

The Role of Networks in The Early Internationalization of Emerging Market Firms: Evidence From Turkish Textile-Born Globals with Social-Business Networks Perspective¹

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Abstract

This study examines the role of networks in the early internationalization of born-global firms operating in the textile sector in Turkey, which is seen as a developing country market, from the perspective of social and business networks, using a dual focus and case-based approach. This study, organized based on the research gap on the early internationalization behaviors of SMEs in developing countries and low-tech sectors, contributes to the internationalization literature by addressing the subject from a developing country market and a traditional industry. Research shows that networks are essential for the early internationalization of born global firms. What companies obtain from network relationships in internationalization; emerges under seven headings: defining foreign market opportunities and creating market information, choosing a foreign market and entry methods, overcoming resource constraints and reducing risk, operational support, access to critical actors, moral support, and trust. Although it has been found that both social and business networks are effective in early and rapid internationalization, this effect cannot be easily categorized in terms of importance.

Keywords: Networks, Relationships, Business Networks, Social Networks, The Role of Networks, Early Internationalization, Born Global Firms

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Öz

Bu çalışma, gelişmekte olan ülke pazarlarından biri olarak görülen Türkiye’de, tekstil sektöründe faaliyet gösteren küresel doğan işletmelerin erken uluslararasılaşmasında ağ ilişkilerinin rolünü, sosyal ve iş ağı perspektifleri bakış açısıyla çift odaklı olarak, vaka temelli bir yaklaşım altında incelemektedir. Gelişmekte olan ülkeler ve düşük teknoloji sektörlerindeki KOBİ’lerin erken uluslararasılaşma davranışları ile ilgili araştırma boşluğundan yola çıkılarak organize edilen çalışmanın, gelişmekte olan bir ülke piyasası ve geleneksel bir sektörden konuyu ele alarak uluslararasılaşma literatürüne katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir. Araştırma sonuçları, ağ ilişkilerinin küresel doğan işletmelerin erken uluslararasılaşmasında önemli rol oynadığını göstermektedir. Uluslararasılaşmada ağ ilişkilerinden işletmelerce elde edilenler; yabancı pazar fırsatlarının tanımlanması ve pazar bilgisi oluşturulması, yabancı pazar ve giriş yöntemi seçimi, kaynak kısıtlarının aşılması ve riskin azaltılması, operasyonel destek, önemli aktörlere erişim, manevi destek ile güven olmak üzere 7 başlık altında bulgulanmıştır. Hem sosyal hem de iş ağlarının erken ve hızlı uluslararasılaşmada etkili olduğu, bu etkinin daha önemlilik doğrultusunda kolayca kategorize edilemeyeceği bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ağ İlişkileri, İş Ağları, Sosyal Ağlar, Ağ İlişkilerinin Rolü, Erken Uluslararasılaşma, Küresel Doğan İşletmeler

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Introduction

In the literature, it is accepted that network theory and analysis constitute the basis for international entrepreneurship research, and network relationships are an essential resource that facilitates the internationalization of businesses (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997; McDougall & Oviatt, 2003; Coviello, 2006; Cavusgil & Knight, 2009; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010; Kontinen & Ojala, 2011). However, despite the importance of the subject, relatively few studies in the literature focus on comprehensively evaluating the networks of early internationalizing firms, and it is pointed out that there is a need for network studies specific to born global enterprises in this direction (Andersson & Wictor, 2003; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003; Autio, 2005; Cavusgil & Knight, 2009; Sepulveda & Gabrielsson, 2013). Furthermore, because networks still represent a black box in the internationalization process, it is emphasized that the role of networks in early internationalization should be clarified (Cavusgil & Knight, 2009; Smith et al., 2012; Bembom & Schwens, 2018), the importance of researching which types of networks are more beneficial in this process (Cavusgil & Knight, 2009) and conducting research that distinguishes between personal and business level relationships (Andersson & Wictor, 2003).

