

Roles of Networks and Social Capital in the Success of International Entrepreneurs: Case of the Chinese Merchants in Senegal

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to understand and explain how international entrepreneurs, and mainly the Chinese merchants residing in Senegal, are organized within the framework of a network of relationships to cope with the hostility of local counterparts. Its contribution is to highlight the role of networks and social capital in the success of business.

Indeed, the survey we conducted from the members of the Chinese merchants community in Senegal and other stakeholders of this sector (associations, trade unions ...), the analysis of the role of a network of business relationships in this market, evolving and changing, helps us underline the following results:

- Chinese traders show a particular interest in belonging to a network of support and solidarity among members;
- Relationships that are maintained allow access to relevant information via the deliberations that take place;
- Survival of the association and relevance of exchanges are based on trust between the members who believe in its founding principles.

Keywords: International entrepreneur, Merchants, Chinese Network Capital Association

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of networks and social capital of international entrepreneurs¹, mainly the Chinese merchants in the success of their activities in Senegal. These networks can support the development of successful relationship environments. They can "create a dynamism which crystallizes local skills and demands scattered abroad" (Beddi, Bueno & Coeurderoy, 2012, p.8). This article starts from the idea that a successful implementation project in a foreign market depends on the ability of the contractor to mobilize the resources and expertise that facilitate the resolution of problems that may arise (Coeurderoy, 2005; Coeurderoy & Murray, 2008). The approach based on the resources and expertise is particularly relevant to analyze the role of networks and social capital in the success of international entrepreneurs (Jones, Coviello & Tang, 2011).

In Africa, many Chinese entrepreneurs try to make things happen. They are generally traders and owners of restaurants. This leads to the proliferation of products "made in china" in the African markets. These latter, with relatively low prices, are accessible to people with low incomes. The success of these products in Africa has been a key factor of the arrival of new Chinese entrants. Thus, the proliferation of trade structures has known such a development that in some cities such as Dakar in Senegal, they are fully integrated in the urban landscape.

The relative success of Chinese entrepreneurs in Senegal, mainly traders, is not without creating problems for the local counterpart (Senegalese, Lebanese ...). The latter react with acts of hostility, denigration and assault.

Despite this relatively hostile environment, the position of Chinese entrepreneurs seems to consolidate a little more each day. Their success may result from the importance of networks and social capital². These, not only allow access to various opportunities, but also helps face different threats of the environment in which they operate.

In this context, what can be the role of networks and social capital in the success of international entrepreneurs, by Chinese traders in Senegal?

Using an inductive qualitative approach, based on individual interviews with Chinese traders and other people of the field (Senegalese merchants, Lebanese-Syrian government, trade unions ...) in Senegal, our work will be shared into three parts:

- First we will discuss about the relationship between international entrepreneurship, networks and social capital;
- Then we will clarify the methodological choices we've made;
- And finally, we will present the results of the survey and propose and open a discussion on it.

¹ International entrepreneurship is "the process of creative discovery and exploitation of opportunities which exist outside the domestic market so as to reach a competitive advantage" (Zahra & George, 2002, p.263).

² Social networks are regarded as suppliers of social capital

1. International entrepreneurship, networks and social capital: how to explain the international success of entrepreneurs

Several theoretical frameworks have been mobilized to study international entrepreneurship. There are the theory of networks and social capital, theory of support, the theory of psychic distance, the approach based on resources and skills (Meschi & Meier, 2010). In this research, we are mainly going focus on the network and social capital theory.

The concept of "social network" refers to relations between persons and social groups (Mercklé, 2004). Therefore, three elements must be considered when talking about social network: **personal relationships**, **network structure** (the set of links and nodes) and **confidence** (which feeds the central component networks) (Ferro, Prefontaine & Skander, 2008). Julien (1996), considering the social and economic trends, proposes to distinguish: personal networks (emotional relationships based on trust), networks or business transactions (stakeholders both upstream and downstream) and informational networks (other sources of new information). What motivates entrepreneurs to go into foreign markets? (1) And what is the role of social networks in the success of this implementation within a hostile multicultural environment³? (2).

1.1 From the motivation to emigrate to the success in the host country: the role of relationships networks

For individual entrepreneurs that set up foreign markets, having relationships to access useful information, is essential to their success in the host country. It is then important to have resource people in the host country, but also in their native country. In this context, the family can play a fundamental role. It offers the possibility to be in contact with many people and institutions necessary for successful implantation abroad.

