



BUSINESS IDEA GENERATION OF SMALL BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS:
ROLE OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to define social environment (i.e. social norms and social networks) and explore idea generation at a social level in business entrepreneurs and answer the question the idea generation at a social level in entrepreneurs.

Design/Methodology/Approach. To achieve the objective of explaining idea generation at the social level, twenty-three semi-structured interviews were steered through a purposive sampling technique for qualitative data collection and analysis. The informants are based on information provided by the chamber of commerce of three regions namely; Sukkur, Hyderabad, and Karachi, Pakistan. The qualitative data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed in NVIVO 10.

Findings. The results achieved from data collected through interviews strongly supported the main research question. The informants defined social networks as the mode of creating a path of belonging, interaction, connecting, and building relationship. In terms of support of social networks in idea generation, business entrepreneurs receive support from social networks, and it contributed to new business idea generation. Whereas; without a social environment idea generation is not possible because one will not be able to brainstorm and scrutinize fruitful ideas.

Research Limitations. This study has only considered a limited sample size from three main regions of Sindh, province. Thus, the future study can engage more sample size and different theoretical backgrounds from other disciplines for the development of models.

Practical Implications. This research will help to enhance entrepreneurial activities in Pakistan by creating awareness to support entrepreneurs at the social level for entrepreneurship.

Originality/Value. In comparison to past research this study explores idea generation at a social level in small business entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Idea Generation, Social Networks, Social Environment, Qualitative Study, NVIVO

1. Introduction.

There are sufficient sources that support the belief of idea generation in terms of creativity, work stress, self-efficacy, and social entrepreneurship (Weinberger, Wach, Stephan, & Wegge, 2018; Gist, 1989; Halberstadt, & Spiegler, 2018; Perkins, Lean, & Newbery, 2017). The family social influence on business has a positive effect on entrepreneurial startups because of their prior experience (Oluwafunmilayo, Olokundun, Moses, & Grace, 2018). However, the greatest idea generation occurs when there are strong 'social ties'



interactively solving problems in an environment of trust (Gemmell, Boland, & Kolb, 2012). Idea generation can be defined as the result of brainstorming providing a wide variety of possible solutions (Leahy, Seifert, Daly, & McKilligan, 2018). Effective idea generation is based on the vision of the expected business, because optimal idea generation is in connection with organizational vision (Perkins, Lean, & Newbery, 2017). However, it has viewed as the first stage in the overall innovation process ending in the successful implementation of creative ideas in an organization (Keum & See, 2017). Technically, an idea generation is a complete process involving successive steps of problem engagement (e.g. concrete experience), the incubation (e.g. reflective observation), idea or hypothesis formation (e.g. abstract conceptualization and convergence), and social conceptual experimentation (e.g. active experimentation) (Gemmell, Boland, & Kolb, 2012; Perkins, Lean, & Newbery, 2017).

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing recognition of social environment's role in entrepreneurial success, there is limited empirical evidence on how social networks and social norms specifically contribute to business idea generation among small business entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The literature on the relationship between social environment and entrepreneurial ideation in developing country contexts remains scarce. This poses a challenge to entrepreneurs, policymakers, and business development organizations on how to leverage social environment for fostering entrepreneurial activities and enhancing business idea generation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Environment

Social environment(s) are networks (Mazzarol, Volery, Doss, & Thein, 1999) and social norms (i.e. closer valuation and social valuation) (Santos, Roomi, & Liñán, 2016). The foremost social environment variable(s) are the country's economic development, poverty, socio-spatial characteristics, rural-urban distinction, economic growth, political and social factors, geographic location, or culture (García-Cabrera, & García-Soto, 2008). The social factors are composite of social capital and social networks (Thornton, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Urbano, 2011). Social influence can also be measured as the influence of friends, families, role models, and advisors (Kennedy, Drennan, Renfrow, & Watson, 2003). Social networks are usually defined as a set of actors (i.e. individuals and organizations) encouraging entrepreneurs to undertake a business process (Fernández-Pérez, Alonso-Galicia, Rodríguez-Ariza, & Del Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, 2015). The importance of social networks entails that when entrepreneurs connected with others willing to provide resources enhance the probability of opportunity exploitation (Perry-Smith, & Mannucci, 2015). For instance, the social network plays its role in establishing an 'entrepreneurial firm' but a smaller difference in interaction and support is found due to the country's size (Greve, & Salaff, 2003). Social norms are the individual perceptions in which individuals behave in a way that improves rules through social manners (Barazandeh, Parvizian, Alizadeh, & Khosravi, 2015). In this connection, the role of social norms in creating sustainable venturing and promoting an enabling environment is also vital that creating value beyond profit by stimulating ideas, actions, and exchange relationships (Kibler, Fink, Lang, & Muñoz, 2015).

