within the networks is also done by the entrepreneurs. Moreover, social networks help the entrepreneurs to develop their individual social capabilities by generating “social credentials” with the help of which they can understand the effective use of their own personal resources for the benefits of others (Batjargal et al., 2013). According to Brouer et al. (2015; p. 217), “Political skill is an important individual difference described as the ability to understand the work environment and those acting within it, and to use that knowledge to influence others to achieve goals”. Therefore, it is believed that the entrepreneurs are expected to improvise their respective skills through the social constructs thereby comprehending the workplace conditions and motivating others to perform in the most effective way (Bastian & Zali, 2016). In relation to the study findings of Brouer et al. (2015), social skills such as positive impression management and performance are likely to be enhanced by various significant factors that entail ‘social networking ability’, ‘apparent sincerity’, ‘interpersonal influence’, ‘social astuteness’, and ‘motivation’.

While determining the impact of entrepreneurs’ skills on social networks, Ferris et al. (2005) revealed that political skill helps to derive positive outcomes because it influences the people to work

more efficiently in the workplaces specifically through negotiation and persuasion. In this context, as per the study findings of Ferris et al. (2005), the association amid social skills of the entrepreneurs and social network building is ascertained from combining communal astuteness with the ability to adjust different behaviors of the members in changing situations. Harris et al. (2007) argued that political skill is a comparatively new construct, which is theoretically dissimilar from the other social effectiveness measures including social intelligence, self-monitoring or social expertise. This distinction is due to the political skill particularly related to work interactions in the respective workplace. In agreement with the study outcomes of Brouer et al. (2015) and Harris et al. (2007) highlighted the effects of political skill, particularly on impression management. Since political skill holds the capacity to implement social cues for understanding people in the workplace, impression management of the entrepreneurs is likely to be developed at an extensive level.

In Tang (2010), it is mentioned that entrepreneurship involves the procedure of exploitation, opportunity recognition, and valuation. Based on the observation made by Tang (2010), entrepreneurial opportunities in the forms of developing existing products and/or services of a firm, following agile production methods and reinforcing decision-making procedures certainly have an impact over the social network building. With respect to the study findings of Tocher et al. (2012), the influence of entrepreneurs' skills on social networks can be determined by accumulating valuable resources specifically from the network members and conducting extreme re-

search over social competencies. This influence also becomes apparent during the situation when the activities of other members in the workplace are successful as well as clearly understood by the respective entrepreneurs in a specific business, operational or an organizational setting (Lim & Cu, 2012). With regard to the study findings presented by Kacmar et al. (2013), the social learning theory can be duly considered in order to determine the positive correlation persisting amid social network building and entrepreneurs' social skills. According to this particular theory, individuals learn how to develop social skills and thereby build strong networks by paying utmost attention to the role models that help to determine the values and the behavioral attitudes of others (Kacmar et al., 2013).

*Proposition 1: Entrepreneurs' social skill is positively related to social network building.*

In relation to the study findings of Tocher et al. (2012), it can be stated that social network building is necessary to facilitate the entrepreneurs in operating successfully in the new ventures by maintaining effective communication between the customers, employees and the potential stakeholders. In this context, the social astuteness aspect of political skill may help the entrepreneurs to build social networks by assisting opportunity recognition and moderating the affiliation existing amid job performance and personal initiative evaluation (Wihler et al., 2017). These factors are expected to support the entrepreneurs in learning and advancing various social skills including social perception, persuasion along with influence, impression management and social adaptability (Zhao et al., 2010). As identified

by Bolander et al. (2015) and Harris et al. (2007), the skill of social perception may facilitate collective network building by correctly perceiving the intentions, moods and the emotions of others.

This certainly supports the entrepreneurs in carrying out their respective businesses successfully by selecting as well as recruiting better job applicants and undertaking the negotiation procedure to deal with any issue (Tang, 2010). Moreover, selecting right partners and chief employees through the skill of social perception is expected to help the entrepreneurs in building strong networks, thereby raising the possibility to earn maximum profits. The ability of the entrepreneurs to motivate their employees by encouraging social perception skills and network building eventually raises the prospect to attain long-term success (Baron & Markman, 2000).

