

Malay Entrepreneurs' Narrative of a Social Network through the Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract:

Social network relationships in the field of entrepreneurship are a form of social relationships between entrepreneurs and social network actors formed through social interaction. This study aims to identify the type of social network possessed by Malay entrepreneurs and the benefits of each actor's social network. This study employs a qualitative approach using interviews with 20 respondents representing small and medium Malay entrepreneurs opening businesses in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. The selection of respondents for the study used the purposive sampling method. The main characteristics of the selection of participants are small and medium entrepreneurs (SME) who have annual sales of over MYR300, 000 or have at least five employees. Qualitative data analysis is thematic using the ATLAS.ti software. The results of the study found that social networks through strong and weak affiliations play an important role in business survival. Networking, regardless of whether they are strong or weak, can help Malays' small and medium entrepreneurs acquire raw material resources, financial assistance, business information, market strategy, guidance, and advice needed in their business survival. In conclusion, social networking as an embedded social structure of social processes helps to maintain business survival and to compete in the market. The study shows that Malays' small and medium entrepreneurs need to build a social network through integration with the business community and social institutions. Apart from that, the government should also review its entrepreneurship policy by paying attention to the needs of small and medium businesses.

Keywords: Malay entrepreneurs, social network, strength of ties, small and medium entrepreneurs.

马来企业家通过现象学方法讲述社交网络

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摘要:

创业领域的社交网络关系是企业家与社交网络参与者之间通过社交互动而形成的一种社会关系形式。本研究旨在确定马来企业家拥有的社交网络类型以及每个参与者社交网络的好处。本研究采用定性方法，对代表在马来西亚瓜拉丁加奴创业的中小型马来企业家的 20 名受访者进行了访谈。研究受访者的选择采用了目的抽样方法。挑选参与者的主要特点是年销售额超过 300,000 令吉或至少拥有 5 名员工的中小型企业（中小企业）。定性数据分析是使用 ATLAS.ti 软件进行的主题分析。研究结果发现，社交网络通过强弱关系在企业生存中发挥着重要作用。网络，无论强弱，都可以帮助马来中小型企业获得企业生存所需的原材料资源、财务援助、商业信息、市场策略、指导和建议。总之，社交网络作为社会过程的嵌入式社会结构有助于维持企业生存并在市场中竞争。研究显示，马来中小型企业需要通过与其商界和社会机构的融合来建立社交网络。除此之外，政府还应检讨创业政策，关注中小型企业的需求。

关键词: 马来企业家、社交网络、关系强度、中小型企业。

1. Introduction

In general, many researchers explain that social networking is an important factor in influencing sustainability in the field of entrepreneurship (Bansal et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2017; Greco & Jong, 2017). As for the concept of social networks, various aspects that are of interest to researchers, such as strong and weak ties, are the main aspects of social networking and are an important variable network in a topic of discussion (Lux et al., 2016). The influence of social networks provides various benefits to entrepreneurs such as acquiring new opportunities, obtaining human resources, financial resources, and knowledge sharing from social networking actors that provide opportunities for success in business (Agbim, 2019; Klyver et al., 2018; Lux et al., 2016). Having a social network of a certain quantity and quality, such as professional as well as well managed, is very important for entrepreneurs, especially at the stage of starting a new business.

The topic of social networking is a topic of interest to researchers, especially in the field of organisational behaviour and management studies, especially after the study by Granovetter (1973), who emphasised the "economic action that exists through personal relationships in a social network rather than individuals". Granovetter places emphasis on the analysis of the social relationships and network structures that exist among entrepreneurs who play a role in business activities (Greve & Salaff, 2003). Although the study of social networking in business has been done by many previous researchers, in developing countries such as Malaysia, the study on the role of social networking in business is still lacking (Surin et al., 2015; Surin & Wahab, 2013). Therefore, to discuss the context of social networks in the field of entrepreneurship, the concept of strong and weak relationships by Granovetter (1973) is used as a guide to analyze social relationships that emphasize the characteristics of networks, network formation process, and the effect of networks on entrepreneurs in performing business activities, especially in obtaining information, business opportunities, and production

resources. Therefore, this article aims to study the types and roles of social networks and understand how social networks help Malay entrepreneurs in conducting business activities to ensure business survival.

2. Literature Review

According to Granovetter (1973), the strength of ties in a social network is defined as a strong relationship or intensity and quality or diversity that can be distinguished from weak ties and strong ties based on time period, emotions in relationships, intimacy, and reciprocal relationship. To distinguish between two types of ties, namely strong ties and weak ties, Granovetter (1973) describes how diverse ties, homogeneity and heterogeneity, affect individual actions. In fact, he also explained that the network should consist of strong and weak networks because the nature of the network influences the operation and structure of the network. A discussion of the types of entrepreneurial networks (strong ties and weak ties) should be discussed together in explaining the role of assisting entrepreneurs in running a business. In fact, entrepreneurs who involve strong and weak ties in business are more successful in obtaining innovative opportunities, information, and actions than those who use only strong or weak ties alone (Elfring & Hulsink, 2007; Singh et al., 1999).