The expatriation process for individual entrepreneurs involves "learning to adapt oneself to new markets, some degree of motivation and innovation, an ability to make decisions and implement an appropriate international strategy. Networks influence each of these entrepreneurial processes "(Ferro, Prefontaine & Skander, 2008, p.5).

The role of social networks in the process of expatriation may concern:

- Information and identification of the international opportunity (Imm Zain & Ng, 2006; Julien & Ramangaly, 2003);
- International learning process (Saarenketo, Puumalainen, Kuivalainen & Kylaheiko, 2004.)
- Leverage on tangible and intangible resources and marketing capacity (Moen, Morten & Iver, 2004 ; Zahra, Korry & Yu, 2005; Zain & Ng Imm, 2006...)
- The decision of market choice (Bell, 1995, Moen & al., 2004; Zain & Siew Imm Ng, 2006)

³ The presence of other nationalized traders favoring a cultural mixture, a community life, an economy based on solidarity

- Gains credibility (Zain & Siew Imm Ng, 2006)
- The posterior approach and the degree of internationalization (Gemser, Brand & Sorge, 2004; Zahra & *al.*, 2005; Zain & Siew Imm Ng, 2006) .

As noted by Ferro and *al.* (2008), belonging to a network requires access to useful information. We formulate the proposition that "the networks provide a forum to obtain reliable information (Ramangaly & Julien, 2003) that can inform decision making of the individual entrepreneur."

1.2 Belonging to a network and its successful implementation in foreign markets

The use of a network of social relationships is a response to the failure of the institution (Weber, 2006). We formulate the following proposition: "The choice for an entrepreneur to expand into foreign markets cannot succeed without relying on solidarity and support in the host and home country." It is then important to have links through the family, friends, clubs, and associations...

Granovetter distinguishes "strong ties" (family membership) of "weak ties" (woven with colleagues, friends, neighbors, membership of clubs, associations ...) to illustrate this fact. For him, the weak links provide more information than strong ties. Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) explain that managers use their weak links to collect professional information (new business opportunities, potential markets ...) and to attract customers.

The different theories presented above show that the international entrepreneur must create and maintain relationships with various links. These links can be considered "strategic" because they provide access to resources (Falemo 1989). Individual entrepreneurs have a preference for sources of business and personal information (Johnson & Kuhn, 1987; Welsch & Young, 1982) obtained through verbal exchanges. Indeed, the "face to face" relationship appears comforting for leaders because it provides them with personalized feedback. During periods of uncertainty and doubt they are happy to use these relationships, especially since they give them an important socio-psychological support based on trust (Welsch & Young 1982).

1.3 The network as a catalyst for trade between merchants

Social capital can generate for the individual entrepreneur, positive effects, provided that these relationships and their configurations allow the contractor to achieve the objectives it has set (Plociniczak, 2005). The social capital will be "closed" when the relationships between people are structured through ethnic origin, age, or social class similarities or "open" when they designate cross-links compared to different directions of social cleavages. Social capital is a collective asset quality end of the relational structure in which actors can enjoy.

In networks where people do not have hierarchical relationships, communication and exchanges are more fruitful. Links can then develop through formal structures such as professional, cultural, sports, humanitarian, political associations, etc. These formal structures act as a meeting place and socialization for their members, and are likely to serve their

professional interests (Ozcan 1995). Associations, bringing essentially together leaders of organizations, are cited as examples of catalysts exchange between decision makers (Chappoz 1995; Filion 1991). Through this channel, business leaders can meet with their peers and build relationships over time.

However, empirical studies show that an environment conducive to an informational exchange, innovation in social networks, is difficult to establish and maintain. Networks promote and facilitate the phenomena of the imitation of business practices and products. In doing so, they may lead to some consistency in behavior (Ozcan, 1995) and they may be detrimental to the business (Aldrich & Zimmer 1986). Moreover, the phenomenon of mistrust causing a lack of communication can occur in networks, especially in those who gather leaders in competition (Gumpert & Boyd 1985).

This literature review has shown how membership in a network can explain the success in business in an international context. Thus, as a result of Jones & al. (2011), we believe in the existence of a link between international management and international entrepreneurship.

2. The Methodology Study

We have focused, in this study, on a qualitative approach (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009; Rialp, Rialp, Urbano & Vaillant, 2005) based on interviews with Chinese merchants in Senegal.

2.1 The context of the study: a hostile business environment for Chinese traders

The Chinese Diaspora is estimated at 1000 or 2000 persons established in Dakar since the mid-90s and generally carrying out activities in the areas of small business and import (Bradeloup, 2008).

