

Use of entrepreneurial social networks by women in the travel agencies creation process

Uso das redes sociais empreendedoras por mulheres no processo de criação de agências de viagens

Uso de las Redes Sociales Emprendedoras por Mujeres en el Proceso de creación de agencias de viajes

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Abstract: Justification of the topic: The study of entrepreneurial social networks has been recognized as crucial in the entrepreneurial process, as well as in the success of the businesses. Since the 1990s, there has been a special interest in researching social networks focused on gender, and considering its relevance, this topic is still very current. **Objectives:** The aim of this study is to analyze how social networks are used by female entrepreneurs in the of new business creation process. It specifically aims to identify the types of bonds that are used by female entrepreneurs in their social networks in the stages of conception, start-up and business consolidation and verify how these social networks influence in obtaining resources. **Methodology/Design:** The research strategy adopted is the multiple case study and evidences were collected through semi-structured personal interviews with seven entrepreneurs of micro and small travel agencies. The cases were described individually and followed by a comparative analysis to examine their similarities and differences. **Results and Originality of the Document:** The study shows that the strong bonds were the most used by entrepreneurs mainly in the conception stage. Furthermore, it also shows that that previous experience was very important in the identification of the opportunity and ability to build diverse networks.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial social networks. Female entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial process.

Resumo: Propósito justificado do tema: O estudo das redes sociais empreendedoras tem sido reconhecido como determinante no processo empreendedor, como no sucesso dos empreendimentos. Desde a década de 90, houve um especial interesse em pesquisar redes sociais com o recorte do gênero e, considerando a sua

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relevância, essa temática continua sendo muito atual. **Objetivo:** O objetivo geral deste estudo é analisar como as redes sociais são utilizadas pelas empreendedoras no processo de criação de novos negócios. Especificamente pretende identificar os tipos de laços que são utilizados pelas empreendedoras nas suas redes sociais nas fases de concepção, *start-up* e consolidação de negócios e verificar como essas redes sociais influenciam na obtenção de recursos. **Metodologia/Design:** A estratégia de pesquisa utilizada foi o estudo de casos múltiplos e as evidências foram coletadas por meio de entrevistas pessoais semiestruturadas com sete empreendedoras de agências de viagens de micro e pequeno porte. Os casos foram descritos individualmente e após essa descrição foi realizada a análise comparativa dos casos para examinar suas semelhanças e diferenças. **Resultados e Originalidade do Documento:** Entre os resultados encontrados vale destacar que os laços fortes foram os mais utilizados pelas empreendedoras principalmente na fase de concepção do negócio. Além disso, constatou-se que a experiência prévia foi determinante na identificação da oportunidade e na capacidade de se construir redes diversificadas.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo. Redes sociais empreendedoras. Empreendedorismo feminino. Processo empreendedor.

Resumen: Propósito justificado del tema: El estudio de las redes sociales emprendedoras ha sido reconocido como determinante en el proceso emprendedor, como en el éxito de los emprendimientos. Desde la década de 1990, hubo un especial interés en investigar redes sociales con el recorte del género y, considerando su relevancia, esta temática sigue siendo muy actual. **Objetivo:** El objetivo general de este estudio es analizar cómo las redes sociales son utilizadas por las emprendedoras en el proceso de creación de nuevos negocios. Específicamente pretende identificar los tipos de lazos que son utilizados por las emprendedoras en sus redes sociales en las fases de concepción, *start-up* y consolidación de negocios y verificar cómo esas redes sociales influyen en la obtención de recursos. **Metodología/Design:** La estrategia de investigación utilizada fue el estudio de casos múltiples y las evidencias fueron recogidas por medio de entrevistas personales semiestruturadas con siete emprendedoras de agencias de viajes de micro y pequeño porte. Los casos fueron descritos individualmente y después de esa descripción se realizó el análisis comparativo de los casos para examinar sus similitudes y diferencias. **Resultados y originalidad del documento:** Entre los resultados encontrados cabe destacar que los “lazos fuertes” fueron los más utilizados por las emprendedoras principalmente en la fase de concepción del negocio. Además, se constató que la experiencia previa fue determinante en la identificación de la oportunidad y en la capacidad de construir redes diversificadas.

Palabras clave: Empreendedorismo. Redes sociales empreendedoras. Empreendedor femenino. Proceso empreendedor.

1 INTRODUCTION

According to the 2016 report of the *Global Entrepreneurial Monitor* (GEM), in Brazil, the rate of early-stage entrepreneurial activity (TEA) is 19.9% for women and 19.2% for men, which may be considered a fairly balanced distribution. This shows the importance of women in the formation of the TEA and is in keeping with previous data, as in 2013 and 2015 the differences between male and female rates were 0.2% and 0.4%, respectively. However, the report highlights

that gender equality diminishes when specific established business ownership rates are analyzed. These data show that Brazilian women manage to create new businesses in the same proportion as men, but find it difficult to make their businesses prosper. This phenomenon may be associated with conditions reported by Brazilian female entrepreneurs, such as gender prejudice, less credibility as the business world is more traditionally associated with men, greater difficulty in obtaining financing and difficulty to reconcile family and business demands (GEM, 2016).

The growing participation of women in the Brazilian economy can also be seen in a study conducted by the Brazilian Micro and Small Enterprises' Support Service (SEBRAE), published in 2014. This study shows that despite occupying less than half of the economy from 2002 to 2012, women became more participative, spurred by the growing dynamism of their occupation, the rate of which rose by 2.1% per annum, with 40,700,000 active in 2012. There was also an expressive rise in the number of women in the formal labor market, accounting for around 40% of the formal workforce in micro and small enterprises (SEBRAE, 2014).

Studies have shown that women open businesses for different reasons. These include desire for achievement and independence, perceived market opportunities, difficulty in achieving professional growth in other companies (a phenomenon known as the "glass ceiling"), need to survive and a way to balance work and family (Machado et al., 2003). Another driving force is coming from a family of entrepreneurs (Buttner & Moore, 1997), which automatically leads them to entrepreneurship as if it were a genetic predisposition.

Social networks are known to be helpful tools at the beginning of a new business, providing access to information, advice and financial support (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). In the early stages of a new enterprise, social networks are a crucial asset for entrepreneurs who mobilize their personal relationship network to obtain physical resources, information, emotional support, capital, business contacts, and to transform visions and business plans into reality (Birley, 1985; Jo-

hannisson, 1998, 2000). Concern over social networks and their relationship with entrepreneurs has been recognized as a determining factor in the entrepreneurial process and in the success of enterprises (Aldrich et al., 1987; Greve & Salaff, 2003). Concerning social networks with regard to gender, although this approach was given special attention in the 1990s, the subject remains topical and requires further studies that can help to deepen existing issues or help to address new ones (Neergaard et al., 2005).