According to the model of strong and weak ties introduced by Granovetter (1973), strong ties can be explained through relationships between individuals who have high levels of emotion or close relationships and the existence of frequent interactions to produce a trusting relationship (Greve & Salaff, 2003). Strong ties relationships are built as a result of long-standing relationships and mutual acquaintance with each other (Birley, 1985; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003). tie relationships are also built on trust (Lechner, et al., 2006). Strong kinship relationships built on trust produce reliable feedback (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003), where strong kinship relationships can be used as a source to obtain knowledge and information and at the same time solve problems encountered. This allows information and support to be obtained from the strong

network contacts they have, and even knowledge and experience are resources for building strong relationships (Jack, 2005).

In the field of entrepreneurship, strong networking provides advantages to entrepreneurs, including knowledge sharing (Johannisson, 1986) and providing resources that help entrepreneurs at the stage of building and growing businesses (Jack, 2005). Among entrepreneurs, the foundation of building strong network relationships is determined by knowledge, experience, and beliefs that develop over time (Jack, 2005). In contrast, relationships with family and friends are strong (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Granovetter, 1973; Treffers et al, 2019). This is because relationships with family and friends have long existed in the social system. According to Granovetter (1985: 490), information and support obtained from strong ties provide various advantages such as being cheaper, reliable, more detailed, and accurate through established relationships, and for economic aspects, the information obtained is reliable. Thus, Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) suggested that hiring among individuals who are close to entrepreneurs (strong ties) such as family and friends can reduce labor costs because they can pay lower wages than the current market. According to Jack (2005), strong ties are analyzed due to the type of information and its use in business. Other researchers analyze strong ties according to key characteristics such as close, strong and friendly relationships with network actors (Lechner, et al., 2006).

Regarding weak ties, Granovetter (1973) explained that weak ties are relationships between individuals who have low levels of emotions or are not close and have less interaction with each other. Sources for obtaining new information depend on the number of frequent social contacts or interactions with weak acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973). Thus, a weak ties relationship occurs if there is a need in the business with an individual who is not close, as opposed to a strong ties relationship that is emotional and close in nature. In the context of entrepreneurship, social network studies focus on weak ties relationships with an emphasis on the role of the entrepreneur acting as a broker in a broad social network in which there are a number of weak network actors (Krackhardt, 1992). According to Granovetter (1973), weak network actors are important as bridges that help connect unconnected actors in a social network and help connect actors at various social levels. Burt (1992) agrees with Granovetter (1973) on the concept of broker in explaining weak network relationships by introducing Structural Hole Theory, which asserts that entrepreneurs act as brokers to gain a number of advantages or benefits in obtaining useful information in business and business opportunities that can be derived from strong network contacts (Burt, 1992). He also explains that sources for obtaining latest information do not entirely depend on frequency in relationships. In fact, the latest information can be obtained from weak ties relationships that are rarely

connected but remain in touch (Burt, 1992). Thus, in the field of entrepreneurship, weak ties are identified and characterized as individuals who are in different groups such as customers, suppliers, financial institutions, and any individuals who communicate infrequently, and the effect of these weak ties results in access to diverse and broader information than known individuals (Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

Moreover, weak ties in business networks tend to get to know each other by engaging in networking activities to get to know new individuals or build new ties relationships, thereby shaping social network structures (Aldrich, Reese, & Dubini, 1989; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). For example, participation in exhibition programs such as business expos or being a member of a trade association involving suppliers and entrepreneurs plays a role in building friendships (new contacts) and information sharing, which in turn forms a business network (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003;). This agrees with the opinion of Granovetter (1973), who explained that it is easier to retain and gain new information in business when building relationships with weak ties actors (customers, suppliers, and others) than with strong ties actors (family and relatives). To explain the importance of weak ties to entrepreneurs, at the stage of building and developing a business of weak ties, try to get to know each other even if there are some who do not meet the needs in the business. However, in some circumstances, the role of weak ties also provides benefits in business over time and transforms into strong ties (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Jack, 2005). This agrees with the statement of Singh et al. (1999), who explained that entrepreneurs who involve strong ties and weak ties in business are more successful in obtaining opportunities and information than using only strong ties or weak ties only.

Thus, strong and weak ties are seen to have different values and benefits and are required by entrepreneurs to manage a business. Social networks play an important role for entrepreneurs, such as the ability to obtain resources (material and non-material) from the business building stage to the business growing stage. In fact, social networking is also an important factor influencing business survival. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the extent to which social networks affect the business survival of Malay entrepreneurs and identifies the types of social networks possessed by Malay entrepreneurs.

3. Research Methodology

A study on the role and importance of social networks on the survival of Malay SME entrepreneurs was conducted in mid-2018. This study uses a phenomenological approach to describe and define the experiences and knowledge of social actors (entrepreneurs) about social networks based on their worldview. Interviews between researchers and informants focused on the role of social networks, their uses, and the process of network formation that impacts

business survival. One of the best instruments of data under the qualitative method is in-depth interviews (Ibrahim & Lyndon, 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Malay entrepreneurs with the selection of a sample using the snowball sampling method. The researcher has set the characteristics of entrepreneurs who are eligible to be informants in the study as hiring at least five employees with a minimum annual income of RM300, 000, and does not set different company sizes and types of businesses that do not focus on specific business areas. This distinction provides an advantage for examining management systems in small and medium enterprises. Different types of business open up opportunities for the study of interesting cultural patterns in different business sectors. To obtain data on Malay entrepreneurs, an interview was conducted with officers of the Entrepreneur Development Foundation (*Yayasan Pembangunan Usahawan*) to obtain profiles of Malay entrepreneurs, such as business location. The in-depth interview method using voice recording tape was implemented because it can stimulate a long conversation by giving the informants the opportunity to express their experiences and opinions. All interviews were copied and formatted for inclusion in the Atlas.ti database and used to create data categories and indexes. This method also allows the researcher to categorize the themes neatly and systematically and allows the processing and analysis of the data to be done carefully. To protect the informant's personal information, the informant's name is replaced with P (participant).