However, current-born global firm studies are generally concentrated in developed countries (Kiss et al., 2012; Cavusgil & Knight, 2015; Mostafiz et al., 2019), whereas studies conducted in developing countries, which are seen as the rising values of the global economy, are limited in the literature (Cavusgil et al., 2012; Kiss et al., 2012; Felzensztein et al., 2015; Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2016). In addition, it is stated that more studies are needed in other sectors, such as education, agriculture, textile, mining, and health, as current research mainly focuses on technology-based industries such as technology, software, and ICT (Mostafiz et al., 2019). In addition, when studies dealing with networks in the literature are examined, there needs to be more emphasis on the role of networks in empirical research on the internationalization of SMEs from emerging

economies (Manev & Manolova, 2010). These studies mainly evaluated network effects in high-tech and knowledge-intensive industries, while low-tech and non-knowledge-intensive industries received less attention (Stoian et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the dynamics experienced by non-high-tech SMEs in internationalization may differ significantly from those of high-tech SMEs (Booltink & Saka-Helmhout, 2018). This study, organized in line with this gap defined in the literature, aims to identify the role of networks in the early internationalization of born global firms from a developing country and a non-high-tech industry. When studies examining internationalization from a network perspective are concerned, it is seen that most of them explore the effects of business networks between firms. Undoubtedly, business networks influence internationalization decisions. However, the analysis of entrepreneurs' social networks offers some conceptual advantages over the study of inter-organizational networks: First, entrepreneurship theorists generally accept that individuals recognize opportunities rather than companies. (Aldrich & Ellen, 1986; Singh et al., 2000; Ozgen & Baron, 2007), and the exchange of information that precedes opportunity recognition is inter-personal rather than inter-organizational (Ellis, 2011). Moreover, since any business-level decision or action originates from the people who make up the organization, to understand the internationalization behavior of the business, we also need to understand the individual driving the business (Coviello, 2015). Therefore, it seems overly restrictive to limit the analysis of network effects to business-to-business relationships without including a subset of all the ties held by entrepreneurs and their teams (Ellis, 2011).

In studies examining entrepreneurship from a network perspective, the social network perspective has generally drawn attention. Slotte-Kock and Coviello (2010), in their review of the literature focusing on networks in entrepreneurship research, criticize that research is mainly conducted from a social network perspective, and they recommend integrating social and business network approaches to explore the macro level of network structure and the micro level of bidirectional interactions. According to

researchers, only by considering these approaches holistically can a useful "bifocal" lens be presented. This mixed view in entrepreneurship research can address the complexity of the process (Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010). However, only a few studies in the literature have simultaneously investigated the effects of business and social networks on internationalization.

There is undoubtedly a need for refinement and elaboration because of the extraordinarily complex nature of the network phenomenon (Anderson et al., 1994). To achieve this, the study adopts a dual perspective from both work and social network perspectives, using a research design that combines the complementary strengths of the two methodological approaches, taking into account the suggestion of Slotte-Kock and Coviello (2010). In light of this, the early and rapid internationalization of born global firms under social and business network approaches in internationalization has been examined from a traditional sector (textile) perspective from Turkey, a developing country category. In detail, using data from four meticulously identified cases and multiple sources, two research questions have been put forward to explore the roles of social and business networks in the internationalization process of Turkish-born global textile businesses:

RQ1. How do networks affect the early internationalization of born global textile companies in Turkey (one of the countries considered an emerging market)?

RQ2. Do social or business networks play an important role in early internationalization?

The research contributes to the literature with a bi-focused perspective by shedding light on the existing research gap in developing countries and traditional sectors and reaching findings that will contribute to the internationalization literature by determining the roles of network relationships in early internationalization.

The rest of the study is structured as follows. The second section reviews the literature on network relationships and their role in the early internationalization of born global firms. The third section consists of the methodology used in the research, and the fourth is the analysis of the data obtained from the firms and the discussion of the findings. Then the study ends with conclusions,

managerial implications, limitations, and suggestions for future researchers.

Literature Review

Network Relationships and Born Global Firms

Born global firms are businesses that internationalize their activities within three years of their establishment and realize 25% of their total sales abroad (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). Networks, therefore, represent a critical point of inquiry in understanding the internationalization of these young and resource-constrained SMEs (Chetty & Wilson, 2003).

The networks of born global firms consist of common relationships between the business and external parties that exchange resources, such as customers, suppliers, commercial intermediaries, and social connections (Hite & Hesterly, 2001). In addition, social relationships and relationships with other organizations often support early and rapid internationalization. However, despite this importance, entrepreneurship studies with a rich network research background mainly discuss how networks develop while creating a local enterprise. As a result, research on born-global firms still needs to be expanded (Sepulveda & Gabrielsson, 2013). Furthermore, since the internationalization behaviors of these firms, which generally start with establish, differ significantly from other companies, researchers need to pay more attention to the particular context of these businesses (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

The "Network Approach to Internationalization" (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988) emphasizes that the internationalization of businesses takes place thanks to the networks they are in. According to this approach, the degree of internationalization of a firm depends on both the networks it develops and the position of the firm in these networks (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988). Moreover, these relationships play a vital role in the concerns of the enterprises with the other actors in the network they are in and the internationalization they reach (Atlı & Kartal, 2014). While networks are essential for businesses of all sizes in internationalization, evidence suggests that they are necessary for born global

companies, which are considered a particular type of SME, given the resource constraints (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997; Andersson & Wictor, 2003; Chetty & Wilson, 2003; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003; Coviello, 2006).