2.2 Idea Generation

Cognitively, new ideas are retrieved from a reservoir of information stored in long-term memory (Toubia, & Netzer, 2016). The process of generating new ideas can be hindered due to the mishandling of common knowledge in the course of specified tasks (Camarda, Salvia, Vidal, Weil, Poirel, Houde, & Cassotti, 2018). New idea generation is a two-phase activity. The first phase is generative in which protective structures are constructed through mental representation. While; the second phase is exploratory in which these structures are interpreted, modified, and combined in a meaningful way (Toubia & Netzer, 2016). Arguments from several experimental studies indicated that idea generation plainly involves an automatic process of incubation, defocused attention, and mind wandering (Camarda, Salvia, Vidal, Weil, Poirel, Houde, & Cassotti, 2018). These are the output of brainstorming in groups intentionally organized in a hybrid structure (Girotra, Terwiesch, & Ulrich, 2010). In addition, entrepreneurial idea generation is a complete process requiring an individual's attention. Idea generation may also be fortified in a promising 'social environment'



consisting of close groups during the process of problem engagement, incubation, and trial idea hypothesis (Gemmell, Boland, & Kolb, 2012).

2.3 Social environment and business entrepreneurship

The term 'social' refers to an initiative of helping others and social movements are given as causation of success and failure. The social movement consists of four key areas i.e. resource mobilization structures by an active appropriation of the site for mobilization, political opportunities, and threats established repertoires of contention and innovative collective actions by challengers and their member opponents and collective action frames and identity formation (Mair & Marti, 2006).

Generally, entrepreneurs are performing entrepreneurial activities in an environment of uncertainty. Though, this process occurs in a social environment in which an entrepreneur tries to ease uncertainty to warrant entrepreneurial success (Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014). In an entrepreneurial activity, the social environment provides a connection between the individual and society in terms of resources, friendship, family, norms, beliefs, culture, and power. Indeed, the social environment is an extension of 'social capital', and it has been viewed as a vehicle to in still relations of trust, norms, reciprocity, exchange, and connectedness (Pretty, & Ward, 2001). The social environment in entrepreneurship relates to the people, the planet, and profit (Thompson, & Kiefer, 2011). Entrepreneurship is a reason for social change, and it is influenced by changes at the societal level (Welter, 2011). The relationship between entrepreneurship and the environment has been seen as a more viable approach in the formation of new organizations (Mazzarol, Volery, Doss, & Thein, 1999). Also, the socio-political environment is highly influential because it can create or destroy entrepreneurship in the country (Luthans, Stajkovic, & Ibrayeva, 2000). Culture is also an aspect of the social environment because of the relationship of culture with entrepreneurial orientation (Lee, & Peterson, 2001).

From an environmental perspective at the macro level, entrepreneurial success depends on behaviours and traits. Similarly, the social environment around individuals plays a vital role in shaping their ultimate behaviour and nurturing individual interest in new venture creation (Santos, Roomi, & Liñán, 2016). The effect of social environment on entrepreneurial activity has been shown by variables such as the country's economic development, poverty, socio-spatial characteristics, rural-urban distinction, economic growth, political and social factors, geographic location or culture (García-Cabrera, & García-Soto, 2008).

2.4 Social Environment and Business Idea Generation

The formation of innovative firms is connected with the generation of new ideas (Gemmell, Boland, & Kolb, 2012). Entrepreneurs must differentiate between gut feelings, true intuitions, and affective responses associated with a phenomenon in the very foundation of a new venture (Blume, & Covin, 2011). Business success is dependent on the newness, quality, and potential of new business idea generation and its exploitation (Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2012). Idea generation in technological firms is based on three processes starting with the utilization of difficult and classy social networks as a source of ideas for testing, refinement, and validation of trial ideas. Then in the second process, those technological entrepreneurs display an extraordinary area specificity for filtering outside specific markets and technologies, and in the final process, active experiments, and iteration of ideas are done rather than engaging in prolonged conceptual analysis. Innovation in creating new businesses has been seen as a key factor for the achievement of economic goals at the local, national and international levels. Researchers also suggest that ideas that are the result of successful connections are imitated from the disparate bodies of knowledge with high impact (Schilling, & Green, 2011). The construction of new and potentially useful ideas and products is known as creativity (Fillis, & Rentschler, 2010). Opportunity search strategies and opportunity identification strategies both are mediated by creativity for a positive relationship with the perceived viability of a business idea (Heinonen, Hytti, & Stenholm, 2011). Therefore, the opportunity for identification and exploitation based on an idea with help of close groups available in networks is part of the social environment.