Impression management is one of the social skills, which not only helps the entrepreneurs to build strong networks but also ensures long-term sustainability in the respective markets or industries wherein they operate by inducing positive responses in others (Brouer et al., 2015; Talbot & Boiral, 2018). Under this circumstance, Baron and Markman (2000) mentioned that persuading optimistic reactions in others can be made possible by agreeing with their own ideas or concepts and delivering gifts to them during an initial meeting. Moreover, skills with respect to impression management are positively associated with social network building, as it is viewed as an essential element for the entrepreneurs to acquire the capital required for conducting any business (Baron & Markman, 2000; Arnold et al., 2017; Roussy & Rodrigue, 2018). With

respect to the study findings of Baron and Markman (2000), the social skill of persuasion and influence has the ability to build effective and strong networks for the entrepreneurs by transforming the emotions and behavioral attitudes of others in desired directions. However, it is argued that individuals largely vary in their capacity to use this kind of social skill, which may not enable them to attain any predetermined objective such as long-term sustainability (Baron & Markman, 2000).

Furthermore, the positive association amid entrepreneurs' social network and their related skills can be determined from their ability to socially adapt towards reaping several significant benefits. These benefits are likely to be gained by enabling the entrepreneurs to form an organizational setting wherein innovation thrives (Ferris et al., 2005, Arnold et al., 2017).

#### *Social Network and Tacit Knowledge*

An individual knowledge such as tacit is viewed as an asset for an entrepreneurship firm, as this leads towards the increased competitive position and long-term success through the retention of a skilled workforce. The fact cannot be ignored that knowledge sharing within the organizational workforce is a vital determinant for the entrepreneurs to attract more customers, increase product/service sales, retain a qualified workforce as well as ensure higher competitive position as compared to others. Knowledge can be of dissimilar types such as explicit, tacit and implicit that is quite important and essential to consider by the entrepreneurs in the recent context for the purpose of retaining competitiveness (Jafari et al., 2011). In

this study, the utmost focus is levied on discussing tacit knowledge, as the proposition i.e. “Social network is positively related to tacit knowledge acquisition” has to be proposed and justified. In this regard, according to Tamzini et al. (2016; p. 2) defined tacit knowledge as “opposed to explicit knowledge, is a form of impossible knowledge (or very difficult) to translate in a speech: it is incommunicable through language.”

Based on this definition, the distinct characteristics of tacit knowledge are identified as it is difficult to formalize and be context-specific in nature. Moreover, the other facets of tacit knowledge represent that the knowledge is deemed to be personal as well as practical, which explains a procedure to the respective organizational members about any business or operational procedure (Tamzini et al., 2016).

Perez-Luno et al. (2016) asserted that the capacity to shift and gather knowledge throughout the boundaries of a firm is a major influencing factor towards the growth and progression of a firm. The study findings of Perez-Luno et al. (2016) highlighted that the competitive landscape is embodied by several crucial factors that encompass intense business market competition, constricted product lifecycles, and disruptive market conditions along with changing preferences or the choices of the customers. Holste and Fields (2009) argued in this context that the construction of the social network and the presence of tacit knowledge can together develop the competitive landscape, which presently exists in this modern financial world. This can be carried out by facilitating observations and imitations about the operating procedures and

the organizational tactics used by the entrepreneurs. In relation to the study findings of Holste and Fields (2009), it has been apparent that face-to-face interaction is often regarded as one of the fundamental procedures towards shifting the tacit knowledge within an entrepreneurial firm. Therefore, the uncertainty, as well as the risk levels that are related to tacit knowledge of an entity, is diminished through the formation, development and the maintenance of trusting relationships (Holste & Fields, 2009; Chen et al., 2018). This evidence of establishing trusting relationships between the members of the organization eventually portrays a positive relationship between the social network created and the acquisition of tacit knowledge.

Based on the observation made by Holste and Fields (2009), transfers of tacit knowledge are identified to be both formal and informal in nature. According to Holste and Fields (2009), the formal transfers of tacit knowledge appear from any sort of training or conference incident, while the sources of the informal transfers include casual social networks, interdepartmental taskforces, and workforce interfaces. These identified sources of the formal transfers eventually decipher a positive association amid social network and acquisition of tacit knowledge. In the context of determining the impact of entrepreneurs’ social skill on the social network and tacit knowledge acquisition, Yew and Gomez (2014) mentioned that the entrepreneurs, whether large or small, can perform tacit knowledge acquisition procedure successfully by coherently coordinating organizational as well as managerial capabilities. This specific approach may eventually support the entrepreneurs to respond to various is-

sues such as frequently transforming market demands, control patterns and ownership structures. Yew & Gomez (2014) and Holste & Fields (2009) argued in this context that tacit knowledge can be cultivated within the entrepreneurial firms by adopting numerous initiatives that embrace reinforcing administrative coordination through the use of advanced managerial procedures and nurturing organizational abilities via the progression of research and development (R&D) methods. As stated by Yew and Gomez (2014), R&D is important to consider for the purpose of fostering tacit knowledge within the entrepreneurship firms because it can facilitate innovation.