This study focuses on the tourism sector, which is the fastest-growing sector in the world. In 2012, it represented a growth of 3% in GWP, which overtook the growth of the global economy (2.3%). It is predicted that in the long term, travel and tourism will be responsible for 10% of GWP, creating millions of jobs at a rate of one in ten. In Brazil, the GDP of the tourism sector had a share of 9.1% in 2012, with an average forecast growth of 5.2% per annum in the following decade. With regard to employment, it represented 8.3% of this total and, this year, a growth of 3.8% in the number of jobs is expected (WTTC, 2013).

In this context, the general objective of this study was to analyze how social networks are used by female entrepreneurs in travel agencies in the creation of their businesses. The specific intention was to identify the types of ties used by the entrepreneurs in their social networks in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the business and gauge how these networks influence how they obtain resources. There now follows a theoretical review of entrepreneurship in tourism, entrepreneurship and the entrepre-

neurial process and entrepreneurial social networks and gender.

2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN TOURISM

Studies on entrepreneurship in tourism are recent, beginning in the nineties. The focus of the pioneers of tourism was to identify the motives of entrepreneurs to create businesses (Getz & Carlsen, 2000) and the characteristics of entrepreneurs in the sector (Glancey & Pettigrew, 1997; Lynch, 1998; Shivas 2001; Lerner & Haber, 2000). Many researchers identified life style motives among entrepreneurs in the sector. Of these studies, that of Morrison, Rimmington and Williams (1999) deserves to be highlighted. These authors found that businesses in the tourism sector are often created by people who seek a life style in which family needs, income, and way of life can be balanced. In addition to the motives, the typologies of entrepreneurs in the tourism sector were presented in some studies (Michaud, 1991; Williams & Tse, 1995). Since the year 2000, research on tourism entrepreneurs has diversified and addressed diverse themes, such as ethnic entrepreneurship (Butler; Carter & Brunn, 2002), intrapreneurship (Altinay, 2005; Jogaratnam & Tse, 2006), and sustainable entrepreneurship in tourism (Kokkranikal & Morrison, 2002). Entrepreneurship in tourism was analyzed in the study of Haber and Reichel (2007), which was conducted in Israel and based on the RBV (Resource Based View), using an integrated model combining the entrepreneurial process and resource accumulation.

Li (2008) reviewed studies on hospitality and tourism and identified articles on entrepreneurship in tourism published in seven of the most important periodicals in the field from 1986 to 2006. The author concluded that, despite the importance of small businesses and the entrepreneurial spirit in the hospitality and tourism industry, the results showed that only 2% of the articles published during the period in question were related to entrepreneurship. To Jaafar et al. (2011), the lack of relative importance of education and knowledge related to the tourism industry influences the survival capability of entrepreneurs with small and medium-sized enterprises in the tourism sector.

More recently, Andriga, Poulson and Pernecky (2016) analyzed motivational factors that explain the transition of successful entrepreneurs back to the labor market. The study concluded that although their life styles were self-imposed, they were exacerbated by the needs of family, customers and the owners themselves, several of whom worked themselves to exhaustion. The implications for future entrepreneurs include considerations with regard to balancing their professional lives and the real cost of owning a business in the tourism sector.

The gender dimension was considered in some international studies such as the pioneer study conducted by Shivas (2001), seeking to identify the entrepreneurial motives in hospitality. Three main motives were identified: the desire to have their own business, the perception of tourism as a pleasant sector in which to work, and the perception that the business in this sector

would enable them to improve their standard of living.

Gender was also the focus of the study conducted by McGhee, Kim and Jennings (2007), who compared the differences between male and female in rural tourism. The results showed that women are more motivated for rural tourism and for them the education of consumers and creating jobs for family members were very important. More recently, Kimbu and Ngoasong (2016) explored a social entrepreneurship model focusing on the participation and engagement of women entrepreneurs in tourism. Their findings complemented previous studies that revealed that female entrepreneurs with social purposes overcome institutional and traditional/ethnic barriers not only to create their businesses but also to use them as platforms to achieve social and economic independence.

In Brazil, some recent studies have focused on gender in the tourism sector, such as that of Dreher and Ullrich (2011). The purpose of this study was to analyze the representation of women in the tourism business in Blumenau, Santa Catarina State, to understand the aspects that led them to this achievement, and the limits of power and decision-making of these women. The results showed that the required characteristics, qualities and gender problems, instead of leading to inequality or discrimination, actually showed very little conflict, and that these women as managers had decision-making power and concentrated on reconciling their professional and family lives.

A study of women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector was conducted by Bomfim and

Teixeira (2015) to identify the major challenges facing women entrepreneurs in terms of planning and managing their businesses. In financial management, the greatest challenge is the difficulty in accessing financial resources, such as funding and credit from suppliers. Concerning people management, the greatest difficulties were hiring skilled people and conflicts resulting from interpersonal relationships.

Another study conducted by Teixeira and Bomfim (2016) of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector analyzed the challenges facing these women to reconcile the conflict between work and family. The study showed that the need to strike a balance between conflicting demands leads to emotional and/or physical problems, affecting self-esteem and morale. In an attempt to balance their multiple roles, the emotional support of husband and children is of great importance. Another study on gender that year was conducted by Souza et al. (2016) to analyze the entrepreneurial potential of the female owners of companies in the tourism sector in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina State. The results showed significant differences between the means obtained in this segment and other interviewees in terms of personality traits, strategic posture, and risk-taking.

2.1 Entrepreneurship and the business creation process

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) understand entrepreneurship as a process involving the phases of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities by the individuals involved. Classical authors such as Reynolds and Miller (1992) argue that, despite the growing number of studies on entrepreneurship, only a few explore the business creation process, meaning the period

from the conception to the birth of a new enterprise. According to Gartner (1985), the creation of new ventures has four dimensions: a) individual(s) – the characteristics of the person/people starting the business; b) organization – the type of enterprise that is created; c) environment – the situation that involves the whole venture; and d) process – the actions taken by the entrepreneur to start the new business.

Moroz and Hindle (2012) emphasize that there is a consensus on the lack of rigorous studies on the process in the field of entrepreneurship, not only with regard to how the process interacts with other dimensions, but even as a singular object of study. By examining thirty-two entrepreneurial process models, such as the classic models of Gartner (1985), Bruyat and Julien (2000), Archivilli, Cardoso and Ray (2003), Shane (2003) and Sarasvathy (2006), they argue that many models call for universality, but that this does not occur because many of them have few possibilities of generalization.

Borges et al. (2005), like Gartner (1985), believe that the entrepreneur, creation process, new business and environment should also be taken into account in any study on business creation. In a study conducted by these authors in Canada on the business creation process, the stages and activities of the process were observed in detail. The authors presented a model of the entrepreneurial process in four phases: initiation, preparation, launch, and consolidation. The first phase begins with the identification of the opportunity, development of the idea, and the decision to create the venture. In the second phase, preparation, the

business plan is organized, market research is conducted, financial resources are mobilized, and an entrepreneurial team is formed. In the launch phase, the activities of the venture are effectively begun. Finally, the consolidation phase begins, with its associated activities being the promotion and sale of products or services and the management of the venture. Some studies have been conducted in Brazil on the creation of business ventures in the tourism sector, and will be outlined below.