However, the social environment is a combination of networks and social norms (i.e. closer valuation and social valuation) (Mazzarol, Volery, Doss, & Thein, 1999; Santos, Roomi, & Liñán, 2016). At a global level, social environment variable(s) are the country's economic development, poverty, socio-spatial



characteristics, rural-urban distinction, economic growth, political and social factors, geographic location, and culture (García-Cabrera, & García-Soto, 2008). But, at the smaller regional level, the social environment contains social capital and social networks in a relationship with entrepreneurial activity (Thornton, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Urbano, 2011). Despite the research on the relationship between social environments and entrepreneurship such as innovative performance, societies culture, entrepreneurial activity, and radical innovation, the gap still exists framework especially to address the question of how an idea (innovation) emerges in society (Liu, Lusch, Chen, & Zhang, 2018). Therefore, to answer the research question (i.e. is there any role of the social environment in business idea generation?), this qualitative study could address the idea generation process in a social environment and its contribution to business entrepreneurship.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Using the social capital theory and the social network perspective, this research defines social environment as comprising social networks and social norms, which serve as valuable resources for entrepreneurial ideation. The theoretical framework posits that social networks and social norms collectively constitute the social environment that facilitates business idea generation among entrepreneurs. The study explores how social environment elements (networks and norms) contribute to the process of entrepreneurial idea generation, leading to new business venture creation.

2.6. Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

RO1. To define the social environment (i.e. social norms and social networks) and explore idea generation at the social level for business entrepreneurs

2.7 Research Questions

Correspondingly, the study poses four research questions:

RQ1. Is there idea generation at a social level for business entrepreneurs??

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This research study is based on the interpretivist philosophy of research and follows the qualitative approach through the use of semi-structured interviews. This perspective is suitable for exploring the subjective meanings and experiences of entrepreneurs regarding the role of social environment in idea generation, yielding rich and contextual understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2 Population and Sampling

This study included registered small business entrepreneurs from three regions of Sindh province, Pakistan: Sukkur, Hyderabad, and Karachi. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select informants based on information provided by the chamber of commerce of these three regions. The formation of chamber of commerce associations came into existence in the accord of the 1961 Trade Organizations Ordinance (Nadgrodkiewicz & Siddiqui, 2011). The FPCCI (Federation of Pakistan Chamber and Commerce Industry) connects the private sector and government to cater to the problems of trade, and industry, and to safeguard the interest of the private sector through constant dialogue with the government. The entrepreneurs register their private businesses with the chamber of commerce to get information and support from the government, as well as build their social network (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). In total, twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants based on data provided by the chamber of commerce of three regions. This sample size is appropriate for qualitative research as it allows for data saturation and in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (Mason, 2010).

3.3 Instrument Development

The interview protocol was designed based on valid scales and interview protocols used in previous research in peer-reviewed literature (Gemmell et al., 2012). The questions were designed for the exploration of key themes i.e., social environment in idea generation. Different types of questions were designed to ensure that key themes could be understood. These questions were designed in a way to enquire information about social environments i.e., social networks and social norms addressing research objectives of idea generation at the social level.



3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Self-administered interview protocol for qualitative data collection has been developed keeping in consideration the interview protocol used in past literature for idea generation (Gemmell et al., 2012). The data was collected between January and March 2026 using a protocol involving personal visits, phone calls, and video links. The cover letters emphasized the voluntary nature, confidentiality, and academic purpose of data collection. A total of twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants from three regions' chambers of commerce i.e., Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur Sindh through personal visits, phone calls, and video links. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analysed using thematic analysis in NVIVO 10. Thematic analysis is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method (Braun et al., 2019). The theme denotes a repeated spotted response within the data set by capturing important information related to the research question (Lee, 2015). In idea generation at the social level, both ways (i.e., inductive and deductive) are helpful in the development of the themes because some already developed codes are used as well as some new codes relevant to analysis needed for completing thematic analysis and preceding it to the next step. Accordingly, six steps were followed for the thematic analysis of data (Braun et al., 2019). Three tasks were performed to achieve concepts and themes for answering the research question "is there idea generation at the social level". The first task was to perform a text search query in which the word tree output was received, this was used to provide a connection of statements with specific themes e.g., social environment if the theme needed is searched. The second task performed is to get the output of the word cloud, in this the cluster of words shown in big and small font sizes representing specific codes to be generated for specific themes. The third task was performed to determine word count in which a particular theme or word repetition is counted or the number of times a particular word is used in by the respondents in an interview.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study followed appropriate ethical measures on informed consent, voluntary participation, respondent anonymity and data security. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights to withdraw at any time. The study did not collect data on participant identities, and the grouped data set was maintained for study and analysis only. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and accessible only to the research team.

4. Findings of the Study

The material collected for qualitative data is dispersed and the transcription of verbatim interviews, needed the researcher's attention for its coherence to proceed with the analysis. The data analysis was performed with help of NVIVO 10 software following a few steps of thematic analysis in qualitative research because thematic analysis is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). The theme denotes a repeated spotted response within the data set by capturing important information related to the research question (Lee, 2015). In idea generation at the social level, both ways (i.e. inductive and deductive) are helpful in the development of the themes because some already developed codes are used as well as some new codes relevant to analysis needed for completing thematic analysis and preceding it to the next step. Accordingly, six steps were followed for the thematic analysis of data (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019).