It is clear that tacit knowledge acquisition and sharing amid the members of a specific entrepreneurship firm is imperative for developing collective performance (Chen et al., 2018). In this context, social networks and related skills have been playing a critical role in improvising collective performance of the entrepreneurship members by encouraging sharing of valuable ideas or concepts with one another (Perru-Smith, & Mannucci, 2017; Lamine, 2018). This can further provide the opportunity to measure individual performances based on the given feedbacks. Ngah and Jusoff (2009) identified that knowledge exists within the human minds, which possesses three particular dimensions entailing depth, width, and tacitness. The name tacitness itself suggests that it is related to tacit knowledge, which is quite difficult to acquire and imitate as per the expectation level. Tacit knowledge can be duly expressed through social networks and ability applications that are easily transferred through varied forms (Lin & Lo, 2015).

Thus, it is viewed as one of the strengths of an entrepreneurship firm, which supports the creation of various long-term benefits such as increased competitive position, developed operational productivity, augmented product sales and enlarge profits at the end of fiscal year. According to Ngah and Jusoff (2009), the association amid social networks and tacit knowledge acquisition in an entrepreneurial setting is determined from capturing, arranging, re-implementing and shifting tacit knowledge, which resides within different entrepreneurial firms. The chief facets of this specific form of knowledge such as personal compatibility, opportunism and transaction cost analysis eventually help the entrepreneurs to retain competitiveness by strengthening social networks and developing communication levels to the maximum possible extent (Ngah & Jusoff, 2009).

*Proposition 2: The social network is positively related to tacit knowledge acquisition.*

While examining the impact of social skills of the entrepreneurs on 'social network' and acquisition of tacit knowledge, Park et al. (2012) inferred that the gathering of tacit knowledge in any entrepreneurial setting encourages several significant aspects i.e. innovation, sustained organizational learning and creativity. This eventually contributes into reinforcing competitive position of the entrepreneurial firms by a certain level. According to Park et al. (2012), social networks and relations along with their own behavioral attributes ensure smooth information transfer within the organizational settings, specifically in relation to tacit knowledge. Based on this notion, a positive association exists between the

variables of social network and tacit knowledge acquisition, which further contributes into greater organizational growth and enhanced competitive position within the respective markets where individual firms perform their respective operations (Park et al., 2012). As per the study results of Yew and Gomez (2014), Park et al. (2012) and Ngah and Jusoff (2009), it has been apparent that tacit knowledge is not easy to acquire and transfer within an entrepreneurial setting due to its inimitable nature. Since Park et al. (2012) stated in this context that tacit knowledge is not retrieved by mere observations, but it specifically requires a two-way interaction with an active involvement of the entrepreneurial members. Moreover, the role of social network and its connection with tacit knowledge acquisition eventually becomes apparent in this case. Similar findings can also be witnessed in the study of Ngah and Jusoff (2009), wherein it is mentioned that strong social network building and formation along with the maintenance of cordial social relations may help the modern entrepreneurs to cope up with the peril of losing core competencies by a certain degree.

According to Perraton and Tarrant (2007), humans including the entrepreneurs belonging to this globalized business environment and technology-driven era are capable enough to perform complex actions routinely by connecting with others and understanding their behavioral attitudes, emotions, and motives as well. Therefore, it can be critically commented that social network and acquisition of tacit knowledge are positively related to one another, resulting in increased competitive positions of entrepreneurial firms that are performing

businesses in this present era. Based on the study findings presented by Park et al. (2012), it is clear that the procedure of tacit knowledge acquisition involves the resource-based viewpoint, which triggers the need for the entrepreneurial firms to use critical resources that are quite inimitable in nature.