4. Findings

4.1. Informants' Profile

Table 1 shows the profiles of the informants involved in the study. Of the total 20 informants, 14 were male entrepreneurs and six were female entrepreneurs. The youngest age of the informants in the study was less than 30 years and the oldest age was more than 61 years. For the respondents' level of education, the lowest level of education is Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), while the highest level of education is Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.). As for the business background of the informants, the results showed that the majority of them (70%) were not previously involved in business, while the rest (30%) were involved in business. As for the family background, half of the total respondents had a family background that conducted business activities. However, only 10% of the respondents run family business activities. As for the type of business ownership, most entrepreneurs (75%) are joint business owners, and only 5% are sole proprietors.

Table 1 Informant profiles (Field study, 2018)

Informants' data	Percentage (%)
Gender	

Male	70
Female	30
Age	
Less than 30	5
30 to 35	10
36 to 40	30
41 to 45	5
46 to 50	15
51 to 55	10
56 to 60	15
Above 61	10
Education	
SPM	35
Certificate	10
Diploma/STPM	30
Bachelor's Degree	10
Master's Degree	10
PhD	5
Previous work experience	
Self-employed (business)	30
Self-employed (not in business)	25
Work with government agencies	15
Work with private agencies	25
Unemployed	5
Parents involved in business	
Mother and father	20
Father only	30
Mother only	-
None	50
The type of business	
New business	90
Family business	10
The type of business ownership	
Sole-proprietorship	25
Partnership	75
Experience in business (years)	
Less than 5	15
5 to 10	25
11 to 15	20
16 to 20	10
21 to 25	5

Continuation of Table 1

26 to 30	20
Above 30	5
Business sector	
Food	35
Animal Husbandry	20
Service	25
Handicraft	20
Number of employees (persons)	
5 to 30	80
More than 30	20

Furthermore, 15% of the respondents in this study had less than 5 years of business experience, and only 5% of the respondents had more than 30 years of business experience. For the business sector, 35% were in the food sector, 25% were in the services sector, and 20% were in the livestock and handicraft sectors. For the number of employees, the researcher has categorized the number of employees according to the definition of the official measure of small and medium enterprises referenced from the official website of SME Corp Malaysia (2020). According to the definition from SME Corp Malaysia 2015, businesses with less than 5 employees are categorized as micro-businesses, while employees in the range of 5 to 30 people are categorized as small businesses, and the number of employees with more than 30 employees is categorized as medium businesses. In this study, most respondents have 5 to 30 employees, which accounts for small businesses (80%), and the remaining 20% of respondents have more than 30 employees, which can be defined as medium business.

4.2. Types and Roles of Social Networks in the Sustainability of Businesses Owned by Malay Entrepreneurs

The types and roles of social networks in the survival of Malay small and medium businesses are divided into two categories: primary and secondary.

4.2.1. Primary Social Network

The results of the study found that the primary network relationships or strong ties in this study were family (husband and wife, parents, siblings, children, relatives), close friends, business network friends, suppliers, employees, customers, mentors, and partners. Each actor plays a unique role in assisting entrepreneurs in running a business, whether sharing information, knowledge, or emotional support. This network is an embedded network (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Granovetter, 1985) since the entrepreneur is born (family) and in the world of work (friends). The relationship with the primary network involves the sharing and exchange of various activities. For business

activities, personal networks are used for information sharing and resource exchange (Johannisson, 1986).

Family network consists of spouses, parents, siblings, children, and relatives. The majority of informants in the study explained that family plays a crucial role in entrepreneurs, especially in providing emotional support. This can be proven through the statement of an informant, P9, who stated (translated from the Malay language to the English language):

“My brother understands me; he is always there for moral support. Sometimes I even have days of frustration and lack of enthusiasm. So, sometimes my brother calls to ask about my wellbeing” (P9).

In addition to emotional support, the family also plays a role in business affairs, such as providing capital assistance, channeling the latest information, creating business opportunities, providing assistance, and giving advice. This statement can be explained through statements in (P10) and (P9) as follows:

“My uncle helps me when I have no capital. I am close to my uncle, and he knows I am passionate about business, so he helps me by lending me money” (P10).

“My wife is conducting all the research. She helps me find potential market and shares suggestions for new products. My wife is my main motivation” (P9).

The results also explain that the family is a strong network. Individuals who are close to the respondents play an important role in assisting the informant in managing the business. The family network is a strong network built on the trust that was built before they became engaged in the business world. Family ties emphasize family values, where trust is the core of the family network. Belief in family relationships can be demonstrated through involvement in business activities and the support provided, belief in the information shared, and belief in the knowledge possessed by family members. This can be explained through a statement by an informant (P15):

“I choose my brother to manage the company because, at the beginning of the business, I lacked money and needed the closest person who can be trusted so as not to be cheated by others because it involves money, and I am still lacking in the knowledge related to business” (P15).