The relationship between the Chinese entrepreneurs in Senegal and Senegalese counterparts are strained. Several factors explain this situation:

- They position themselves in the same niche products offered by Senegalese and Lebanese traders, offering unbeatable prices, albeit with products of lower quality (*e.g. "Gani LAH⁴" cloth which rises high Malian quality "Chinese model devalued"*);
- The success of Chinese traders with traders in the sub-region (Mauritania, Gambia, Guinea ...) makes Dakar center of a large supply of "Made in China";
- in the customs and tax level, the Senegalese traders accuse their Chinese counterparts "to engage in some customs fraud."

This justifies Chinese traders have concerted action to deal with this highly competitive and hostile environment for their implementation.

With the initiative of a Chinese trader based in Dakar for over thirty years, has been launched the idea of creating a network of exchanges between Chinese. This network should facilitate both sides of the relationship between Chinese and Senegalese operators, but also offer them opportunities to strengthen market private commercial relations between the two economic

⁴ An African cloth well used by women

centers.

This network offers countless markets facilities, business opportunities and lobbying. It is a forum where Chinese merchants have a place to interact with their peers. This network has within nearly 100 managers managing approximately 250 stores. They have a turnover of CFA⁵ 20 billion francs and land 600 containers per year.

2.2 The collection and processing of data

We have chosen a qualitative approach for two reasons. First, the study of individual representations of traders requires direct contact with the people involved. Second, a qualitative research based on a case study approach is recommended when the interest is for contemporary events in context and in real time but also when the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and the context are not clear (Yin, 1989).

Data collection was conducted through individual interviews lasting an average of 40 minutes on the sites where the Chinese businesses and competitors are. We selected 15 Chinese traders and owners of their businesses located in Senegal since at least five years in various divisions and operating in different sectors (trade and other clothing, food, automotive spare parts), two (2) associations (the Unacois and Ascosen represented by their General Secretary, two (2) unions (the importers traders Union, service providers and exporters of Senegal, the Senegalese Union of Importers / Exporters) 13 Senegalese traders working with Chinese. Overall, we interviewed 32 people.

Each interview was recorded. The processing of data collected was done by content analysis. The approach can be broken down as follows: reading the body to clear the similarities and dissimilarities of Registrars for the establishment or application categories, categorizing elements of corpus, constitution of indicators; linking; interpretation of results.

The interview guide was designed to gather the views of Chinese traders and other stakeholders on the following issues: the choice of Senegal as the home and host countries, the causes of hostility of Senegalese traders towards their Chinese counterparts, the value of belonging to the network of Chinese traders; the impact of informational material on the one hand, concerning the types of information exchanged, the value of communication between peers, On the other hand, the comparison between the Association of Chinese traders and other sources of information for the manager/owner.

These factors have helped to retain the following categories (see Table 1).

⁵ 1 euro = CFA 655,955

Table 1. Categories and subcategories used for data collection

Categories	Sub-categories
Environment of Chinese traders in Senegal	-Reason for the choice -Settling and induction in Senegal -Population perception of their business
Interests of belonging to a network of relationships	-Solidarity -meeting with peers -Exchange of experience and information - Nature Network
Input of network for the entrepreneur	- Provide a rich and quality information - Confidence role
Other sources of information	- the role of the family - the role of the friends - the role of business associations

3. Findings

3.1 *The environment of Chinese traders in Senegal between hostility and human kindness*

3.1.1 The reasons for the choice of Senegal....

Several reasons explain the presence of the Chinese in Senegal. Some, officials, are sent by the Chinese authorities in the framework of bilateral agreements, the other, mainly individual entrepreneurs, simply hope to make a fortune in Senegal. For the latter, the destination Senegal offers many opportunities: a booming market with many opportunities, industry to develop, affordable rents, a cheap labor, a market which has not yet been very organized.

Chinese traders have settled mainly in the main city of Senegal, Dakar, which is the new "Eldorado" in West Africa, in view of business opportunities.

Successful settlement requires having contacts in Senegal (for easy installation and integration), but also to keep steady relations with China (with family, friends ... who are often suppliers, facilitators ...). For a trader, "... In Senegal, with few resources and good relations, you can easily start a business, a trade... However, it is important to have relationships and know how things are organized..."