Teixeira (2012) adopted the model of Borges et al. (2005) to analyze the business creation process in the tourism sector, identifying the stages of initiation, preparation, start-up, and consolidation in four travel agencies located in Curitiba, Paraná State. The author observed that the businesses had begun informally and that the entrepreneurs had no information on the sector. In the business preparation stage, despite the support offered by the SEBRAE, the entrepreneurs started their ventures without developing a business plan. The consolidation of the business was the most difficult stage because the entrepreneurs had to deal with problems of seasonality and difficulties in managing the cash flow between the high and low season.

Focusing on the entrepreneurial process in the hotel industry, Teixeira (2012) conducted a study in the hotel industry in Aracaju, Sergipe State. The author found that the main motive for creating the business was to seize a perceived opportunity, and found that despite support offered by the SEBRAE, the entrepreneurs began their ventures without a business plan or market research. They considered the business worth-

while, although some highlighted low profit levels, heavy workload, and lack of incentives from the government to support the development of tourism in the state.

Also on this theme, a study was conducted by Teixeira and Carvalho (2012) in travel agencies in Aracaju, Sergipe State to analyze the factors that influenced the creation of new ventures. The most important results included the high level of schooling of the entrepreneurs, support from their families, and prior experience in the sector. A noteworthy aspect of the study was that although the entrepreneurs were well educated, they were not qualified to prepare a business plan or manage their businesses. These are weak points when it comes to operating in an increasingly competitive market.

The present study adapted the model of Borges et al. (2005) and adopted three stages of the entrepreneurial process to analyze the female entrepreneurs' social networks: conception, start-up, and consolidation. The stages of initiation and preparation were combined into a single stage, that of conception. This simplification was used considering that in a micro or small enterprise preparing business plans and conducting market research, which are typical of the preparation stage, are rare. The main activities of entrepreneurs during the conception stage are identification of the opportunity, development of the idea, decision to create, business plan, market research, attracting financial resources, and defining the team. In the start-up stage, the legal procedures involved in opening the business are considered, along with the entrepreneur's dedica-

tion to the business, organization of installations and equipment, development of the first product/services, hiring employees, and first customers. To operationalize the business, marketing and sales, the break-even point, planning and administration are considered.

2.2 Entrepreneurial social networks

Entrepreneurial social networks are defined as an entrepreneur's relationships and contacts with other people. These contacts provide means of recognizing opportunities and facility in the use of resources, which are potential sources of competitive advantage (Barnir & Smith, 2002; Birley, 1985). To Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), the entrepreneurial process is founded on a changeable network of continuous social relationships that facilitate and form ties between aspiring entrepreneurs, resources, and opportunities. To these authors, networks are known to help the start of a business and its growth, providing access to information, advice and finances, as well as necessary contacts.

Networks are systems made up of nodes or ties and connections between them that, in the social sciences, are represented by social subjects (individuals, groups, organizations, etc.) connected by some type of relationship (Granovetter, 1973). To this author, ties can be strong or weak. Strong ties exist in a small group with long-term relationships, such as members of a family and a small group of internal advisors of a business owner. They are characterized by heavy investments in the relationship, frequent con-

tact with each other, and an implicit sense of reciprocity. Weak ties exist in the short-term, contact is less frequent and there is less trust, and more ambiguity in the relationship.

According to Dubini and Aldrich (1991), a personal network consists of all the people with whom an entrepreneur has direct ties or, for some purposes, indirect ties through direct relationships. These include partners, suppliers, customers, distributors, trade associations, other creditors or family members. The simplest type of social network includes direct links between entrepreneurs and the people with whom they have direct contacts and from whom they obtain services, advice, and moral support. The authors highlight the concept of extended personal networks, which arise within organizations and consist of all the relationships between owners, managers, and employees and how they are structured by patterns of coordination and control.

Birley (1985) highlights formal and informal networks, which are similar to the personal and business types identified by Dubini and Aldrich (1991). To this author, informal networks involve family, friends, old acquaintances, and employees, who may be less well informed of the options and schemes available to entrepreneurs, but are willing to listen and give advice. Formal or professional networks include all the individuals with whom the entrepreneur maintains relationships, with the main subjects being business-related. They include banks, accountants, consultants, and organizations that can satisfy entrepreneurs' needs, although they may be time-consuming and expensive. Irrespective of the typology, it is im-

portant for entrepreneurs to recognize the relevance of social networks, as entrepreneurship can be limited or facilitated by the links between resources and opportunities created through an entrepreneur's social network. Entrepreneurs build successful businesses by maximizing opportunities, and their social networks are crucial in this respect (Birley et al., 1990).

Furthermore, Ducci and Teixeira (2011) claim that these networks can help to form social capital for entrepreneurs. To Park et al (2012), social capital is everything that facilitates individual or collective action, created by relationship networks, reciprocity, trust, and social norms.

Two international studies focusing on the use of social capital in the tourism sector may be highlighted. The first was conducted by Zhao, Ritchie and Echtner (2011), applying the concept of social capital to the development of tourism. It was conducted in the rural environment in China and aimed to verify the creation of new ventures and their relationship with social capital. The study found that social capital was positively related to entrepreneurial capability and the probability of an individual establishing a tourism business while cognitive social capital was marginal.

The study of Park et al (2012) was conducted in North Korea with residents of villages involved in government rural tourism projects. The aim was to investigate the type of social capital that local residents possessed and how this capital was affected by elements such as socio-economic status, demographic variables, and interaction in the community. As a result of the cluster analysis,

the residents were divided into two groups: a high social capital group and a low one. It was found that the variables that affected the probability of determining the types of social capital are the types of participation in rural tourism businesses and the main crops. The sale of agricultural produce, preparing meals, housing, and experimental rural tourism programs were positive. This discovery indicates that people who participate in these activities are more likely to belong to a high social capital group. This result also implies that irrespective of the category of tourism businesses, the financial benefits of developing tourism are crucial when it comes to building greater social trust and cooperation in communities.

In Brazil, some studies have addressed entrepreneurial social networks with a focus on tourism. The pioneer study was that of Ducci and Teixeira (2010) in a travel agency in the interior of the state of Paraná. The aim was to understand how social networks were used by the entrepreneurs to form their social capital in the creation and development phases of a business. The most important results of the study were that relationships grew stronger as trust was built and that access to social networks enabled access to information and resources and acted as a learning channel. Therefore, the resources accessed did indeed aid the formation of social capital.

Of the most recent studies addressing this theme in tourism, those of Gimenez and Gimenez (2015), Costa and Galina (2016) and Souza and Teixeira (2017) especially deserve to be mentioned. Gimenez and Gimenez (2015) analyzed the role of social networks

and social capital in the creation of a company in the tourist sector in Curitiba, Paraná State. Through a case study, it was observed that social networks are an important source of social capital for entrepreneurs, both in the creation and growth stage of the company. It was also found that on many occasions access to financial and social resources and information was available, which emerged through formal and informal networks.