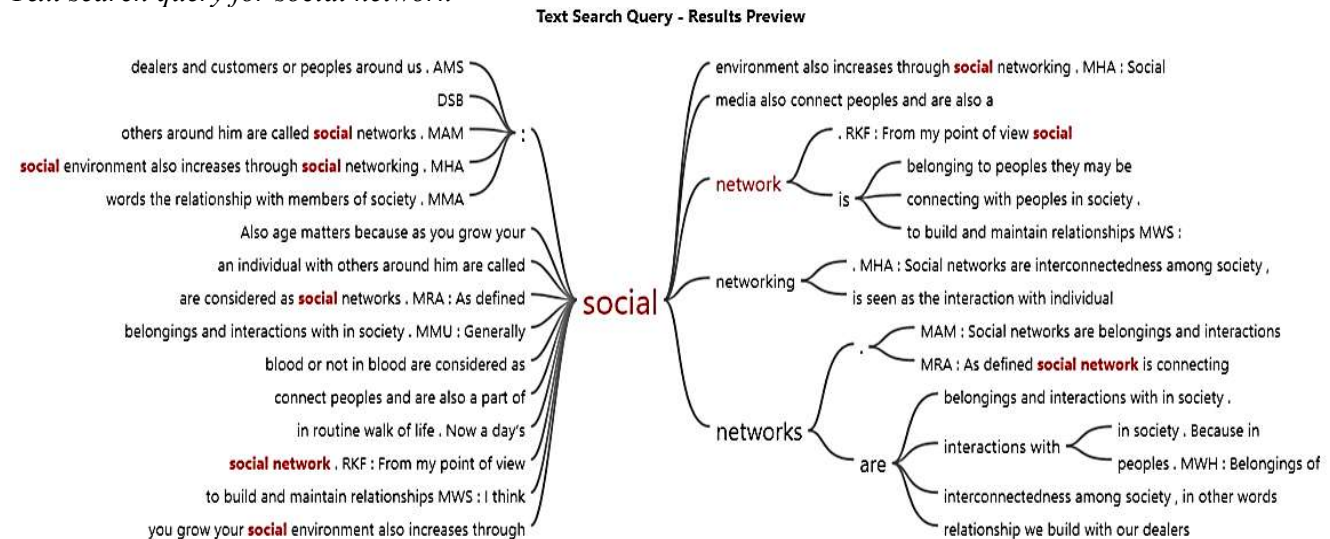
4.1 Definition of social networks by entrepreneurs

Table 1 captures the demographics of the 325 survey respondents. There were 193 men (59.4%) and 132 women (40.6%). The most prevalent age range was 31-40 years (39.4%). The second most prevalent age range was 21-30 years (31.4%). Nearly half of the respondents had a master's degree. In addition, 41.2% had worked between 5 and 10 years. Figure 1 presents these distributions.



Figure 1

Text search query for social network



The entrepreneurs define social networks in their own words “Social networks are interconnections within society:” (RKF; MHA; MRA). Similarly, “social networks are belongings and interactions within society (MAM; DSB). Further, it is defined in three themes as given in below Table 1.

Table 1

Definition of Social Network Themes

Themes	No. of respondents	No. of coded moments
Interaction with	05	05
Belonging of individual	03	03
Relationship with	03	03

These responses are in line with the definition of social networks in the literature which is a measure of formal and informal relationships (Serrat, 2017). Similarly, it is building a relationship of a person with another person (Neystadt et al., 2018). Not limited to this social network are also called social relations and it has been used interchangeably (Lin, 2017). So, the central theme of entrepreneurs and literature about social networks is an interaction of an individual within society.

4.2 Members of social networks

When entrepreneurs enquired about their social network members the feedback provided is about close and for members of social networks. Further, most of the themes are family, friends, customers of their business, and colleagues as given in below Table 2.

Table 2

Members of social network themes

Themes	No. of respondents	No. of coded moments
Family	07	11
Friends	05	09
Customers	03	05
Colleagues	03	03

Similarly, literature also supports the response of entrepreneurs about the most influential members of social networks i.e. family and friends (Aral, & Walker, 2012). Apart from social networking sites social networks are based on a relationship with family, friends, and others (Marin, & Wellman, 2011). Similarly,