3.1.2 Settlement and integration in Senegal

After the resumption of diplomatic relations between Senegal and China in 2005, the implantation of many Chinese merchants has been facilitated (visa, residence and paperwork to start a business). Mostly young (between 20 and 45 years), Chinese traders develop their activities in the textile, trade (selling clothes and other), restaurants, import-export. Their massive installation is seen as a double edged sword by the stakeholders of the market:

- For households, the arrival of Chinese merchants can offer the market products at low price (consistent with the income level of the population);

- For national retailers, who buy from the traditional partners (France, Italy, Turkey, China ...), competition from the Chinese is unfair (non compliance ...).

When looking at the Chinese traders in Senegal, many divisions are recognized: it is a community in the making and it is grouped mainly in the city of Dakar (which makes them visible⁶). It is a self-sufficient community deeply rooted Chinese culture (importance of family solidarity, guanxi ...).

3.1.3 Perception of their location and activities by the population: "The Chinatown, China Market and made in China products" or the negative representation

From our corpus, three concepts are used to describe the location and the products sold by Chinese traders in Senegal. The Secretary General of Unacois sums up the situation: "When you go to Gibraltar area, you believe that you are in Chinatown. In this place you will find products made in china. «Behind this picture, are hidden elements of representation: the "Chinatown" which refers to the avenue that houses the Chinese traders and the "China Market" which characterizes the avenue itself, and "Made in China" products, designate products often perceived as lower quality and low price.

This negative representation is driven mainly by a small and defined social circle: traders, employers and their agents.

To grow their businesses, Chinese traders use Senegalese vendors. Often, "they are underpaid and are used seven days a week, with difficult conditions" (interview with a trader belonging to Unacois). The association of traders profit by the occasion to talk about exploitation, slavery and accuses the community of not investing, not proposing the transfer of technology. Other arguments are those that reinforce the hostility of local businesses: non-participation of the Chinese to the local economy, the money repatriation and controversies about the containers.

3.1.4 A benevolent government policy

Population, government and consumer groups are allies to the Asians. Given the hostility of the others in the field, in Senegal, the government says that Chinese traders are all in good standing. It condemns the protagonists who make "some propaganda [and] negative reflexes of fear", while arguing the opposite of cooperation between the two states.

Chinese traders are realistic and know, for some at least, the instability of their status as non-integrated foreign traders. There are many conflicts of interest on the presence of Chinese traders, which are more economic than political or ideological, and can be formed into two camps represented by:

- Employers and small businesses on one side, and conservatives who want to keep their influence on economic life, thus denying the Chinese competition and
- Consumers and their representatives on the other side, progressives, liberals, who welcome with satisfaction the positive competition for portfolios of the poor, made by the majority of

⁶ one can see in the habits of the Chinese traders the limits of the recessed fitting theory

the population of Dakar.

It is significant to see how less than 200 merchants can, in the space of a decade, impose across Dakar market an early economic and social transformation. Politically, the issue is full of symbolism and will not upset its new partner dogmatically, philosophically or ideologically.

One of the fundamental characteristics of Chinese merchants settled in Senegal lies in customizing their operation. In business, they are eminently present. They take almost exclusively financial and social administrative responsibility, and actively participate in the daily management of their business. This omnipresence of the owner of trade resulted in relational networks of trade which are those of the owner / manager. And this is often due to maintained relationships with others (Chinese traders, State Association, small Senegalese traders ...) that the owner/ manager gets access to the customer or to new opportunities and more easily provided the funds he needs.

3.2 Respond collectively in a highly competitive and informal market to survive

The establishment in Senegal of the association of Chinese traders stems from the need to respond collectively in their daily exercise activity.

More than 200 Chinese traders participate in regular meetings with the aim to sustain their business by developing consistent practices with their goals. Promoting the consolidation of Chinese traders in Senegal, this network aims to increase the bargaining power of the latter. Resources from the social structure facilitate actions within this association and thus build social capital.

Traders in Senegal come from different backgrounds. They are Senegalese, Senegalese-Lebanese-Syrian Lebanese, Chinese ... "The Lebanese-Syrian hold a virtual monopoly of trade and capital and are organized in associations..." (*Interview with the head of the Unacois*⁷).

Chinese traders surveyed deem appropriate to create a network to facilitate the exchange, to cope with the highly competitive market, where the informal sector is dominant. This network-based peer support, allow them to learn from each other and have new ideas.

Moreover, the participation of network marketers, trade (experience and information) considered successful, seems essential in the development of interaction between members, interviews and various aids to Chinese traders in trouble, organizations meetings between members, etc.

For Chinese traders, "we should be supportive of us ... It will make us stronger." This solidarity is based on the complementarity of trade and services. To be united supposes to share the same practices; that the community members are interacting with each other, and they have common goals. Thus, the success of Chinese traders can be enhanced by the integration of each to instances of socialization such as associations.