Costa and Galina (2016) conducted their study at rural tourism enterprises in Brazil and Portugal to analyze the social networks used by entrepreneurs, the resources accessed and the important aspects related to the dimensions of social capital in the creation and development phases of the ventures. The results suggest that, in the cases in question, formal and informal networks are crucial in the mobilization of economic and non-economic resources. In general, the informal network is important for mobilizing non-economic resources. In the Brazilian cases, informal networks were equally important in the mobilization of economic resources.

Souza and Teixeira (2017), in a study conducted in small hotels, sought to analyze the social capital of entrepreneurs using the structural, relational, and cognitive dimensions in a comparative analysis of the cases studied. The results highlighted the importance of social capital in establishing a new business, the role of trust, and the use of formal and informal networks.

In the nineteen nineties, there was special interest in researching social networks with a focus on gender (Neergaard et

al., 2005), a theme that remains topical. However, these authors claim that it is important to observe that when the study of social networks is incorporated into research on female entrepreneurship, the concepts are broadened because of the inconclusive definitions of entrepreneurship, the complexity and dynamic nature of relationships in networks, and the particular aspects inherent or attributed to women embedded in the business world.

Regarding the scope of social networks, Vale and Serafim (2010) found that female networks were not very diverse, and this restricted access to other platforms. A possible reason for this might be related to the availability of time for these women, who do not find it so easy to socialize outside of their work and family environments, to which they dedicate much of their time. Another explanation given by Vale et al. (2011) for the low diversity of women's networks lies in the historical social context portrayed in the image of the man as the provider. In their activities outside of the family, men form networks with predominantly weak ties, while women, with stronger links to their families, are involved in networks with strong ties. The problem that emerges from this characteristic of women's networks is that the less diffuse her network is the less capacity a woman will have to obtain information that is useful for developing a competitive advantage (Vale & Serafim, 2010).

3 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

This study is exploratory in nature, as studies that address entrepreneurial social

networks in the context of the tourism sector in Brazil remain in their early stages. The multiple case study was used as a research strategy in keeping with the methodological precepts proposed by Yin (2010) and Eisenhardt (1989). To Yin (2010), the importance of conducting a multiple-case study is based on the following premises: a) there is little information available on the theme and thus analyzing more than one company can provide complementary information on a subject that has seen little research; and b) a single case study might distort the analysis due to the particular nature of the company in question.

The data were collected in personal semi-structured interviews with the women entrepreneurs who opened the travel agencies, using a semi-structured script. Seven women entrepreneurs, who opened their businesses and now manage them, were interviewed in order to identify the types of social ties they use and the resources that they obtained in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of their tourism businesses. Although interviews are an essential source of information for a case study, Yin (2010) recommends corroborating the data obtained with other sources of evidence, such as document analysis. Information from the company websites served as a documental source of data, as the sites listed the location of the companies and the services on offer. Travel agencies were chosen, as they are responsible for the dynamic nature of the tourism business in the regions of the state where they operate, as they welcome visitors and tourists (Teixeira, 2012).

To Laville and Dionne (1999), it is

essential to define analytical categories so that the elements of content can be gathered and organized in relation to their meanings. In this study, the mixed model was used. In this case, the researcher does not wish to be

limited in terms of analysis and interpretation to identifying the presence of elements that were predetermined. The analytical categories and elements of analysis adopted in this study are based on its specific objectives, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 - Analytical categories and elements of analysis

CATEGORY	ELEMENTS OF ANALYSIS
Entrepreneur's profile	Age, age of first business, place of birth, education, marital status, number of children, previous experience, entrepreneurial family background, attendance of managerial courses/training.
Business characteristics	Year of foundation, organizational structure, physical structure, services provided, number of employees, customers, family members in the company. Strong ties: formed by personal networks such as family, friends and old acquaintances.
Types of ties in the conception, start-up and consolidation	Weak ties: formed by entrepreneurial networks from relationships with banks, consultants, customers, suppliers and others Social Resources: emotional, moral and technical support, identification of new business opportunities, motivational support, source of ideas and information, advice, recommendation of suppliers, customers and employees.
Resources accessed in the conception, start-up and consolidation	Financial Resources: Loans and financing, seeking investments, application of resources, fixed costs (raw materials and suppliers, equipment, locations and employees). Physical Resources: raw material and input, machinery and equipment, vehicles, property and physical location

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the literature review

4 CASE DESCRIPTIONS

The cases in this study are described following the order of the analytical categories listed above: entrepreneur's profile, business characteristics, types of ties and resources accessed in the conception, start-up and consolidation phases.

4.1 Case of agency 1

The entrepreneur of Agency 1 is 35 years old. She was born in Aracaju. She is married and has two daughters. As she worked with her parents in the family travel agency, she decided to train overseas to have her own business and chose a course that she

could apply directly to her business. Following her stay in the United States, she began a graduate course in Management in Foreign Trade, but did not conclude it due to family issues. Before opening her own agency, her professional experience was always related to the tourism sector, as since her teenage years she had worked in her parents' company. Even her earliest childhood memories are linked to the family business. Therefore, her immersion in this environment was a determining factor behind the entrepreneur, at the age of 22, to open her own agency, which she believed to be her natural path. The entrepreneur has not attended any courses in the field of management. However, her previous experience working in the family busi

ness is a great source of learning, providing her with experience in various administrative roles, thus developing a range of managerial skills. The company became operational only with the entrepreneur and a minimum structure of a cell phone and a computer. She currently has two stores and nine employees, including managers, but no family members.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

Tables 2, 3, and 4 contain summaries of the main types of ties and resources found in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the entrepreneur's business, extracted from the case description for Agency 1.

Table 2 –Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception phase of Agency 1

Ties	Strong	Family: father, mother, daughters
	Weak	-
Re-resources	Social	Strong Ties: Identification of business opportunity through her prior experience in the family business; Moral support from parents; Help from parents and husband with ideas, advice and recommendations for customers and suppliers; Help from family and friends with ideas for advertising; Strengthening of ethical and professional values through her upbringing. Weak Ties:
	Financial	Own resources.
	Physical	Own resources.

Table 3- Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 1

Ties	Strong	Family (parents and friends) with moral support.
	Weak	Accountants.
Re-resources	Social	Strong Ties: Moral support from parents and friends; Necessary skills in the early days of the business obtained through previous experience in family company. Weak Ties: Execution of legal procedures of opening the company by a specialized firm.
	Financial	Own resources.
	Physical	Own resources.