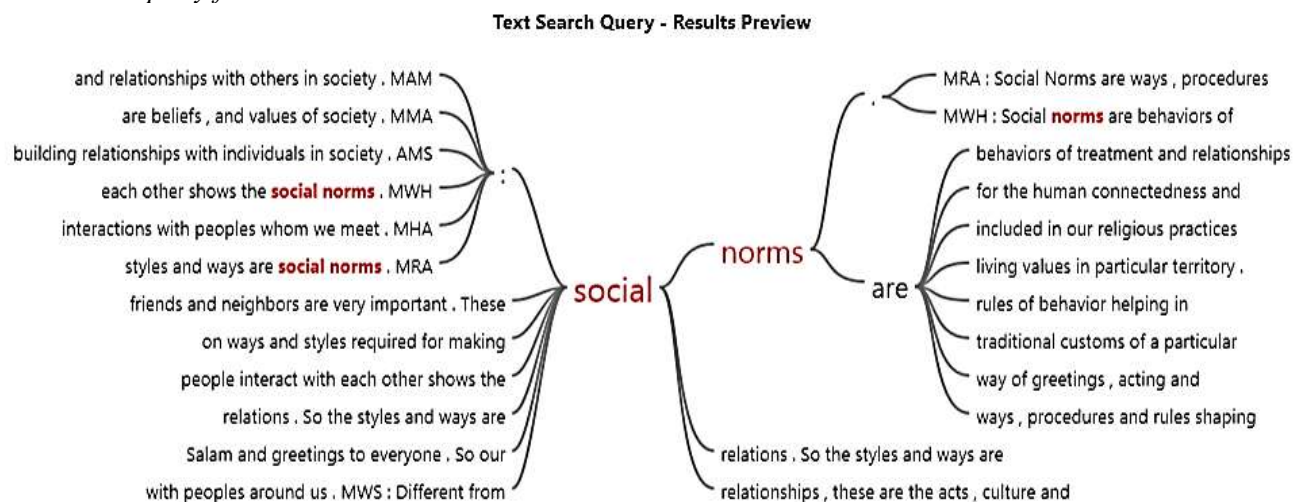
the respondent's words about social network members are "First of all my family and friends after business clients, employees and vendors, etc. are part of my social networks" (RKF). "Close social networks are family and friends, and far social networks are peoples in interactions due to business and family" (MHA).

4.3 Definition of social norms by entrepreneurs

On inquiry about social norms from entrepreneurs' responses collected are around themes of values, practices, rules, and ways of building a relationship. Figure 2 illustrated a word tree that provides a quite clear picture of social norms themes and definitions. Entrepreneurs define in their own words that "social norms are rules of behaviour helping in building relationships with individuals in society" (MMA). Similarly, respondent entrepreneur consent is that "social norms are behaviours of treatment and relationships with others in society." (MWH). Not only this but "Social norms are living values in a particular territory, comprising of beliefs, attitudes, religious practices, and living styles, etc." (MAM).

Figure 2

Text search query for social norms



These definitions and themes are consistent with the literature available i.e. social norms are defined as the main behavioural pattern within groups encouraged by shared understandings of acceptable actions and sustained through social interactions within groups (Nyborg, Anderies, Dannenberg, Lindahl, Schill, Schlüter, & Chapin, 2016). Similarly, these are different from laws and are written codes of conduct that are negotiated and understood through social interaction (Chung, & Rimal, 2016). Social norms are considered the foundation of culture, language, social interaction, cuisine, love, marriage, play, prejudice, economic exchange, and traffic control (McDonald, & Crandall, 2015). Certainly, in a society, an individual needs an interaction that is only possible through social norms, which are the set of rules, behaviour patterns, living values, etc.

4.4 Support of Social Networks in idea generation

After defining social networks and identifying members of social networks, entrepreneurs were enquired about any support they receive in idea generation from the social network. As we generally see close social network provides more support, so according to the words of respondents. "Yes, received support from a social network, contributes to idea generation" (DSB).

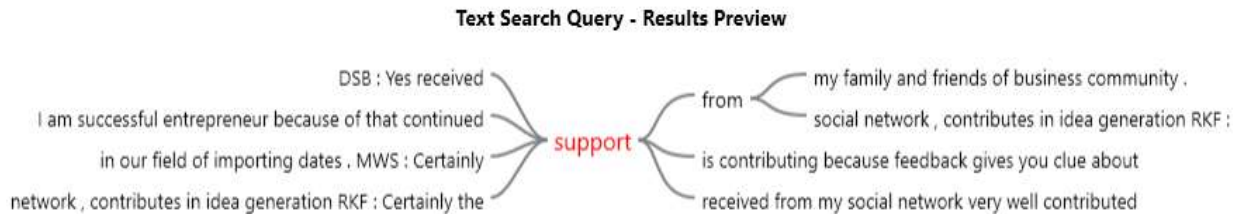
Not only this just they informed that they receive support in idea generation, but they claimed the success in their entrepreneurial activity is because of social network support, "certainly the support received from my social network very well contributed to my business idea generation. Today I am a successful entrepreneur because of that continued support from my family and friends of the business community"



(RKF). Similarly, another respondent provides his reply to our question “Certainly support is contributing because feedback gives you clue about the fruitfulness of the idea generated.” (MWS). Further on searching theme of support Figure 3 determined the word tree of social network support in idea generation.

Figure 3

Text search query for support of social network in idea generation



These results are consistent with the literature available about social network support in idea generation. For instance, idea generation in technological firms is based on three processes starting with the utilization of difficult and classy social networks as a source of ideas for testing, refinement, and validation of trial ideas (Gemmell, Boland, & Kolb, 2012). Opportunity search strategies and opportunity identification strategies both are mediated by creativity for a positive relationship with the perceived viability of the business idea, and the opportunity identification and exploitation on basis of the idea are with help of close as well as for groups available in networks (Heinonen, Hytti, & Stenholm, 2011). So, it is easily concluded that the social network a part of the social environment provides support in idea generation.