The main constraints SMEs face in internationalization are difficulties accessing economies of scale, lack of financial resources, lack of market information, and hesitancy to take risks (Freeman et al., 2006). Born global firms, on the other hand, have a unique profile compared to other exporter groups (Madsen et al., 2000): They target a narrow customer group in different geographies, often use foreign distributors as their primary distribution channels, invest less in sales and production subsidiaries abroad compared to other internationalizing firms, and often establish sales and marketing networks with external partners as they cannot invest in market knowledge and infrastructure development due to their limited resources. In addition, born global firms need more reputation and legitimacy in the international arena, which is an effective means of gaining legitimacy and reducing the perceived risk of third parties in the new market (Roberts & Dowling, 2002). This constraint can be overcome by cooperating with a prestigious business or a few small businesses (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). For this reason, born global companies often seek partners that complement their competencies in leading markets and develop effective networks (Coviello & Munro, 1997; Madsen & Servais, 1997). These networks enable obtaining resources that would otherwise take years to build (Baum et al., 2000). On the other hand, social relations in new ventures are essential for internationalization as the entrepreneur lacks established business relations yet (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Strong interpersonal ties are valued because they contain foreign market and industry-specific information and can provide the "commitment and response" required for business in international markets (Harris & Wheeler, 2005).

Social-Business Networks and Internationalization

There are generally two network approaches in entrepreneurship (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998):

Social (personal) networks, where business founders are the focus and include the individual relationships of entrepreneurs. And business networks (inter-organizational networks), where the business is the focus.

In a social relationship, the actor is the individual, and the relationship cannot exist without the individual's participation (Agndal & Chetty, 2007). Social relationships are personally created by and related to entrepreneurs (Melen & Nordman, 2007). Typically, these are people with whom the entrepreneur meets face-to-face and receives service, advice, and support (Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). Within the scope of this study, in line with social network relationships (Birley, 1985; Chetty & Wilson, 2003), the focal actor is considered to be the individual's relationships with family, friends, and colleagues, and the "entrepreneur" is adopted as the focal actor.

Internationalization is initiated based on the idea that interpersonal (social) relationships are at the center of business interaction (Cunningham & Turnbull, 1982). When various studies investigating the internationalization of businesses have been examined, although social network relations are expressed in different terms (personal networks (Qiu, 2005), informal networks (Coviello & Munro, 1997; Zain & Ng, 2006), social networks (Komulainen et al., 2006), interpersonal relationships (Harris & Wheeler, 2005), personal contacts (Andersen, 2006) and social ties (Ellis, 2000)), positive effects on internationalization have been examined in various dimensions.

In addition, several studies have proven that entrepreneurs' social networks are critical assets for initiating and developing born global firms. These studies found that the existing networks of born global firms in the early stages of internationalization consisted of relationships previously developed by their owners and managers (Andersson & Wictor, 2003; Crick & Spence, 2005), which were found to have the most significant impact on the discovery and exploitation of internationalization opportunities in the early stages (Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011). Furthermore, firms' early internationalization behaviors are mainly activated by this set of interpersonal ties formed before the establishment of the firm (Manolova et al., 2010; Masango &

Marinova, 2014), and these relationships also form the basis for the establishment of inter-organizational ties (Masango & Marinova, 2014).

Business networks are formally linked relationships between actors who exchange information and make a joint effort to achieve a common goal through cooperation (O' et al., 2001). In other words, business networks are institutionalized relationships in which the actor is an organization. Therefore, they are not tied to specific individuals. They are created by their firms, not individuals, are associated with the company, and can be transferred to others (Melen & Nordman, 2007). In searching for an appropriate framework for business networks, some researchers (Gadde & Mattsson, 1987; Håkansson & Johanson, 1993) have transferred the social change perspective of social networks (Emerson, 1976; Cook & Emerson, 1978) to business networks (Anderson et al., 1994). In this study, social exchange theory is used to describe business networks. In this context, business networks, by adopting Emerson's (1981) definition, are defined as "two or more connected sets of business relationships where each exchange relationship takes place between businesses conceptualized as collective actors" (Anderson et al., 1994, p. 2). These actors include customers, distributors, competitors, suppliers, and government agencies (Sharma & Johanson, 1987; Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Axelsson & Johanson, 1992).