Table 4–Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 1

Ties	Strong	Family (father, mother, husband, and daughters) with moral support and ideas.
	Weak	ABAV, Tourism Agencies and travel Operators, exchanging information and employees with marketing plan, strategic planning, and banks.
Resources	Social	<p>Strong Ties: Moral support from parents and husband on trips; Help from parents to serve customers when demand increases; Help from children and husband with ideas for new campaigns; Status associated with friendship with a woman at the bank.</p> <p>Weak Ties: Drafting of marketing plan with help from an employee Exchange of information on the tourism sector; Drafting the plan of growth for the company with employee help.</p>
	Financial	Own resources, but has easy access to credit due to good relationship she formed with the banks.
	Physical	Own resources.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.2 Case of agency 2

The interviewee was born in Penedo, Alagoas State. She is 42 years old. She is married and has three children. She began a degree course in Management, but did not conclude it. She has never attended a course or training in the field of management. The entrepreneur noted that she chose entrepreneurship due to influence from her brother, who put her in touch with commerce. Positive experiences in her own travels aroused her interest in the tourism sector and this was a determining factor in her decision to open her own agency. At the age of 21, she had her first business, a restaurant that she ran with her husband, remaining in that sector for 18 years. She then left this activity to concentrate on a travel agency. Her company was founded in 2011, as part of an entrepreneurial initiative, aided by her husband, who

is a business partner. They currently have no employees and only family members work at the agency. The company caters to a wide range of people, but its main focus is on public sector workers and the elderly, the latter having more time and money for traveling. The services they provide basically consist of selling package tours, insurance and car rental.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

Tables 5, 6, and 7 contain summaries of the main types of ties and resources found in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the entrepreneur's business, extracted from the case description of Agency 2.

Table 5 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception of Agency 2

Ties	Strong	Friend came up with the idea for the business; Sisters; Friends and close family.
	Weak	SEBRAE
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Idea for the business came from her friend; Help with moral support from friends and sisters; Suggestions for the development of the business from friends and close family members. Weak Ties: Information from the SEBRAE regarding the opening of the company.
	Financial	Own resources acquired by selling the assets of her previous business.
	Physical	Purchased with her own resources from the sale of the assets of her previous business.

Table 6 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 2

Ties	Strong	Friend who came up with the idea for the business; Husband; Friends in general.
	Weak	Tour operators.
Re-sources	Social	Strong Ties: Help from friends with first customers; Help from husband to manage the company; Help from family to serve customers. Weak Ties: Help from operators with technical support.
	Financial	-
	Physical	-

Table 7 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 2

Ties	Strong	Friends; Husband and son; Family in general
	Weak	ABAV; SEBRAE.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Help to prepare travel plans; Help from family to publicize the company; Help from the husband with financial management; Establishing relationships of trust with family members; Help from son with advertising and publicity materials. Weak Ties: Help from the ABAV with information on the business and publicizing the company; Help from the SEBRAE with courses on tourism.
	Financial	-
	Physical	-

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.3 Case of agency 3

The entrepreneur is single. She is 33 years old and has one daughter. She was born in São Paulo. She has a degree in Tourism and Hospitality and a post-graduate di-

ploma in Teacher Training in Higher Education. She has attended a course in the field of management offered by the SEBRAE. The decision to open a business was influenced by her entrepreneur father. She was also attracted by the possibility of flexible working

hours and the desire to work for herself. At the age of 21, she was already the owner of her first business. This was a drinks and poultry distributor. However, this did not work out and she opened another business in the food sector. Before opening her current business, she had gained wide-ranging professional experience as both employer and employee at other companies. Her degree in tourism and experience at travel agencies helped her to open her first agency with a partner, but this experience was not successful.

The company currently has no branches. It is managed by the owner and has two direct employees and two freelancers. With these collaborators, the agency offers a

number of services, including excursions, cruises, plane tickets, group tours, honeymoon trips, general vehicle rental, and transfers. The main clientele consists of young people and the services offered depend on the planning skills of the entrepreneur.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

The main types of ties and resources found in the conception, start-up and consolidation phase of the entrepreneur's business are summarized in Tables 8, 9, and 10, extracted from the case description of Agency 3.

Table 8- Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception phase of Agency 3

Ties	Strong	Friends; Mother.
	Weak	Entrepreneurs; SEBRAE; Consultants; Suppliers; Customers.
Resources	Social	<p>Strong Ties: Strengthening the idea of opening the business with the support of a friend who works in another company; Help from a friend/colleague to open the company as partners; Professional help from her friend with suggestions for the name of the company; Professional help from her friend with ideas for decorating the store; Emotional and moral support from her mother.</p> <p>Weak Ties: Sharing knowledge and experiences with other entrepreneurs; Customers, suppliers and consultants help with advice; Customers, suppliers and consultants helped identify opportunities; Help from the SEBRAE with the Business Plan.</p>
	Financial	Family (father) helped with a loan.
	Physical	Purchased with a loan from her father.

Table 9 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 3

Ties	Strong	Mother; Father; Friends.
	Weak	Suppliers and customers.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Her mother helped to serve customers; The entrepreneur received emotion support from her mother and daughter; She received moral support from her friends; A friend helped with the interior design services, choosing adequate equipment and a functional layout for the store; Her friend helped her hire her first employee. Weak Ties: Customers were sources of ideas and information; Suppliers helped with training.
	Financial	Help from her father with financial resources.
	Physical	-

Table 10 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 3

Ties	Strong	Friends; Mother; Daughter; Boyfriend.
	Weak	ABAV; EMBRATUR; SEBRAE; Customers; Consultants; Suppliers.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Advice from family and friends; Help from friends, mother and daughter to identify threats from the competition; Motivational support from friends; Help from a friend to create material for advertising campaigns. Weak Ties: Help from customers, consultants, and suppliers with recommendations for sales; Help from a public agency and association to allow the entrepreneur access to other networks and advertise her company; Help with access to information and learning by the SEBRAE and ABAV.
	Financial	-
	Physical	Help from boyfriend to purchase equipment.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.4 Case of agency 4

The entrepreneur is 43 years old, with a post-graduate degree in marketing. She is married and has one son. At the age of 15, she already ran informal businesses in the municipality of Itabi, Sergipe State, and always dreamed of one day gaining her independence. She became interested in the tourism sector when she still lived in the interior and dreamt of traveling and being an entrepreneur. In 1989, at the age of 19, she began working in the tourism sector. However, it was in 1997, with the help of a busi-

ness partner, that she opened her first travel agency in Aracaju. After eight years, the partnership ended and the entrepreneur opened her second agency, this time on her own.

When the agency first opened, the entrepreneur had five employees, but this number has now quadrupled. Some of the employees have university degrees. The entrepreneur is not the only person in the family who has opened their own business, as a number of family members are also entrepreneurs. Her family members are present in the daily life of the company, as some are employees. The entrepreneur believes that

working with family members is more of a positive than a negative experience.

the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the entrepreneur's business are summarized, extracted from the case description.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

In Tables 11, 12, and 13, below, the main types of resources and ties identified in

Table 11 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the conception phase of Agency 4

Ties	Strong	Family; Mother; Husband; Friends.
	Weak	-
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Advice and moral support from her mother; Help in the form of emotional support from her husband; Family members helped in the development of skills through sharing knowledge and experiences.
	Financial	Her own resources, which she gained when she ended her partnership.
	Physical	Husband helped by suggesting a location for the store.