4.5 Kind of support received in idea generation from social network

When respondents provided positive feedback about support in idea generation the researcher extended the boundary of enquire to get information about the kind of support they receive in idea generation as well as in business development. The themes generated in coded moments are given below in Table 3 based on social, financial, and moral support.

Table 3

Kind of support received from the social network in idea generation

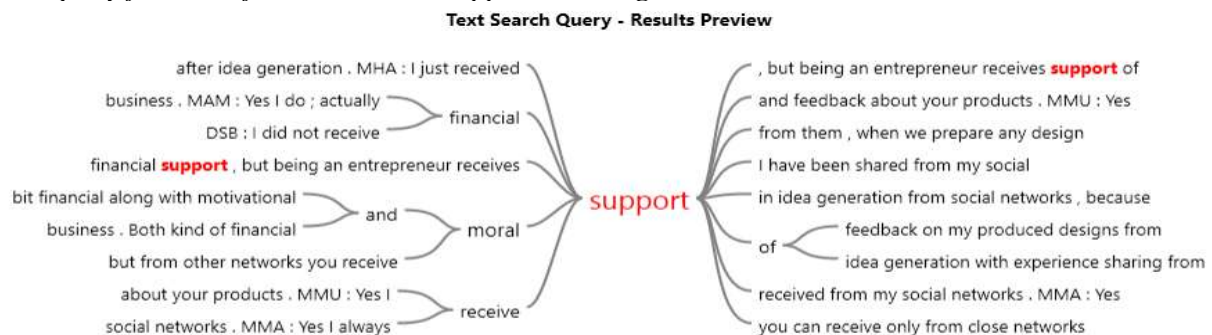
Themes	No. of respondents	No. of coded moments
Social	06	11
Financial	04	04
Moral	03	04

A further text search query in Figure 4 provides evidence of what kind of support is received in idea generation. Referring to one of the respondent's responses to the inquiry of kind of support from social networks “I did not receive financial support, but being an entrepreneur receives the support of idea generation with experience sharing from seniors and different members of a chamber of commerce. We also give and receive training for idea generation and business creation from a chamber of commerce which helps us even to run our businesses smoothly” (DSB). Here we see respondents denied financial support but confirmed social support in the shape of training, and experience sharing from family and colleagues' social networks. Another respondent express views “I received every idea from my social network when requested to give me an idea about opening a business. I received market information from my social network while generating business ideas. I received contacts from social networks to expand my business after idea generation.” Further “Yes I do; financial support you can receive only from close networks but from other networks, you receive moral support and feedback about your products” So it is clear from the response of entrepreneurs that they receive encouragement, and moral support but only financial report is received from close social networks.



Figure 4

Text search query for kind of social network support in idea generation.



4.6 Contribution of social norms in idea generation

The social environment's part of social norms supports idea generation as determined from the informant's point of view "no doubt social norms are helpful, because when you behave ethically and keep the relationship alive; people will share with you their problems and idea for solution of it. This will certainly help in idea generation of business opportunities" (DSB). In support of this statement another respondent's viewpoint shows that "these contribute in idea generation with brainstorming because as more ideas are coming from society more effective idea is possible to come out" (MMA). His point of view suggests that social norms contribute to building relationships ultimately leading to brainstorming for the best idea generation. A further theme of contribution is reported 06 times from five respondents as shown in Table 4 also in Figure 5 the "contribute" is visible after idea and generation themes.

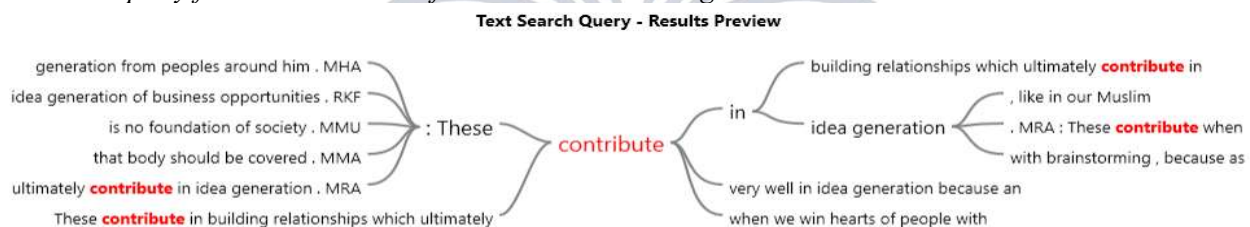
Table 4

Contribution theme moments of social norms in idea generation

Themes	No. of respondents	No. of coded moments
Contribute	05	06

Figure 5

Text search query for a contribution of social norms in idea generation.