It is believed that constructing social networks and forming, developing as well as preserving cordial social relations with others may facilitate the modern entrepreneurs not only to obtain numerous major advantages but also to ensure their sustainability for an extended time (Park et al., 2012; Perraton & Tarrant, 2007). Since Tamzini et al. (2016) elaborated the fact that tacit knowledge acquisition is context-specific and personal in nature, it also depicts a definite procedure to support the entities to successfully accomplish their preset targets. Therefore, under this circumstance, forming social networks and maintaining effective relations with the respective members of an organization impose a significant impact on the social skills of the entrepreneurs by an extensive degree.

## Discussion

According to the literature review findings derived for this particular research paper, it can be claimed that the social skills of the entrepreneurs impose a significant impact on the social network as well as tacit knowledge acquisition. Based on this identified issue, two plans have been proposed in the literature review and propositions development section that is listed below.

*Proposition 1: Entrepreneurs' social skill is positively related to social*



*network building.*

*Proposition 2: The social network is positively related to tacit knowledge acquisition.*

With regard to Proposition 1 framed for this study, it is identified that the various social skills of an entrepreneur fundamentally comprise social perception, social adaptability and impression management, which certainly have an impact on the social network in one way or the other. For instance, social perception, acting as one of the communal skills of an entrepreneur, strongly influence social networks by facilitating wider adaptability in any specific business, operational or entrepreneurial setting.

The literature review outcomes retrieved for this specific research paper illustrated that the mentioned social skills of an entrepreneur are positively correlated to social network building, as these tend to tie distinct organizational members for ensuring better information and resource flow. Since face-to-face interactions are limited in the case of building social networks amid the organizational members, it can be argued that the entrepreneurs might face the issue of losing their core competencies by a certain level. Under this circumstance, the skill of social perception may have an impact on the entrepreneurs' social networks, as it encourages them to identify and understand the perceptions, motives or the intents of others (Tang, 2010; Zhao et al., 2010).

According to the literature review results, political skill is recognized as one of the aspects, which tends to develop the social networks of the entre-

preneurs by making others to understand the nature of free enterprise and its impacts on the organizational structures (Banister & Meriac, 2015). In relation to Proposition 2 designed for this study, it was observed that social network has a positive association with the acquisition of tacit knowledge, which strongly influences the performance of an entrepreneurial firm in terms of gaining a higher competitive position as compared to others. Based on the outcomes retrieved from literature review, the distinctive facets of tacit knowledge encompass creativity, continued organizational learning and innovation at the optimum level (Park et al., 2012).

Therefore, the formation of social networks facilitates the smooth functioning of the tacit knowledge acquisition procedure by establishing, developing as well as preserving two-way communication within the entrepreneurial members. Moreover, the positive relationship between social network and tacit knowledge acquisition procedure can be determined from certain specific factors that encompass interpersonal influence, social astuteness and networking ability among others. These aspects not only facilitate the entrepreneurs to acquire a clear understanding about any non-obvious prospect but also enable them to find ways to raise their position in the market by enhancing their competitive advantage among its competitors (Bolander et al., 2015; Brouer et al., 2015).

## Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the social skills of the entrepreneurs have a strong, direct and positive influence on the two most im-

portant factors i.e. social network and acquisition of tacit knowledge. Based on the literature review findings obtained for the research paper, the impacts of entrepreneurs' social skills such as social perception and impression management on social networks are found to be imperative.

Moreover, it is also considered to be the factors responsible for raising overall effectiveness in making interactions with others, preserving accuracy in pointing out the emotion or the motives of others and developing talent to learn anything in distinct social circumstances. From the perspective of communal effectiveness constructs, the influences of entrepreneurs' social skills on societal networks are apparent in the form of engaging purposeful attempts and interpersonal influences towards the attainment of optimistic work-related objectives. Similar to the social network, the impact of different social skills that are possessed by the entrepreneurs is also apparent on the acquisition of tacit knowledge in a particular operational or an organizational setting. This impact can be duly measured in varied forms that entail facilitating the modern entrepreneurs to establish two-way communication procedure, strengthening procedures of decision-making and obtaining valuable resources from every entrepreneurial member.

The influence of the entrepreneurs' social skills on knowledge acquisition becomes evident during the situation when the individual organizational members feel the necessity to develop their skills in order to fulfil their personal and organizational targets. Therefore, strong social network building and better acquirement of tacit knowledge

procedures are expected to help the entrepreneurs to obtain a competitive edge in the market as compared to its competitors.

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