Table 12 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 4

Ties	Strong	Brother
	Weak	Suppliers
Resources	Social	-
	Financial	Strong Ties: Brother helped with a loan. Weak Ties: Suppliers helped by providing credit.
	Physical	-

Table 13 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 4

Ties	Strong	Stepchildren
	Weak	Employees; SEBRAE
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Technical support from stepchildren to redesign the company logo. Weak Ties: Technical support from the SEBRAE with consultancy in marketing, consultancy in Strategic Management, courses, and training; Technical support from the team.
	Financial	80% of the cost of ongoing consultancy is paid for by the SEBRAE.
	Physical	-

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.5 Case of agency 5

The entrepreneur is 49 years old and is from Salvador. She has a degree in accountancy. She is a widow and has no children. She has never received training in the field of management. However, she gains the know-

wledge she requires through reading. When she opened her first business, she was 21, but had already worked in informal commerce in Brazil, and the decision to open her own business was a matter of affinity. Since childhood, she had sold and exchanged, always busy with something. She gained expe-

rience in the tourism sector when she moved to the United States in search of opportunities. It should be highlighted that there are signs of family influence in the entrepreneur's decision to open her own business, as her brothers and sisters, cousins and other relatives are also entrepreneurs.

The company was established in 2011 without partners, becoming effectively operational in 2012. The company began with, and continues to have, two employees, one of them a graduate. The entrepreneur is not related to her employees. The services the

agency offers include travel consultancy, package holidays in Brazil and overseas, preferably for adults.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

A summary of the main types of ties and resources identified in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the entrepreneur's business are summarized in Tables 14, 15, and 16, below, extracted from the case description of Agency 5.

Table 14 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception phase of Agency 5

Ties	Strong	Family: Mother.
	Weak	Operators; Customers; Suppliers; Register of Tourism Service Providers (CADASTUR); Brazilian Tourism Institute (EMBRATUR).
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Moral and motivational support from her mother. Weak Ties: Operators helping with information and clearing up doubts; Suppliers helping with information and clearing up doubts; Customers as sources of learning; Public agencies providing credentials and licenses.
	Financial	Help from mother.
	Physical	Help from mother.

Table 15 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 5

Ties	Strong	Family: Mother and brother.
	Weak	Accountant; Acquaintances.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Help with first customer. Weak Ties: Accountant helped with legal procedures to open the firm; Acquaintances helped by recommending first employees.
	Financial	Financial aid from mother with part of the working capital.
	Physical	-

Table 16 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 5

Ties	Strong	-
	Weak	Accountant; ABAV
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: ABAV helps with: Information on travel routes; Recommending suppliers; Recommending operators; Accountant helps with financial management.
	Financial	-
	Physical	-

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.6 Case of agency 6

The entrepreneur is 31 years old and opened her first business at the age of 21. She is from Aracaju, married, and with one son. She has a degree in Tourism and a post-graduate degree in Business Management. In addition to these courses, she has attended courses in the field of management offered by the SEBRAE and ABAV. She has always been involved in commerce, as she worked in the family business. The entrepreneur suggests that the example set by her entrepreneur father has greatly influenced her professional life. As well as contact with the family business, the entrepreneur explained that when she decided to become an entrepreneur, she also considered the possibility of more flexible working hours. She also noted that in addition to the influence of family and the attraction of flexible hours, her academic

background in tourism and internship in travel agencies were determining factors in choosing this market segment for her future business.

The company was founded in 2005 with a partner. Currently, there are no family members working for the company. In addition to the partners, there is an employee with a degree. The services offered are hotels, airline tickets, car rental, and travel insurance in Brazil. Her customers are upper middle class people who frequent resorts.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

Tables 17, 18, and 19 contain summaries of the types of ties and resources found in the conception, start-up and consolidation phase of the business of the entrepreneur, extracted from the description of the case of Agency 6.

Table 17 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception phase of Agency 6

Ties	Strong	Father; Former colleague.
	Weak	Suppliers/operators.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Help from father with moral support and recommendation of customers, and suppliers. Weak Ties: Help from suppliers, providing credit and guidance; Help from the university with the preparation of the business plan.
	Financial	Strong Ties: Credit from suppliers.
	Physical	Strong Ties: Own resources and resources of former colleague.

Table 18 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 6

Ties	Strong	Friends; Family (father).
	Weak	EMBRATUR, Travel agencies.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Help from family and friends as the first customers; Help from parents and friends to publicize the agency; Help from father with advice and guidance on how to serve customers. Weak Ties: EMBRATUR with registering the agency and providing it with the credentials required to function; Help from other agencies with professional recommendation.
	Financial	Own resources.
	Physical	Own resources.

Table 19 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 6

Ties	Strong	Father
	Weak	Customers
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Help from father with advice and emotional support. Weak Ties: Customers are sources of motivation.
	Financial	Own resources.
	Physical	Own resources.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

4.7 Case of agency 7

The entrepreneur is 52 years old and is from Alagoas. She is a widow with three children. In addition to a degree in Psychology, she has two post-graduate degrees, one in Marketing Management and another in Human Resources. She approached the SEBRAE to develop her managerial skills. Her first professional experience was in her father's company. After university, she began a career as a psychologist, but moved to another city to manage her father's hotel. The influence of her family was a determining factor in her decision to work in inbound tourism.

The company was founded seven years ago. The agency specializes in inbound tourism and tourist activities in the region of Xingó. The company was initially established with family members. However, it ended up

being controlled by the entrepreneur. Working with her family has always been part of her life and she feels comfortable in this situation. She has had four employees since the agency opened. Only one of these collaborators has completed higher education. She has a variety of customers, ranging from large operators to individuals. The company has a small structure, without departments, and all the employees help out with every activity.

Types of ties and resources in the phases of the business

A summary of the main types of ties and resources identified in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the business, extracted from the case description of Agency 7, is provided in Tables 20, 21, and 22, below.

Table 20 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Conception phase of Agency 7

Ties	Strong	Family (father, mother, children, siblings).
	Weak	ABAV; SEBRAE; Bank
Re-sources	Social	Strong Ties: Help with the idea of opening the company; help with the name of the company; Creation of the slogan; Help with the business plan.
		Weak Ties: Help from the SEBRAE and ABAV with courses and training.
	Financial	Weak Ties: Financial resources.
	Physical	Strong Ties: Furniture and other resources.

Table 21 - Types of ties and resources obtained in the Start-up phase of Agency 7

Ties	Strong	Friends; Family
	Weak	Employees; Accountant
Re-sources	Social	Strong Ties: Help to choose furniture; help with legal procedures. Weak Ties: Help with operational procedures for selling tickets; Help from accountant with legal procedures for opening the firm
	Financial	Strong Ties: Financial Resources.
	Physical	-

Table 22 – Types of ties and resources obtained in the Consolidation phase of Agency 7

Ties	Strong	Family; Friends.
	Weak	SEBRAE.
Resources	Social	Strong Ties: Friends offer contracts in difficult times; Friends are customers; Family as a source of support. Weak Ties: SEBRAE with consultancy.
	Financial	-
	Physical	-

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research data

5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CASES

Following the description of the seven cases of the travel agencies, a comparative analysis was conducted based on the analytical categories of the study: profile of the entrepreneurs, characteristics of the companies, and types of ties and resources accessed in the conception, start-up, and consolidation phases of the business. An effort was made to highlight the differences and similarities between the cases in question, relating them whenever possible with the theoretical base.