Not only has this but quantitative testing in literature also supported the contribution and support of social norms in idea generation. During the idea generation exercise it was observed that under the right conditions, individuals in groups shared new and creative ideas helpful in creativity and innovation for enhancing entrepreneurship (Paulus, & Yang, 2000). Idea generation is a two-phase activity, first, a generative phase where mental representation called preventive structures are constructed and the second is an exploratory phase where these structures are interpreted, modified, and combined in a meaningful way (Toubia, & Netzer, 2016). Certainly, ideas are the output of brainstorming techniques of groups organized in a hybrid structure generating more ideas, qualitative ideas, and better ideas (Girotra, Terwiesch, & Ulrich, 2010).

4.7 More supportive kind of the social norm in idea generation

It was very difficult to decide which social norm support more in idea generation because most of the respondents were talking about the cumulative effect of different social norms. This can be observed from the below statement of respondents.





Further according to respondents “At social level idea generation is very supportive because I have achieved the advantage of it and doing business successfully” (MHA). Similarly, “At the Social level idea generation is fruit full because if you will not understand society, you will not be able to generate any idea” (MAM). Not only this but very strong response about the social environment including social norms, social networks provide support in idea generation “At the social level idea generation is very fruitful because instead of networking and social norms, a social environment is incomplete. And these both are always around you to get help in business idea generation” (RKF).

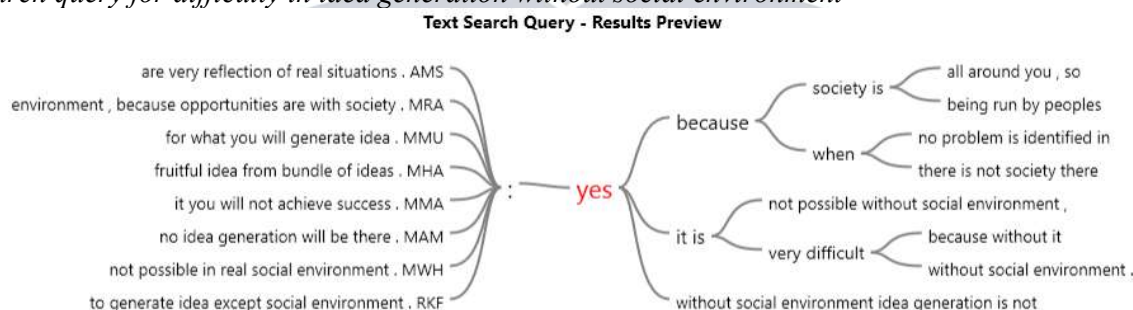
It is also consistent with the literature reviewed, that idea generation is the result of brainstorming of individuals providing a wide variety of possible solutions (Leahy, Seifert, Daly, & McKilligan, 2018). And it is created because new insights or solutions to problems are coming through creativity through idea generation (Perkins, Lean, & Newbery, 2017). Certainly, in this new era prompt knowledge transmission in the social environment is contributing more explicitly than ever before to idea generation at the social level (Liu, Lusch, Chen, & Zhang, 2018). The ambiguity claimed about idea generation at a social level from the literature review now has been confirmed by respondents in qualitative results that there exists a role of the social environment in idea generation or simply there is idea generation at a social level.

4.9 Idea generation without a social environment

This part of the interview was taken just to know that there is the availability of any evidence that without social environment idea generation is possible. But we didn't find that without a social environment idea generation is done. Because in response to the question do you expect idea generation to be difficult? If yes, why? From below Figure 8, it can be seen that most of the respondents have asked yes idea generation is difficult. Further “Yes, it is not possible without social environment, because opportunities are with society” (MMU). And “Yes, it is very difficult because without it one will not be able to brainstorm and scrutinize fruitful ideas from a bundle of ideas” (RKF). Certainly, idea generation is based on problem identification, and the problem is identified from the social environment as the respondent has replied “Yes because when no problem is identified in society, no solution will be provided for fixing that problem. So, no idea generation will be there” (MWH). So generally, the building blocks of society are social norms and social networks, which are parts of the social environment, and idea generation is done for entrepreneurial activity. The interlinked system is possible within an environment but if there is no environment then there will be no need for entrepreneurial activity.

Figure 8

Text search query for difficulty in idea generation without social environment



Finally, idea generation at the social level is determined by which family business entrepreneurs have provided positive feedback on the social environment in idea generation. Three tasks were performed to achieve concepts and themes for answering the research question “is there idea generation at the social level”. The first task was to perform a text search query in which the word tree output was received, this was used to provide a connection of statements with specific themes e.g. social environment if the theme needed is searched. The second task performed is to get the output of the word cloud, in this the cluster of words shown in big and small font sizes representing specific codes to be generated for specific themes. The third task was performed to determine word count in which a particular theme or word repetition is counted or the number



of times a particular word is used in by the respondents in an interview. Along with our main objective few other concepts are also explored which can be helpful in the future for theory building i.e. which kind of social norms are supported more in idea generation and the possibility of idea generation without a social environment.

