

CALL FOR PAPERS
Special Issue of the Journal of International Business Studies

**MAKING CONNECTIONS:
SOCIAL NETWORKS IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS**

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Introduction

The progress of research on social networks has enabled the increasingly fruitful application of network ideas across disciplines in recent times (e.g., Barabasi, 2002; Burt, Kilduff, & Tasselli, 2013; Christakis & Fowler, 2009; Jackson, 2008). In addition to its prominent role in the sociological arena, in economics, psychology, and in inter-disciplinary research, the network perspective has yielded, and continues to yield, significant advancements in many research domains.

However, despite the prominence of the social network perspective (in its many instantiations) across business disciplines, its presence in international business (IB) remains, by comparison, limited. There have been a small number of social network studies that have explored IB-related questions (e.g. Ghoshal & Barlett, 1990; Ellis, 2000; Andersson, Forsgren, & Holm, 2002; Joshi, Labianca, & Caligiuri, 2003; Forsgren, Holm, & Johanson, 2005; Vasudeva, Zaheer, & Hernandez, 2013; Cantwell, 2013; Zhang, Cantwell, & Jiang, 2014; Haas & Cummings, 2015). Other IB studies have used networks predominantly in a metaphorical sense (Ghoshal & Barlett, 1990).

These examples highlight the rich theoretical rewards from applying social network theory in IB research. Despite the flexibility and adaptability of social network theories and mechanisms, research in IB has not yet seen the levels of integration of the social network perspective evident in other fields. As a result, we see great potential for social network theories and mechanisms to extend and enrich established IB scholarship. Accordingly, we propose a special issue forum that will encourage the use of network perspectives in relation to a broad set of IB-related questions.

Topics

Social network theory and mechanisms can be – and have been – applied at multiple levels of analysis. We encourage submissions that investigate questions at the individual, group, subsidiary, firm, business group, or location (e.g. city, sub-national region and country) levels. One of the key aims of this special issue is to encourage IB network research by drawing on different disciplinary perspectives to conceptualize and construct networks at these different levels of analysis including, for example, studying the origins, evolution, and consequences of individual, inter-group, inter-firm or interorganizational level ties within and across MNEs as well as between the MNE and external actors. We welcome a diversity of theoretical perspectives and methodological and empirical approaches.

A social network is a social structure made up of a set of social actors (such as individuals, organizations, countries, or cities), sets of dyadic ties, and other social interactions between actors. The social network is a theoretical construct useful throughout the various social and behavioral sciences to study relationships between individuals, groups, organizations, or even entire societies, such as countries or regional areas. Thus, submissions to the special issue will reflect the study of social networks in international business relationships of different kinds, which may include but is not limited to more specific applications of social network theory, or social network analysis or methods. It is expected that articles will focus on the social aspects of cross-border networks used or developed for international business objectives, including both internal and external corporate networks, ethnic entrepreneurial networks, pre-firm international proto-business connections, and the role of kinship or ethnic ties in international business networks.

We see potential for social network theory to contribute to research in each of the six sub-domains of IB studies, as stated in the *JIBS Statement of Editorial Policy*. Studies could address topics including but not limited to:

- How do social networks affect the activities, strategies and decision-making processes of MNEs? Conversely, how do changes in the strategies and activities of MNEs influence their social networks?
- How do social networks of one kind (or with one type of actor) internal to MNEs influence the interactions between MNEs and other types of external actors, organizations, and institutions? How have these relationships (in terms of network tie type, tie strength, tie density and so on) been changing over time and what are the implications of these changes?
- What is the role of social networks in the cross-border activities of firms such as intra-firm trade, finance, investment, and technology transfers?
- How does the international environment (e.g., cultural, economic, legal, political) affect the development, characteristics, dynamics, and consequences of social networks?
- How do social networks affect the initiation and governance of cross-border organization forms (e.g., strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions) and cross-border activities (e.g., entrepreneurship, knowledge-based competition, corporate governance across borders)?
- What are cross-country differences in social networks and their implications, as based, for example, on cultural differences?

We purposely state these themes in broad terms. Each theme can be approached in a number of ways, making use of the mechanisms offered by research in social networks to forge a deeper understanding of these and other issues of interest to IB research.

To further illustrate this potential, we provide brief examples of how important theories and topic areas in IB research can be developed further by integrating theory and insight from research on networks.