It was noted that the average age of the women entrepreneurs who participated in this study is 41, the youngest being 31 and the oldest 52 years old. Their average age when they opened their first business was 25, with the youngest being 18 and the oldest 43 years old. The marital status of the entrepreneurs differs greatly, with married and single women and widows, with only one

having no children. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Gouveia et al. (2013), with married being the predominant marital status and a similar number of children. The entrepreneurs have high levels of schooling, similar to entrepreneurs in other studies (Vale & Serafim, 2010), with only two not having concluded their university courses. Among those with post-graduate diplomas, it was observed that they were particularly concerned with developing their managerial skills by attending specific courses for this purpose. Thus, the drive for learning is a characteristic of the entrepreneurs in this study and others (Ducci & Teixeira, 2010).

Another issue that was addressed that had proved to be relevant in some studies, such as Vale and Serafim (2010) and Corrêa and Vale (2014), is the entrepreneurs' previous experience and the success of their ventures. In this study, only one entrepreneur had no previous professional experien-

ce in the tourism sector. It is worth noting the predominance of entrepreneurs who began their activities at a very early age, when they were around 20 years old. Those who did not experience entrepreneurship in this way were involved in the family business.

It was noted that the entrepreneurs who were interviewed came from families of entrepreneurs, including grandparents, parents, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, and husbands. This result is in keeping with the studies of Vale and Serafim (2010, p. 13), who identified among women entrepreneurs a "certain family tradition in the business world". Nevertheless, the main reference in the family for these women was the paternal figure as an example and inspiration in their lives. In the interviews, the factors that deserve to be highlighted are family influence and previous experience as an entrepreneur, followed by educational background and training in the tourism sector, desire for financial independence and the possibility of flexible working hours.

It was noted that the companies in this study were created recently, with only one opening in the year 2000. Regarding the number of employees, only one agency, only one company would be considered a small business, while the others fit the profile of micro enterprises. As for the organizational structure, Agencies 1 and 4 had a simple structure, with a maximum of three hierarchical levels.

With regard to the participation of family members in the agencies' activities, only three entrepreneurs highlighted that their relatives are also employees. It was also observed that Agencies 2, 6, and 7, unlike the other entrepreneurs, were businesses with partners. At Agency 2, the partnership was formed with the entrepreneur's husband. At Agency 6, the entrepreneur formed her partnership with a former colleague, while at Agency 7 the partnership was formed bet-

ween the entrepreneur, her daughters, and niece. However, in the latter case, only the entrepreneur herself effectively works at the company.

5.1 Ties and resources accessed in the conception phase

The **conception phase** is when the business opportunity is identified and the idea developed. Regarding the initial idea for the business, only Agency 2 used access to **strong ties** through a friend to create the business idea. The influence of the environment was a determining factor for the emergence of the business idea and perceived opportunity. In the case of Agency 1, all the experience in the tourism sector was acquired in the family business. The business idea for Agencies 3, 4, 5, and 7 emerged in the work environment of the entrepreneurs. In the case of Agency 6, attending a degree course was a determining factor for the emergence of ideas. The importance of the entrepreneurs' prior experience should be highlighted, as emphasized in the study conducted by Corrêa and Vale (2014). These authors observed that previous experience enabled the creation of ties and focal relationships, and provided entrepreneurs with technical skills and references, albeit minimal, thus facilitating their entrepreneurial activities.

In this phase, all the entrepreneurs accessed their **strong ties**. The entrepreneurs of Agencies 2, 3, and 4, as well as family members, counted on friends as primary sources of ideas. They provided the business idea itself, helped with ideas for advertising, the company name and the decoration. The entrepreneurs from Agencies 1, 5, 6, and 7 did not access friend in this phase and relied on support from family members. In these cases, the family also helped with ideas for the business, but relatives were primarily a

source of emotional and moral support, as they acted as advisors in the figure of the father and mothers and as providers of physical resources for Agency 4 and financial resources for Agencies 3 and 5. These results are compatible with the findings of other studies in the tourism sector. Ducci and Teixeira (2010) demonstrated that friends and family are the most important ties in the early stages of a business. Bomfim and Teixeira (2015) highlighted that the difficulties faced by the women entrepreneurs in this study were diverse and, to overcome them, they always counted on support from their relationship networks, especially family and friends.

Regarding access to networks constituted by **weak ties**, it is worth highlighting that the entrepreneurs from Agencies 1 and 4 did not access these networks in the conception phase to obtain resources. In the case of the entrepreneur at Agency 1, contacts with several entrepreneur family members throughout her life combined with her professional experience at the family agency were used in the conception phase of her business. In the case of Entrepreneur 4, despite having over 20 years of experience in the tourism sector, her distrust of the ethical attitudes of other entrepreneurs made her reluctant to strengthen relationships. The entrepreneurs from Agencies 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 accessed their strong ties to obtain **social resources**. The entrepreneurs from Agencies 2 and 5 repeatedly sought to clarify doubts related to the legal and operational aspects of the business. Agency 2 sought information from the SEBRAE on the procedures required to open the business, and Agency 5 sought other operators for info on the market. The entrepreneur from Agency 3 broadened her horizons by sharing knowledge and experiences with other entrepreneurs and asked suppliers for advice. The main point shared by Agencies 5 and 6 lay in the wide-ranging

orientations they received from operators and especially suppliers. Only the entrepreneur at Agency 6 had help with her business plan through the university. At the other agencies, there was no formal business plan at all. Regarding training and courses at this stage of the business, only the entrepreneur from Agency 7 had access to this resource through the SEBRAE and ABAV. Weak ties were not accessed by any of the entrepreneurs to obtain **physical resources** in this phase, while **financial resources** were obtained through suppliers and banks. Agency 6 obtained this resource in the form of credit through a supplier, and Agency 7 accessed the bank to take out a cash loan.

It should be highlighted that, in some cases, weak ties were not used in the conception phase, but there was no case with an absence of strong ties. Concerning **strong ties**, in quantitative terms the entrepreneurs obtained more resources than they did by accessing weak ties, even when restricted only to the network of family members, as was the case of the networks of Agencies 1, 5, 6, and 7. These findings are in keeping with the study of Vale and Serafim (2010), who found that women have difficulty socializing outside of their work and family environments.

In a study conducted in travel agencies, Ducci and Teixeira (2010) highlighted the contacts made by entrepreneurs with strong ties (former bank colleagues and tour operator employees) who provided them with essential information to facilitate their understanding of the sector and the business. Some of these contacts became very frequent, constituting strong ties.

5.2 Ties and resources accessed in the start-up phase

The **start-up** phase is when the business effectively begins. In this phase, an ana-

lysis was conducted of how these networks were used to facilitate the legal procedures involved in opening the business, the organization of the installations and equipment, the development of the first service, the hiring of employees, and efforts to attract the first customers.