This explains that there is an exchange relationship on the basis of mutual trust between the informant and family members in getting help and solving problems in the business. In business, personal networking is a tool used by entrepreneurs to exchange information and obtain resources (Johannisson (1986). This clearly shows that strong relationships are important in supporting business activities and are also a place for informants to share problems and discuss solutions to problems encountered. Since family members are close and trusted individuals, informants can avoid the risk of business loss such as fraud, especially in the early stages of starting a business. Usually, in this initial stage, business persons have limited resources and no trustworthy individuals other than family members.

Personal network: The research findings illustrate

that there are informants who do not involve their family members in the business. Although family members are the closest individuals to the informant, not all family members can provide help and assistance to the informant in managing their business. As such, informants in this category build relationships with individuals who are able to provide benefits and advantages in business, such as information, resources, and skills not possessed by informant family members. Individuals involved in personal networking include close friends, suppliers, employees, business networking friends, partners, investors, customers, and mentors.

The majority of respondents understood the perception of strong network relationships that are closely related to strong relationships, as described by Granovetter (1973). Strong relationships consist of individuals who know each other and each has their own knowledge and experience. Strong relationships are founded from close relationships between individuals that are built on the advantages each individual possesses and ultimately create long-term relationships. Moreover, close ties with network contacts result from social council participation, informal arrangements, and previous work experience, resulting in close ties in strong kinship networks (Dodd & Patra, 2002; Granovetter, 1973; Koning, 2003). This statement is in line with the findings of the study, in which the informant stated the following:

“When I want to get information related to green technology, I will go to the ministry related to green technology. After that, I participated in organized courses and training. I met a lot of people from different backgrounds. Although initially, not a good friend, but over time my relationship with them became a good friend. We are always in touch, share problems faced, share opinions and others” (P9).

The statement by the (P9) informant stated the strong kinship relationship, which started from the participation in formal programs organized by the government. Informants get to know each other who have different backgrounds and experiences. Every contact has the same purpose in business, which is to find information and opportunities in business. Since each contact has its own distinct advantages and is seen to be able to provide an advantage in business, informants build social relationships that start through social interaction and subsequently form a strong network of relationships in business.

To discuss the relationship between interactions in strong networks, Granovetter (1973) describes the frequency of social interactions with entrepreneurs in strong relationships at least three times a week. Accordingly, the findings of the study are not in line with Granovetter's statement that strong relationships do not necessarily require frequency in interaction relationships, but strong relationships can also be built through the advantages and benefits that can be gained because of social relationships with strong network contacts. This fact can be proven through the following

statement of the informant:

“I often meet other entrepreneurs every 3 to 4 months through expos held by government agencies. We get to know each other while participating in expos such as the National Craft Day, which is held once a year in Kuala Lumpur” (P14).

The informant (P14) explained that the frequency of social interactions in this study is not in line with Granovetter (1973). The frequency of social interaction among informants depends on the business' needs. Starting from the contacts resulting from the participation of entrepreneurship programs, whether organized by the government or social programs, the relationship becomes closer and forms a strong network.

For a business organization a strong network consists of two groups, namely mutual relationships of contacts within the organization and contacts outside the organization. Both of these groups are contacts who forge close ties with entrepreneurs. Strong networks within organizations are employees, partners and board members who are directly involved in the affairs of the business organization and business discussions (Hansen, 1995; Jack, 2005). In fact, family and relatives are also known as close personal relationships (Riquelme, 2013), which is also a strong network in business organizations for some entrepreneurs. Meanwhile, a strong network outside the organization involves contacts such as suppliers, close friends, business network partners, mentors and customers, which serve to help entrepreneurs by providing guidance, financial assistance, opinions, information, resources and evaluation in an action that can help entrepreneurs manage and grow businesses. The following is an informant's statement about the role of strong networks in the organization:

“As a company director, there will be a point where our mind. Therefore, I need people who can support me. You can't do it alone. I conducted research with my staff and planned strategies. I also need a partner who can take care of my staff and customers, provide support and motivation toward the staff, come up with a strategy, and so on” (P12).

The above statement clarifies that the informant is unable to manage the business alone. A strong network in the organization plays a crucial role in ensuring that all business operations and activities function properly so that the goals of a business organization can be achieved. A strong network in the organization not only conducts business activities but also contributes to providing ideas or information that can be used to solve problems and generate new ideas for these entrepreneurs in growing the business.

At the same time, the role of strong networks outside the business organization also plays an important role in influencing business survival. The following is an informant's statement about the role of strong networks outside the organization:

“Suppliers usually always share information. Suppliers share opinions and information related to

shrimp farming” (P10).

“Since my customers always ask about my product details, I have made improvements to my product packaging to facilitate customers” (P7).

“I usually consult mentors who have business experience up to the corporate level to solve the problem that I face” (P5).

“After I participated in courses and training organized by the ministry, I met many friends from different backgrounds. We are always in touch, share information, share problems faced, share opinions and others” (P9).

Although suppliers, close friends, business networking partners, mentors, and customers are individuals who are not directly involved in business activities, the role they play is crucial for business survival. The role of suppliers is not only to provide raw materials but also to share the latest information and opinions to improve the quality of products and services. Furthermore, the role played by customers in providing feedback on products and services helps entrepreneurs identify problems with a product. In addition, the role of the mentor as a professional individual in providing guidance and advice through extensive knowledge and experience in the business world serves as a source of reference in solving problems faced by them. In addition, the role of business networking partners is vital in influencing informants to make decisions in business dealings. Because some of them operate the same type of business, they share information, opinions, provide assessments, and recommendations in each other’s businesses. The word “share” and “each other” is used to indicate that the relationships forged among business networking partners are reciprocal as they interact. This means that the social relationship formed is based on direct and two-way relationships.