5. Discussion

Referring to the research question is there a generation of the idea at the social level? The results achieved from data collected through interviews support answering this question and achieving an objective in light of the literature reviewed. This was completed by collecting data from ten entrepreneurs from three regions' chambers of commerce i.e. Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur Sindh through personal visits, phone calls, and video links. In the first phase, the respondents were enquired about the definition of constituents of social environment i.e. social networks and social norms. The respondents defined social networks as the forms of creating a path of belonging, interaction, connecting, and building relationship. The concrete definition provided by the respondents is "social networks are belongings and interactions within society" (MAM; DSB). Similarly, this is confirmed from the literature that social networks are building a relationship between a person with another person (Neystadt, Karidi, Weisfeld, Varshavsky, Oron, & Radinsky, 2018). As well as social networks are also called social relations, and it has been used interchangeably (Lin, 2017). Social norms are defined as values, practices, rules, and ways of building a relationship. Different respondents have quoted social norms as "the rules of behaviour helping in building relationships with individuals in society" (MMA). "Social norms are behaviours of treatment and relationships with others in society." (MWH). The same is confirmed from literature when explored in light of the entrepreneur's response, that social norms are defined as the main behavioural pattern within groups encouraged by shared understandings of acceptable actions and sustained through social interactions within groups (Nyborg, Anderies, Dannenberg, Lindahl, Schill, Schlüter, & Chapin, 2016; Chung, & Rimal, 2016).

In a later stage, entrepreneurs enquired about the support of social networks in idea generation, and the response received is yes. As quoted "certainly the support received from my social network very well contributed to my business idea generation. Today I am a successful entrepreneur because of that continued support from my family and friends of the business community" (RKF). Further, it is also matched with the literature reviewed and found consistent as the opportunity identification and exploitation on basis of an idea are with help of close as well as for groups available in networks (Heinonen, Hytti, & Stenholm, 2011).

Finally, in concluding questions from entrepreneurs, it was enquired whether without a social environment idea generation is possible or not, and the response received that "it is not possible without social environment, because opportunities are with society" (MMU). And "it is very difficult because, without a social environment, one will not be able to brainstorm and scrutinize fruitful ideas from a bundle of ideas" (RKF).

Further idea generation at the social level is found possible and contributes to the success of entrepreneurs because "at social level idea generation is a fruit full because if you will not understand society, you will not be able to generate any idea" (MAM). Similarly, "at the social level idea generation is very fruitful because instead of networking and social norms, a social environment is incomplete. And these both are always around you to get help in business idea generation" (RKF). The same found supporting and consistent with recent studies performed quantitatively i.e. idea generation is the result of brainstorming of individuals providing a wide variety of possible solutions (Leahy, Seifert, Daly, & McKilligan, 2018). And creativity provides new insights or solutions to problems coming in through idea generation (Perkins, Lean, & Newbery, 2017). Conclusively in this new era, prompt knowledge transmission in the social environment is contributing more explicitly than ever before to idea generation at the social level (Liu, Lusch, Chen, & Zhang, 2018).

5.1 Research Implications

This research will help to enhance entrepreneurial activities in Pakistan by creating awareness to support entrepreneurs at the social level for entrepreneurship.



This research will divert the focus of entrepreneurs on gaining opportunities through social interaction and activities that are not common in Pakistan's culture.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

There are some restrictions to note. First, the qualitative design limits generalizability of findings; quantitative studies with larger samples would be able to better offer statistical generalizability regarding the relationships between social environment factors and entrepreneurial outcomes. Secondly, the sample is geographically limited to three regions of Sindh province, while these regions have diverse entrepreneurial ecosystems, the results may not necessarily be representative of other provinces in Pakistan or other developing countries. Third, using self-report information from interviews increases the risk for social desirability bias, even if methodological controls are used when instruments are administered. Fourth, the study focused on small business entrepreneurs registered with chambers of commerce; unregistered entrepreneurs may have different experiences and perspectives. Fifth, the study did not examine the moderating role of industry type, business size, or entrepreneur characteristics, and future studies could benefit the explanatory power by including such variables.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study was qualitative in nature and investigated how social environment, comprising social networks and social norms, contributes to business idea generation among small business entrepreneurs in Pakistan. The study revealed that both social networks and social norms have significant effects on improving idea generation, with social networks providing support in the form of social, financial, and moral support, and social norms contributing through building relationships and facilitating brainstorming. The findings provide a good theoretical and practical understanding of how social environment facilitates entrepreneurial ideation in emerging economies.

The results support the integrated framework and suggest that, in emerging economies like Pakistan, social environment plays a critical role in entrepreneurial ideation. Hence, entrepreneurs are encouraged to actively engage with their social networks and leverage social norms to enhance their idea generation capabilities. Business development organizations and chambers of commerce are encouraged to create platforms and opportunities for entrepreneurs to interact, share ideas, and receive support from their social networks.

Entrepreneurs must invest in developing and maintaining strong social networks, building relationships with family, friends, customers, and colleagues, and leveraging social norms such as religious

Author Contributions

All authors participated in ideation, development, and writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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