- The multinational organization is core to international business. Although researchers have suggested conceptualizing the multinational organization as a social network, this perspective can be further explored and developed, especially considering the development of research on social networks in the intervening 25 years. A dynamic and evolutionary view of multinational organizations as social networks will both be closer to the reality of the phenomenon and also leverage the recent research on the dynamics and evolution of networks. To take one example, intra-firm networks might influence the internationalization decisions of multinational organizations, which would influence the boundaries of the multinational organization. Such a change in firm boundaries itself, in turn, would influence the intra-firm networks that affected these changes in the first place. In addition, the formal and informal relationships that make up intra-firm networks can relate differently to decisions and outcomes. This example also illustrates the presence and relevance of different levels and types of networks, in terms of influencing internationalization decisions, and how these decisions can be further investigated with the application of insights and tools from network research.
- Although it is well established that actors internal to the multinational organization interact frequently in both formal and informal ways with actors external to the multinational organization, relatively little is known about the determinants of these relationships in terms of closeness and connectedness, nor do we know how these relationships change over time.
- The Eclectic OLI (Ownership, Location, Internalization) paradigm has triggered a considerable body of research in IB. Incorporating a network perspective into this paradigm can offer new insights to broaden this well-established framework. Each of the OLI parameters might be influenced by the presence of social networks. For example,
 - a) Social networks with certain structural properties, for example bridging ties, have been suggested as means for actors to obtain privileged access to resources. Hence, networks might be an important source of multinational organizations' ownership advantages.
 - b) The presence of networks with particular structures, such as those that demonstrate small-world properties, can influence the overall effectiveness of systems, thereby making a location characterized by these structures more attractive. Because such networks can be locally embedded, they can offer a source of location advantages.
 - c) Studies have shown that social networks can influence the emergence and development of trust, as well as reputation mechanisms. Therefore, the presence of cohesive or dense networks might make market-based governance mechanisms more

or less attractive, which would affect multinational organizations' internalization advantages.

- An assumption underlying many IB theories is that multinational organizations doing business abroad face costs, i.e., they incur a liability of foreignness (LoF). Incorporating social network theory can further enrich our understanding of this core IB concept. For example:
 - a) To what extent is a multinational organization's LoF driven by the absence of local networks?
 - b) What kinds of local or global networks help mitigate LoF?
 - c) How might the interplay of a multinational organization's global network and the local networks of the multinational organization's subsidiaries work together to reduce LoF?
 - d) How do informal networks (e.g., immigrant networks that establish social and business connections between a home and host country) mitigate LoF?

In addition, applications of social network theory to IB issues may also enrich the social network perspective, for instance by elucidating issues like:

- How do the formation, evolution and consequences of networks with actors that are dispersed across different countries differ from those of networks with actors concentrated within a single country?
- How do networks and institutions co-evolve differently across countries?
- How and when do network properties like structural holes and closure manifest themselves differently in different institutional environments?
- To what extent does network research in a cross-border setting require different methodological approaches than those conducted within a single country?

We emphasize that the foregoing represents a suggestive list and we would encourage authors to explore the application and extension of social networks mechanisms and methods to IB theories, topics and questions in ways that extend beyond this list.

Submission Process

All manuscripts will be reviewed as a cohort for this special issue. Manuscripts must be submitted in the window between September 26, 2016, and October 10, 2016, at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jibs>. All submissions will go through the JIBS regular double-blind review process and follow the standard norms and processes.

For more information about this call for papers, please contact the Special Issue Editors or the JIBS Managing Editor (managing-editor@jibs.net).

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Gokhan Ertug is an Associate Professor of Strategic Management at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University. He received his PhD in Management from INSEAD. He is interested in studying social networks, status, reputation, and trust. Beyond studying these topics in various settings, including settings in international business, he also has an interest in studying distance and categorization specifically in an international business context.

Martin Kilduff is Professor of Organizational Behavior at UCL, former editor of *Academy of Management Review* (2006-08), and currently associate editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly*. He received his PhD from Cornell University. Prior to joining UCL he served as Diageo Professor of Management Studies at Cambridge University, and prior to that served on the faculties of University of Texas at Austin, Penn State, and Insead. Martin's work focuses on social networks in organizations and includes the co-authored books *Social networks and organizations* (Sage, 2003); and *Interpersonal networks in organizations: Cognition, personality, dynamics and culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). His articles have appeared in a diverse range of journals, including *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Organization Science*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, and *Social Networks*.

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John Cantwell is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of International Business Studies* from 2011-16. He is Distinguished Professor (Professor II) of International Business at Rutgers University. He was previously Professor of International Economics at the University of Reading. John Cantwell's main research areas are the analysis of corporate technological change and

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