⁷ Senegalese national union of industries workers and traders

The friendship develops between members who find emotional support from their peers. The problem of loneliness of the leader, who does not speak the national language, both while being with its employees and outside with his family, is frequently mentioned in the interviews. The Chinese trader therefore wishes to enter the network to assign to talk about his doubts: "I need to talk to people who will understand me, who have the same problems, the same responsibilities as me ..." (Interview with Chinese merchant).

The assistance provided by the network is especially relevant for international entrepreneurs. In fact, they often lack the time to collect the relevant information: "In a small business, you have less time than in a big where people are specialized in production, accounting, etc. ... You have to know what's new. This is important. In combination, the information is geared toward efficiency." Associations are places "resources" that can be activated to achieve the objectives. The network of Chinese traders in Senegal is closed. It provides its members with contacts, partnerships, business, synergies and common dynamics in a competitive environment.

3.3 The contribution of the network of relationships in informational material

The study shows that information circulating among members primarily concerns the daily management of the business.

3.3.1 Provide useful information

Our work confirms that the role of networks is, essentially, to provide relevant information to members. Information on the discovery of a business opportunity (information provided by the family, friends, brothers ... installed in the host country) for the adaptation and integration to the market (information provided by associations ...) and for decision making (decision to emigrate, strategic choice regarding the method of implantation and the host country) during the setting of the strategy (implementation of actions for the operation of the activity in collaboration with local and Chinese employees).

Discussing with other Chinese merchants settled in Dakar firstly makes us understand each other because we often experience similar difficulties as decision-makers: "We all, as entrepreneurs, things we can exchange, regardless of the type of business. It is always about the same style problems. "The exchange of experiences can provide us with changes in the business and improve the decision: "The aim is to remove information about the experiences, the joys or misfortunes of others. We take notes. You can always, without copying, adjust methods here. With our ideas and ideas of others, it can give improvements."

3.3.2 The role of trust

Chinese traders surveyed said that trust is essential in relationships among members. But they recognize that the establishment of a real trust among the members request time (often several years) and that this is facilitated by the fact that "most of compatriots who come to exercise are cousins, brothers ... in short, people you know or have been recommended to us "(interview with a merchant). As for the Chinese traders, "we have to stick together and trust each other." This "confidence bound" (enforceable trust) is directly proportional to the

strength of the association discrimination and been inversely proportional to the other options available outside the association to obtain useful information and business opportunities (Granovetter, 1985). More members find solutions to their problems, the more confidence required and the greater the social capital that results is important. This confidence is reinforced by cultural values conveyed (importance of family, solidarity, human relations).

The non-competition between traders promotes the creation and development of relationships of trust, based primarily on the confidentiality of the discussions. Even when they operate on the same niche, Chinese traders trust each other. Indeed, they have networked together to deal with the prevailing hostility. Their mode of arrival in Senegal has been first organized as a network from China (belonging to family networks, village or regional institution and facilitated their departure from China and their arrival and installation in Dakar).

4. Discussion: Networks, integration and success in foreign markets.

Analyses based on data collected from Chinese traders in Senegal and other market participants have found that when individual entrepreneurs emigrate, they often face difficulties related to their new environment (hostile actor's local, cultural differences, difficulties of integration ...). Belonging to a network, such an association can be a "powerful" steering and successful business tool.

Our interviews revealed that the Chinese are organized in kinship network or village of the same origin, the structure and facilitate their departure, arrival and installation in Dakar. To ensure the sustainability of their business activities in an environment increasingly competitive and hostile, collaborative networking clear as the best solution to deal with the complexity room. This confirms the important role of networks in successful international entrepreneurship (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986; Dung Ngo Vi, Jansen & Jacquemin, 2012; Elidrissi & Hauch, 2012; Jones & al., 2011).

We have analyzed the behavior of the international entrepreneur, the Chinese merchant here in Senegal, as an actor of inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships network; these relationships can be private (family, friends ...) or professional. These networks are transnational. International entrepreneurs certainly have contacts in their host countries, but also in their native countries. The best articulation of these two sources of information can ensure success in business. So, going to foreign markets is seen as a process where relations with foreign and domestic actors are established and maintained on an ongoing basis for success.