Strong relationships for contacts within the organization and outside the organization with informants are built on trust. From the relationships that are built, trust exists after going through a certain time. Entrepreneurs spend long periods of time with strong networks (contacts within the organization and contacts outside the organization) to build trust in social network relationships. When trust exists, the relationship becomes closer. In personal networks, trust is important (Johannisson, 1986). Respondents in this study built strong trust-based networks resulting from long-term relationships to anticipate the behavior of their acquaintances (Aldrich et al., 1989; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003). The following is the informant’s statement regarding the value of trust between strong network contacts with the informant:

“In the early stages, I did everything. Now I hand everything over to employees according to division or department. We have to trust others. Similarly, with suppliers, I build business capital in terms of trust by providing debt” (P6).

According to the statement of the informant P6 above, the strong relationship between the network

contacts is solid with the informant on a trust basis. Informants and strong network contacts trust each other. The existence of trust between informants and a strong network of relationships allows business activities and transactions to occur. The value of trust gives confidence to both parties. At the same time, the value of trust is not only limited to business operating activities but is also a priority in information sharing and mentoring between informants with strong network contacts. The following is the informant’s statement regarding the value of trust in information sharing and guidance:

“I have a business group where there are mentors who share business, latest information, opinions, and so on. I share and learn a lot with him during those 2 to 3 years” (P16).

“Friends also give many suggestions to improve my business performance, including product quality, business strategy, and potential places to sell products” (P5).

According to the statements of informants (P16) and (P5), there is a close relationship between informants and strong network acquaintances. They share knowledge and information and provide guidance. The findings of this study agree with the statement of Jack (2005), who explained that knowledge and experience are resources for building strong networks. Because of trust, informants are confident in the information shared by strong network contacts. At the same time, the feedback received is trustworthy, and they learn from each other through experience. Informants obtain knowledge and guidance from professional and experienced individuals. Strong network relationships are built and formed by entrepreneurs based on knowledge, experience, and trust over a specific period (Jack, 2005). The result of this strong network relationship provides advantages and benefits to the informants because it can save time, cost, and energy. This explains that strong networks are built on trust through exchange relationships among actors in a social network that benefit the business. Thus, the influence of social networks provides various benefits to entrepreneurs, such as acquiring new opportunities, obtaining human resources, financial resources, and knowledge sharing from social networking actors, which provide opportunities for success in business (Agbim, 2019; Klyver et al., 2018; Lux et al., 2016).

4.2.2. *Secondary Social Networks*

According to the research results, the revealed secondary network relationships or weak ties were government agencies, financial institutions, associations, customers, suppliers, and business network friends. Each actor plays a unique role in assisting entrepreneurs in running a business, whether it is information sharing or experience in the business. According to Granovetter (1973), weak networks can be described as relationships between individuals that show weak or intimate levels of emotion and lack of interaction. In the business world, weak network

contacts consist of a group of individuals of different backgrounds, such as customers, financial institutions, suppliers, and individuals who communicate infrequently (Granovetter 1973, 1995). Weak ties are important in building new business contacts and retaining information within a network that has loose tie bonds (Burt 1992; Granovetter 1995).

Government network: The government, through various agencies in all sectors in Malaysia, plays an important role in helping entrepreneurs conduct business. Various programs, trainings, seminars, and grants are designed by the government to help entrepreneurs conduct business effectively and obtain optimal profits. Government agencies are a weak network for the informants of this study. Infrequent communication and the priority of relationships for business rather than personal relationships are characteristics of weak networks. However, the relationship between informants and government agencies provides various benefits to informants in conducting business. The results of the study found that the Entrepreneur Development Foundation (YPU), owned by the Terengganu state government, is a networking center for informants, which is the main source and reference for informants to discuss business matters. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"YPU provides courses for companies (accounts, how to create papers, customers, marketing, and others" (P10).

"YPU does a lot of expos in Terengganu and outside Terengganu such as Kuala Lumpur. YPU will invite entrepreneurs to participate in the expo. I participated in the expo to introduce my product" (P7).

In addition to providing exhibition venues, courses, and training to informants, YPU also acts as an intermediary with government agencies, private parties, supermarkets, business associations, and banks. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"YPU calls suppliers and supermarkets, for example, Hock Kee Seng, Xiri, and Kasut You. After that, YPU called Terengganu entrepreneurs to create a business network. They will discuss with supermarket owners how to include Malay products in their stores (business matching)" (P7).

"I asked the YPU to help me meet with the correct agencies involved. If I were to go and meet directly, they would most probably not accept my offer. Therefore, the YPU wrote a letter to the Department of Agriculture for an opportunity for me to meet. YPU serves as a mediator" (P9).

The statements of informants (P7) and (P9) expressed the same opinion that YPU plays an important role in helping informants obtain resources and manage their businesses. In addition to helping provide entrepreneurship courses and training, YPU also acts as an intermediary between government agencies and private agencies (banks, supermarkets) and informants. This is in line with what was discussed by Granovetter (1973), who explained the importance

of weak networks as intermediaries (bridges) that help connect unconnected actors in a social network and help them to connect at various social levels.

Financial network: At the start-up or business building stage, in addition to using personal savings, most informants obtain business capital from strong network contacts such as parents, spouses, siblings, and relatives. However, to continue the business, informants need more capital to support increasingly complex business activities. As such, informants forge relationships with the weak networks in the business environment. This is because a weak network has the resources that informants need primarily. Financial resources can only be obtained through financial institutions, namely, banks or government agencies.