Various studies have been carried out that reveal the importance of business networks from different perspectives on internationalization (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Styles & Ambler, 1994; Coviello & Munro, 1995; Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000a; Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000b; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003; Moen et al., 2004; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004; Coviello, 2006; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Sandberg, 2014; Jeong, 2016; Chandra & Wilkinson, 2017). According to these studies, the internationalization of firms is affected by the internationalization of actors in business networks (Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000a); the existence of strong ties with other firms in the network to facilitate access to different sources of information, enabling entrepreneurs to use the experiences of others that encourage them to make

internationalization decisions (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). For this reason, it has been determined that business networks are critical in the early stages of the internationalization process (Coviello & Munro, 1995). In addition, economic relations have proven to be the most effective tool for determining firms' international growth in the early stages of their life cycles and the following steps (Coviello, 2006). Furthermore, business networks have been shown to be the most important source of information for firms during internationalization (Sandberg, 2014), enabling rapid internationalization by providing new opportunities, technology, market information, and information (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004).

In line with the findings mentioned earlier, although the literature generally accepts that networks facilitate internationalization, networks that are more critical in providing this effect are debatable. A third view emphasizes the equal importance of social-business networks in internationalization. For example, Rialp, Rialp, and Knight (2005) conclude that both social and business networks facilitate the early internationalization of born global firms. Melen and Nordman (2007) argue that none of these networks is more important than the other. Instead, they state that the most critical issue is to have the ability to learn from existing networks in which types of knowledge and networks are needed at different stages of internationalization.

The Role of Networks on Early Internationalization

International entrepreneurship involves identifying and exploiting opportunities for international exchange (Ellis, 2011). International opportunity identification is accepted as the beginning, in other words, the trigger of the internationalization process (Chandra et al., 2009). Networks are essential sources for identifying opportunities and providing new types of knowledge that can lead to the identification of different ways of internationalization (Chandra et al., 2012). Firms gain market knowledge through network relationships, which enable them to discover, create, realize, and develop international market opportunities (Chandra & Wilkinson,

2017). At the beginning of a business's internationalization, networks facilitate the acquisition of experiential knowledge about foreign markets (Prashantham & Dhanaraj, 2010), representing invaluable sources of information (Ellis, 2000; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). Thus it plays a vital role in deciding many managerial and strategic choices, such as foreign market and entry mode (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997; Moen et al., 2004). Furthermore, it accelerates and shapes internationalization efforts by providing new market opportunities to firms and establishing potential partners (Coviello & Munro, 1995). Several studies (Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000a; Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000b; Coviello & Munro, 1995) prove that networks are effective in the success of born global firms by helping them identify new market opportunities and create market knowledge.

The prevailing view in the international start-up literature is that contacts on social networks trigger a firm's foreign market and market entry method choices. For example, Chetty and Campbell-Hunt (2004) found that born global firms tend to rely on the characteristically rich networks of their entrepreneurs to reach their targeted international niche markets. Johanson and Vahlne (1990) and Komulainen, Mainela, and Tähtinen (2006) suggest that personal relationships are essential for the first stages abroad. Andersson and Wictor (2003) state that personal (social) networks are the leading networks in born global firms. However, after the first entry into foreign markets, the importance of existing ties in identifying opportunities decreases, indicating that firms must identify and implement new opportunities by creating new network ties (Crick & Spence, 2005). In addition, social networks, which are effective in the foreign market and entry method choices of born global firms, can also become business networks over time (Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011).

Another view in internationalization literature is that business networks are more effective in guiding businesses' foreign market and entry method choices. For example, Coviello (2006) found that effective networks for born global firms in the first foreign market entry are more economical than social. Moen, Gavlen, and

Endresen's (2004) research on five small Norwegian software companies also shows that business networks are decisive in which market they decide to enter and which market entry method they choose. Bell (1995) found that in small computer software businesses in Finland, Ireland, and Norway, business network relationships (with customers, suppliers, etc.) influence the way companies to choose their market and enter the market; Coviello and Munro (1995), on the other hand, found that business contacts are more helpful to firms in their first foreign market and market entry method choices.