Several contingent factors may explain the choice to settle abroad:

- Opportunism: Chinese traders coming to settle in Senegal are driven by business opportunities and stability offered by this country. This is consistent with the work of Zhara and George (2002) for which the international entrepreneur tries in most cases to seize an opportunity that exists abroad. International Entrepreneurship is in "discovery, engagement, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities beyond national borders to create future goods and services" (Oviatt and McDougall, 2005, p.540 definition recovery by Zahra, Kori and Yu, 2005, p.131 and Servantie, 2007, p.11).

- The characteristics of the entrepreneur (courage and perseverance ...)
- The existence of relationships (friends, acquaintances, parents) in the target country.

These results reinforce and complete the list of factors explaining the choice to undertake abroad⁸. They are factors related to the environment of the entrepreneur, international experience (Anderson & Gatignon, 1986; Stopford & Wells, 1972), knowledge of selected countries (Erramili, 1991), the benefits related to internationalization (Dunning, 1988), the benefits of the property (Dunning, 1988) and resources of the contractor ; for market factors we have also country risk (Erramili & Rao, 1993) economic and political instability (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003), cultural distance (Kogut & Singh, 1988), market potential (Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1992), competition in the market (Hill, Hwang & Kim, 1990).

Our work has highlighted the role of networks in order to obtain relevant information for the "survival" in a complex environment. A relational network facilitates access to information about the competition and business opportunities.

If made by peers (by Chinese traders in Senegal), members do not maintain hierarchical relationships. This makes it even easier and fruitful exchanges and cooperation (Lincoln & Miller, 1987). Therefore, in the network, the exchanges of experience lead to the accumulation of a wealth of information over time and encourage business leaders to have an open mind pushed in a given environment. This type of relationship can help to create mutual support and cooperation between actors (Kram & Isabella, 1985), and reduce the feeling of loneliness that may affect peer (Gumpert & Boyd, 1985). In this context, links can be established through formal or informal structures. This is in sorts of Association, Club, Junior Company ... An equally important element is trust in the relationship between peers.

Networks have made features that go beyond the formal decision on the structures and forms of organization of the network. When autonomous individuals organize themselves to do something together and when the autonomy and diversity are our "resources" basis, the relationship between different people is the junction of the "existence of the network." These links are reinforced by the growth of the association. And the association grows through joint work. Working together comes from shared values, values that also need to be revisited and articulated from time to time (Church & al., p.1, 2002).

In networks, trust plays an important role in the various exchanges. Building trust and relationships work requires a lot of attention, priority status and time. This is what gives the network its strength. The web network is woven from various relational processes. Participants contribute to the development of a project with the time, expertise, contacts and information. They benefit from the exchange of experiences, access and resources.

The relational process, referred, can be interpreted in the context of the evolution of the network and structure, based on the relationships established in the network. The quality of these relations promotes or slows the process of action, reflection and change together. In the

⁸ See the "theory of International entrepreneurship ". For Wright (1999) this new field of research tries to link international Management and Entrepreneurship

context of these relationships, the leader is more important than the institution he represents.

Conclusion

The objective of this article is to understand and explain how international entrepreneurs, and mainly the Chinese traders residing in Dakar in Senegal, organize themselves within a network of relationships to deal with the hostility of other traders in Senegal. Its contribution is to highlight the role of networks and social capital in the success of business.

Following this study, several points can be made.

Membership in the Association of Chinese traders in Senegal allows pooling of resources to promote exchanges and mutual support among its members. Exchanging, sharing among them, the Chinese traders can benefit from a support network that border on the obvious principle "that birds of the same feather flock together." This involves linking members in order to facilitate their expansion abroad. The parity relations between Chinese traders contribute greatly to the success and development of the association. The exchange of experiences between members of the network leads to the accumulation over time of a wealth of information, constantly renewed, and prompting traders to cultivate their spirit of openness to the environment, to position compared to their peers and try to improve.

Our analysis of the role of a network of business relationships in a relatively hostile environment, has given the following conclusions:

- Chinese traders show an interest in being part of a network of support and solidarity among members;
- Relationships that are maintained allow access to relevant information via the deliberations that take place;
- The survival of the association and the relevance of exchanges are based on mutual trust among the members sharing its founding principles.

This study opens perspectives and raises the question of how to connect social networks approach to decision supporting international entrepreneurs in small businesses, given their responsibility of decision-making at both strategic and operational level (Baillette, 2007). It will then be to analyze the contribution of peer exchanges in the different phases of the decision process, and to assess the utility perceived by the entrepreneurs. This will improve on the one hand the knowledge of decision-making of the leaders, discussed in terms of interaction between peers, and secondly to sensitize policymakers about the value of social networks.

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