According to Birley (1985), banks and government agencies are formal resources aimed at obtaining finance. He added that banks are a source of finance often used by entrepreneurs. The results of the study found that the informant contacted the bank to make a loan after several years of running the business. The following is the informant's statement:

"I started borrowing money from the bank after a year of starting this farm. Once I finished building the pool, the bank became confident and gave me a loan" (P10).

The bank serves as a source of money that enables the informant to continue business activities. Loans provided by financial institutions help informants grow their businesses. However, the results of this study found that financial institutions do not easily provide financial assistance to informants. The financial institution first assesses the performance of the business and approves the loan if it meets the set criteria. It is usually easy for informants to obtain loan assistance from financial institutions after several years of running a business. As such, interactions and relationships with weak networks occur only involving business dealings and according to need and not aimed at establishing close social relationships. The following are the statements of the participants in this study:

"When I faced capital problems, I went to PUNM to restructure the loan, and because the previous loan payment record was good, PUNB approved a new loan" (P16).

The analysis of the informant (P16) statement above explains that the informant will only deal with the financial institution when facing problems. To solve the problems faced, informants should get help from appropriate and trusted sources. Social relationships are built on needs in business and occur infrequently. This agrees with the statement of Dodd and Patra (2002), who explained that interactions with weak networks occur infrequently, for example, once a year.

In addition, the informants of the study also explained that the source of information on assistance or loans from financial institutions is the participation of associations and entrepreneurship expos organized by the government. The following is the informant's statement:

“When I join the WhatsApp group of entrepreneurs under the guidance of any agency, indirectly I will know the assistance and grants that the agency offers” (P19).

The government organizes entrepreneurship courses and seminars to help disseminate information on opportunities and assistance provided by any agency, whether government or private. Through participation in these entrepreneurship courses and seminars, informants can obtain the latest information and assistance that is eligible to be applied for.

Association network: Participation in an association is an option for the entrepreneur to choose whether to join or not. Associations are usually managed or supervised by government agencies. Entrepreneurs who are active in networks, for example, being members of various associations, are able to build relationships. The participation of entrepreneurs in the association aims to provide help, advice, and support among the members of the association. Association is a weak network for informants. The social relationships that are built are weak relationships in which informants and weak network contacts know less about each other, do not interact often, and are less connected. In fact, according to Granovetter (1973), actors in weak networks have weak emotional levels. This explains that the social relationships that are built are not intended to build personal relationships but are aimed at business ventures.

The relationship between the informant and the association provides various benefits to the informant in conducting business. According to Koning (2003), to grow a business, entrepreneurs should build relationships with new acquaintances through active involvement in business activities. As such, the association is not only able to build relationships with new acquaintances but also serves as a reference center for advice and as an intermediary to seek help and voice problems to be conveyed to the authorities. The following is the informant’s statement on the matter:

“The purpose of joining an association is to introduce products, find markets, make friends, and others. Every new person should join an association because we still depend on the help of others. Through the association, many activities and training are provided” (P13).

“Members of the association come from all states. Therefore, we each share information by telling the places of suppliers. Once a year, there is a gathering that gathers and share experiences and information” (P10).

“The activities of this association are to listen to the problems faced by entrepreneurs under PUNB. One example is flood problems. From the meeting between entrepreneurs and PUNB, PUNB approved the deferment of loan repayment” (P16).

The above statement explains that the purpose of informants joining an association is to find opportunities that can be used in their business. The intended opportunity is to find new contacts who have

experience in business, market opportunities, find resources, gain knowledge from participants in courses and training, and so on. The informant (P13) stated that participation in the association is necessary for entrepreneurs who are in the stage of starting a business. This is because knowledge, information resources, and business experience are still insufficient. In addition, informants (P13) and (P10) argued that through participation in associations, they were able to meet various individuals with different backgrounds and experiences, such as entrepreneurs, suppliers, and investors, and subsequently build social relationships. Social relationships are built through social interaction and form the basis of discussions about business dealings with unknown individuals and, in turn, form a weak network relationship. This agrees with the opinion of Koning (2003), who explained that experience and career background help build weak network contacts.

In addition, the association also serves as a reference center in the event of business problems. According to (P16), through the association, he could present the problems faced and discuss solutions. At the same time, the association plays a role in presenting the problems faced by the informants to the authorities. It can be explained that the association functions as an intermediary for informants to voice their problems to the authorities or the government. This is in line with what was discussed by Granovetter (1973), who described the importance of weak networks as intermediaries or bridges that help connect unconnected actors in a social network and connect actors at various social levels.

Friends’ network: Friends are referred to as the people with whom entrepreneurs have established relationships just before or after they venture into business activities. These friends are also involved in business. In addition, they are new in entrepreneurs’ lives and live in various localities. The relationships with these friends are normally unplanned and are due to spontaneous business activities or because they are similar in interest. Therefore, as for the aspect of networking with friends, the results of the study found that business networking with friends are weak network actors who are also able to play an important role in helping informants manage businesses. Friends are weak network actors because the relationships built are weak relationships such as lack of interaction, short relationships, not based on emotional relationships, and are newly built relationships (Granovetter, 1973; Greve & Salaff, 2003; McDonald & Westphal, 2003). The results of the study found that the informants knew the friends they owned, but there was less social interaction. The following is the informant’s statement on the matter:

“Usually, a businessman knowshis friends. For example, a batik entrepreneur gets a project. Not everyone wants to make a shirt from batik, so he offered it to me and told me to make a bag from batik cloth” (P3).

