

Hybrid Networks and Early Internationalization: Evidence from Born Global Firms in Crunchbase

Suzan Abuhlawah

Seville University, Spain

Abstract

Born Global Firms (BGs) are known for their early and rapid entry into international markets, challenging traditional models of international expansion. While network relationships are recognized as critical drivers of such early internationalization, the distinct effects of relational ties—such as angel investors, mentors, or incubators—remain underexplored. Grounded in Network Theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV), this pilot study examines Crunchbase data from 30 digital BGs founded between 2010 and 2020. It investigates the influence of relational ties, structural ties, and their intersection as hybrid networks on the speed of first foreign market entry. Results show that while relational ties alone do not exhibit a statistically significant effect, structural ties are positively and significantly related to faster internationalization. Firms with hybrid network configurations appear to benefit most in early global scaling. These findings offer a novel lens into the configuration of network-based resources in digitally enabled entrepreneurship. The paper contributes both theoretically—by clarifying how distinct network forms enable early market entry—and practically, by informing accelerators, founders, and policy actors about the strategic value of combining informal trust with formal institutional support.

Keywords: accelerators; digital entrepreneurship; internationalization speed; relational ties; structural networks