In this phase, the entrepreneurs accessed diverse resources through their social networks of strong ties and weak ties. With regard to their **strong ties** and **social resources**, only the entrepreneur at Agency 4 did not access this type of network, which in this phase was highlighted by the strong presence of friends. As for the first customers, friends, rather than parents, were important when it came to attracting people. They helped the entrepreneurs by becoming their customers and recommending others, as was the case of Agencies 2 and 6. When it came to recommending employees, in the start-up phase, this sort of help was not identified at the agencies. Vasconcelos et al. (2007) claim that it is fundamental in this phase for new companies to have recommendations for customers and suppliers, as the company is not yet known in the market. It should also be highlighted that Vale et al. (2011), when analyzing a market embeddedness indicator, found that female entrepreneurs in the early stages of their business counted more than male entrepreneurs did on the significant participation of friends and acquaintances, both direct and indirect, among their customers, at a rate of over 21%.

The help of family members such as the father and mother especially stood out in the form of the operational support provided by the parents at Agencies 2, 3, and 6. These family members directly helped the entrepreneurs to serve customers at the company and indirectly helped them with advice and orientation. The study of Vale et al. (2011) found that women tend to resort more to their closer ties for information and support.

In this study, the support offered by the family was fundamental for the business to operate.

Concerning the network of strong ties, it is also worth highlighting that friends were also important when it came to hiring the first employee. In the case of Agency 3, a friend of the entrepreneur also became her employee. The entrepreneurs at Agencies 3, 4, 5, and 7 sought **financial resources** at this stage of the business and obtained them from their own families. The entrepreneur at Agency 3 received help from her father to pay the fixed costs of the business in the first six months. The entrepreneur from Agency 4 obtained money from her brother. The entrepreneur at Agency 5 obtained part of the money for her working capital from her mother. The entrepreneur at Agency 7 needed money and also obtained it from her family.

The resources accessed through networks of **weak ties** were also important for the legalization and development of the business. In the case of Agencies 1, 5, and 7, the entrepreneurs accessed accountants to obtain help with the legal procedures involved in opening their businesses. It should be highlighted that this resource was the most frequently used in the start-up phase. When it came to hiring their first employees, two agencies had professional recommendations. Agency 5 accessed this resource through a "friend of a friend", and Agency 6 hired an employee through another travel agency. To develop the first service, suppliers played a key role. They helped the entrepreneurs by teaching and orienting them as to the best sales practices and preventive measures regarding credit card security. Regarding financial resources, once again the help of suppliers was very important. They provided credit to the entrepreneur at Agency 4 to enable her first services and training.

5.3 Ties and resources accessed in the consolidation phase

In the **consolidation** phase, the entrepreneurs showed how they used their social networks in marketing and sales to achieve the break-even point and facilitate the planning and management of their businesses. In general, they accessed their strong ties to mobilize social resources. The exception was the entrepreneur from Agency 5, who lost her main connection with this network due to the death of the person who constituted her greatest support, her mother. Of the six entrepreneurs who accessed their strong ties, only Agencies 3 and 7 resorted to friends, obtaining some different social resources. The entrepreneur at Agency 3 received advice and help from friends to identify threats from the competition. Regarding marketing and sales, the entrepreneurs, in addition to their friends, had help from family members, who also stood out as providers of social resources.

The family stood out for advice and as a source of moral support in the cases of Agencies 3, 6 and 7. Some of the relationships they maintained helped the entrepreneurs by improving their prestige within their own families. This was the case of Agency 2. In the case of the entrepreneur from Agency 1, her prestige grew in the external environment, with a better social status. With regard to financial management, only the entrepreneur from Agency 2 sought help from her husband by placing him in charge of this task.

The social resources gained through **weak ties** were also diverse. However, exchanges of information on the tourism sector was the most frequently used resource by the agencies, with Agencies 1, 2, 3, and 4 claiming that they benefited from this. In these cases, the most frequently accessed institutions were the Brazilian Association of

Travel Agents (ABAV), agencies and tour operators. The next most frequently accessed institutions were consultancies, courses and training, with the SEBRAE as the main providers of these. This type of support was observed at Agencies 2, 3, 4, and 7. Help with advertising and publicity was the third most frequently accessed social resource, and was important to Agencies 2 and 3, which used institutions such as the ABAV, the Brazilian Tourism Institute (EMBRATUR) and the SEBRAE.

It is noteworthy that in this stage of the consolidation of the business, the only entrepreneur with management based on formal marketing plans and growth was Agency 1. She also had a qualified professional to help her with planning. In this phase, there was only one case of access to **physical resources** by the entrepreneur at Agency 3, through her boyfriend. As for **financial resources**, only Agency 4 sought these resources and obtained them through the SEBRAE, acquiring eighty percent of the cost of the consultancy provided.

Souza and Teixeira (2017) confirmed the importance of trust in relationships, both in formal and informal/family networks. The entrepreneur's network of friends is an important source for attracting customers, while professionals such as accountants and attorneys play an important role in providing consultancy. In the study conducted by Gimenez and Gimenez (2015), in the creation phase of tourism companies, informal and formal networks were used to access information and financial resources. According to these authors, this was not a critical phase, but the growth and development of the company presented considerable challenges.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the entrepreneurs' characteristics, it should be highlighted that, as in

other studies, prior professional experience was an influential factor in the decision to open a new business. It should also be highlighted that the participation of family members in the businesses was positive, due to the trust and security that these relationships engender.

Concerning the types of ties, it was found that strong ties were more frequently accessed by the entrepreneurs, highlighting that in some cases they did not count on friends, the ties being limited to family members. In general, weak ties provided fewer resources for the entrepreneurs than strong ties. It was also found that the number of actors involved in the network was directly proportional to the amount of resources obtained. Therefore, the more people the entrepreneurs had in their network, the more connections and resources they were able to acquire. Another factor, pointed out by Aldrich, (1989), is associated with the predominance of strong ties, which is related to the entrepreneurs' social lives. This is because women do not use social contacts like men, who participate more frequently in informal meetings after work.

In the conception phase, the importance of family should be highlighted in terms of moral and emotional support for the entrepreneurs and help from friends as sources of ideas. According to Birley (1985), when an entrepreneur decides to open a business, he is guided by his previous experience and the advice he receives from his relationship network.

Ducci and Teixeira (2010) suggest that by maintaining a formal or informal relationship network entrepreneurs can access different resources and information and learn from other people, as they have access to other ways of doing things. Gimenez and Gimenez (2015) highlight that the business creation process requires great capacity on

the part of entrepreneurs to coordinate different kinds of resources. This coordination becomes less complex when the entrepreneur uses a higher level of social capital gained from his experience in different social networks, both formal and informal.

The findings of the cases studied here show that when experience was lacking in the tourism sector, family and friends were the only alternatives for these female entrepreneurs. In the start-up phase, family members played a fundamental role in making the business operational, especially by serving customers and as a source of financial resources, while friends were important in helping to attract the first customers and first employees. It was also possible to note the negative experiences of the entrepreneurs with banks in the conception phase, leading them to count once again on their families to obtain this type of resource. Furthermore, the present study revealed that there was a greater need for financial resources in this phase. In the consolidation phase of the business, family members contributed mainly with activities related to marketing, and friends were highlighted for providing resources for the company to grow and survive.

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