“Sometimes business necessities are expensive in

Terengganu, and my friend who lives outside Terengganu told me the same items can be obtained at a cheap price, so I asked my friend to help me buy and post to Terengganu" (P11).

The P3's statement explained that social relationships with friends have been established but are weak. This is because of the lack of social interaction that weakens the basis of kinship relationships. They know less about each other. This is due to the lack of appeal or benefits that can be derived from the friends it owns. Weak tie relationships produce fluctuating social relationships, such as statement (P11), in which there are infrequent social interactions. Social relationships in weak network relationships occur only for business and not for emotional relationships, as described by Granovetter (1973).

For information sharing activities, most the informants in this study benefited from the results of information sharing from friends. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"We always talk with our fellowsongket entrepreneurs. Always meet and talk through the WhatsApp application. Discuss the latest information" (P14).

"I always visit the ponds of my friends who also farm shrimp. We often exchange ideas and information" (P10).

Statements of (P14) and (P10) explain the results of active social relationships, such as always meeting and discussing business matters, enabling the sharing of information between informants and friends. The frequency of communication between weak ties network contacts ultimately helps to obtain interesting information that can be used in business, such as the business planning process (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Granovetter, 1973; Jack, 2005). The following is an example of an informant's statement regarding interesting information, as discussed by Granovetter.

"I will ask my friends where to get suppliers, which ones are of good quality. My friends directly gave me the supplier's phone number. If there is a problem with the supplier, I will ask my friends" (P4).

"I did not survey all plastic suppliers because there were too many. I couldn't afford it, so I asked my friends which plastic supplier was good and could offer a good price. It's easy to ask friends because they are used to taking stock and supplies with the supplier" (P19).

Statements of (P4) and (P19) give the same opinion that the information shared by friends is information that can benefit them in managing the business. In addition, the sharing of quality information can provide benefits in terms of saving time, energy, and money and, at the same time, can solve the problems faced by informants. Frequency in relationships with weak network actors produces rich and varied information that attracts business owners to build social networks that can ultimately provide benefits in business (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973) and have similarities in business transactions capable of providing business

support (Obschonka et al., 2015).

In addition, friends also play a role in generating new business opportunities as a result of information sharing. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"My friends share a lot of information with me. For example, their experience in exporting products abroad" (P4).

The (P4) statement explained that friends generate ideas for identifying new business opportunities because of information sharing. Information and advice from friends help informants identify risks and opportunities in each business activity. Thus, the findings of this study agree with the statement of Arenius and Clercq (2005), who stated that weak ties actors (who are also newly identified weak ties network actors) play a role in identifying opportunities in business through information sharing.

Since weak ties have a low level of trust, not all information shared by friends is easily accepted and can be used in business. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"When I hang out with customers or network friends, I will get information, but not all the information I get is accurate" (P19).

The statement of (P19) explains that establishing relationships with weak network actors may lead to obtaining rich and diverse information. However, not all of the information shared by weak network actors can be used and have a positive impact on the business. The informant (P19) evaluates each piece of information and only uses information that can benefit the business. Therefore, the level of trust in weak network actors is low. Hence, every piece of information shared by weak network actors needs to be evaluated first before being implemented in the business.

As for the process of building social relationships with friends, the informants in this study stated that weak relationships are built through participation in entrepreneurship programs such as meetings, workshops, courses, and trainings they participate in. The following is the informant's statement on the matter:

"After the course, I made new friends. I know all the information about this raw material from friends who have the same business as me" (P11).

P11 builds social relationships with friends through participation in entrepreneurship programs. As a result of the participation, the respondents could build social relationships with many new acquaintances from diverse backgrounds. The findings of this study agree with Koning's (2003) statement that entrepreneurs build relationships with weak network actors through participation in entrepreneurial activities that are in their environment. Active participation in formal and informal activities becomes the source or foundation of a weak network of relationships (Koning, 2003). The informant (P9) explained that the relationship that was built was originally a weak relationship. After going

through a certain period, the relationship that was built turned into a strong one. This is because active participation in business networking activities and frequency in relationships, such as often sharing problems, giving opinions, and discussing business opportunities, have created the value of mutual trust and become closer ties, where relationship strength is built on common ground and similar goals (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Jack, 2005).

Overall, the findings of the study were obtained through in-depth interviews. Thus, the social networking model in the business survival of Malay small and medium entrepreneurs is constructed as shown in Figure 1. The results of this study prove that social networks play an important role in the business survival of Malay entrepreneurs in Kuala Terengganu. The strength of social networking actors through strong and weak ties helps entrepreneurs obtain raw materials, financial assistance, business information, market strategies, mentoring, and advice needed in business. The impact of the role of social networking helps Malay entrepreneurs to maintain their business and compete in the market.

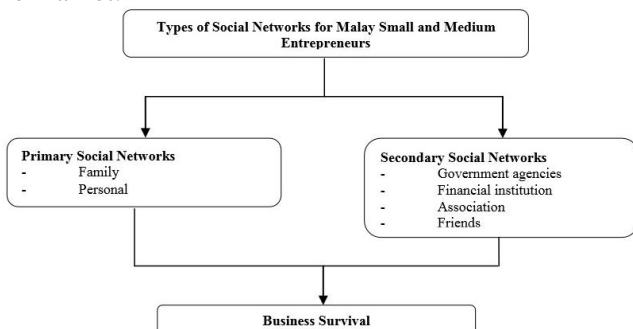


Figure 1. Social networking model for business survival (Field study, 2018)

5. Discussion

The study found that social network relationships between Malay SME entrepreneurs and social network actors form two types of social networks: strong and weak ties. These two types of networks are distinguished according to the strength of the relationship. The findings of the study found that the actors in strong relationships are family and personal networks. The study found that the formation of strong relationships does not necessarily require frequency in the interaction relationship, as stated by Granovetter (1973). Strong relationships can be formed through the sharing of quality and important information, experience, and guidance in business. The findings of this study coincide with the arguments by Jack (2005) and Surin et al. (2015), according to which strong relationships can be built through quality advantages and benefits owned by social network actors such as resources, knowledge, and experience.

Strong ties are built on trust. This agrees with the views of Aldrich et al. (1989); Elfring & Hulsink (2007); and Nakamura & Yorks (2011) who stated that this strong relationship is built on the basis of trust after going through a certain period of time so that they can

expect the behavior of their acquaintances. Therefore, Malay SME entrepreneurs obtain knowledge and guidance from individuals who are professionals and experienced in managing businesses because of the trust they have in each other. Therefore, the impact of this strong relationship provides various advantages and benefits to Malay SME entrepreneurs, such as business knowledge, the latest information, problem solving, and business support, thus saving time and money.

The actors in weak ties are government, financial association and friend networks. The study found that the formation of weak ties requires frequency in the interaction relationship, as explained by Granovetter (1973), but the frequency of this relationship does not necessarily occur face-to-face. The evolution of technology, especially social media such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook applications, has shifted face-to-face interaction and connection to online platforms. This agrees with the view of Yang et al. (2018), who stated that entrepreneurs who have good business networks are able to obtain the latest technology resources, which help to produce innovative behavior in business. Thus, interactions with financial institutions and government agencies can occur easily and quickly with the use of smartphones. In fact, sharing the latest information from work agencies and associations can be done quickly and with reliable sources without the need for intermediaries. As with interactions with business network partners, these interactions are infrequent and only occur when necessary; however, social relationships are maintained with the assistance of technology.

The study found that the Yayasan Pembangunan Usahawan (YPU), owned by the Terengganu state government, is an entrepreneur network centerego-centric) that is the main source of reference for Malay SME entrepreneurs in the field of entrepreneurship. This study found that YPU acts as a broker that connects Malay SME entrepreneurs with suppliers, customers, government agencies, banks, associations, private agencies, supermarkets, and other Malay SME entrepreneurs. Through this initiative, various benefits are received by Malay SME entrepreneurs at various business levels, such as obtaining business opportunities, identifying potential and quality suppliers, and receiving the latest information and transactions with supermarkets for marketing products and services. This agrees with the view of Granovetter (1973) and Burt (1992), who stated that weak network actors are important as bridges that help connect unconnected actors in a social network and help connect actors at various social levels to gain some advantages or benefits in obtaining useful information in business and business opportunities that can be derived from strong network contacts. Therefore, the initiative of the Terengganu state government to help Malay entrepreneurs by establishing the YPU is used as a model for business support services at the national level and becomes the essence of the country's entrepreneurship policy.

Thus, social networking is a business tool and strategy used by Malay SME entrepreneurs for business survival. The formation and development of the social network structure of Malay SME entrepreneurs involves a complex social process over a certain period of time and a rational process of action. Rational actions among Malay SME entrepreneurs are motivated by the benefits and expectations obtained based on the choices made. The consideration of what is offered and whether the offer agrees with the interests of the business is more emphasized which ultimately aims for a social network relationship to provide a positive impact on business and business survival. In conclusion, a strong social network plays a critical role in helping to maintain business survival to continue to compete in a homogenous social environment and a global economy. The implications of the study show that Malay SME entrepreneurs need to build social networks using social structures, which are social strengths at the macro level, including social institutions.

6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, from the results of the study, it can be concluded that Malay entrepreneurs build social relationships with social network actors to gain interest in business, such as information, technology, and business opportunities. Every social network actor, whether weak or strong, has its own functions and benefits in helping these Malay entrepreneurs to run their businesses. Social networking actor influence and impact the growth and development of businesses. The results of this study found that the frequency of relationships with social network actors is not a priority for Malay entrepreneurs because social relationships are built to depend on the needs and benefits that will be obtained in the business. In conclusion, this study explains the importance of social networks as a social structure that has been built and embedded in social processes that can affect the survival of a business. The social process influenced by rational selection provides various benefits and supports to Malay entrepreneurs in managing and growing businesses. Implications and recommendations of the study to the government include the need to review entrepreneurship policy. This can be achieved by paying attention to the need for business support that can increase awareness and understanding of the value and implications of social networks. It can be realized through participation in entrepreneurship programs and at the same time by building cohesion with government agencies and among entrepreneurs. This study is a phenomenological study involving in-depth interviews with 20 Malay entrepreneurs in the Kuala Terengganu district. Therefore, for future studies, the researchers suggest that this study be expanded by involving entrepreneurs throughout Malaysia by using quantitative methods to obtain a broader picture and be able to make more accurate and robust generalizations related to the phenomenon of Malay SME entrepreneur networks.

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