Given resource constraints, access to resources in born global firms is positively associated with rapid internationalization success (Tang, 2011). Their resource constraints push these firms to find the needed resources through network relationships (Tolstoy & Agndal, 2010). Therefore, it is advantageous for small and resource-constrained firms, such as born-globals, to develop a collaborative rather than competitive and aggressive view of international markets (Chandra et al., 2009). As young and entrepreneurial businesses, those born globals are innovative in combining their resources with those of others through joint ventures and partnerships because they already have no previous success and fixed routines in entering foreign markets (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). On the other hand, decision-makers are social actors who must decide to enter a new market based on limited information. Therefore, the decision of any business, especially an SME, to start exporting is fraught with risk and uncertainty. Decision-makers, faced with this uncertainty, tend to choose the option with which they are most familiar, so they need to create, develop and manage their social resources when deciding to enter a foreign market (Ellis & Pecotich, 2001). In addition, born globals face novelty constraints as start-ups. Therefore, resources from networks can be attributed to networking capabilities rather than location (Monferrer et al., 2015). Their dynamic networking capabilities enable them to reduce the risks associated with their decision to enter global markets (Mort & Weerawardena, 2006).

Methodology

Although networks are seen as one of the primary dynamics that ensure the early and significant internationalization of firms, in the literature, more research findings on the axis of developing countries are needed to explore the subject in depth and illuminate different samples.

As a developing country, Turkey is a peninsula connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and acts as a bridge between the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East (Coban & Kavuk, 2022). Thus, it has had prosperous trade and investment links with these regions for centuries (Bugra, 2016). With the acceleration of globalization movements in the 1980s, while countries were looking for ways to increase their export volumes by developing their export-based production structures, Turkey, as one of these economies, adopted the export-led growth model (Ayvaz Guven, 2021). With increasing company investments in research and development (R&D), Turkey has become a rapidly industrializing economy in recent years. Moreover, the participation of Turkish companies in international trade has accelerated as the implemented government policies encourage the diversification of export product/market portfolios and expand the geographical reach of Turkish companies (Yaprak, Yosun, & Cetindamar, 2018). In this direction, Turkey's economic growth was led by exports; in 2020, it grew by 1.8%, while the global economy shrank by %3.1. It grew by 11% in 2021, making it the fastest-growing economy among the G-20 and OECD countries (TIM, 2022). Turkey's export, which was 254.2 billion dollars in 2022 by the Turkish Exporters' Assembly-TIM (2022), is predicted to increase to 300 billion dollars in 2026, 364.6 billion dollars in 2030, and 453.5 billion dollars in 2035. Today, Turkish companies exporting to more than 160 countries have foreign direct investments in many countries in North America, Africa, South America, and Asia (Yaprak, Yosun, & Cetindamar, 2018).

With the policies of opening up and promoting exports based on the free market economy implemented after 1980, exports of textile products have increased significantly in Turkey, especially since the second half of the 1980s. Consequently, it

has become an essential export item (UIB, 2018). The sector's attainment of its current level of development has been achieved through export-oriented production, especially in the US and EU markets. Today, the Turkish Textile Industry has a unique position in the world with its product quality, fashion, and designs that have the power to determine trends (Turkish Ministry of Commerce, 2022; UIB, 2018). With its 4.2% share in world textile and raw material exports, Turkey is the fourth largest exporter by country (Turkish Ministry of Commerce Easy Export Platform, 2023). In 2022, the Turkish textile and raw materials sector was exported to 197 countries and regions (TIM, 2022). The industry, which ranks first in the country in parameters such as its share in GDP and domestic input use, also forms the basis of the country's existence in global markets (UIB, 2018).

For the reasons listed, Turkey offers a convenient environment to examine the internationalization behavior of companies from developing countries. At the same time, the textile sector stands out as a traditional sector, having been among the locomotive sectors in Turkey's exports. In this direction, the present study was organized to explore the roles of networks in the early internationalization of Turkish-born global textile firms, believing that it will constitute an essential piece of evidence in understanding the early internationalization of firms from developing countries.

In the research, the qualitative research method was used, which provides the opportunity to investigate a particular phenomenon in depth and to reveal the variables under the influence of the phenomenon in detail. As qualitative data are rich and holistic, they also have the potential to clarify complexity (Evers & Knight, 2008). In the research, the use of a multiple case study design, which is a qualitative research method, was preferred because it can provide a dynamic and holistic view of the investigated event and is valid in research involving the real-life environment where a specific action (such as early internationalization) takes place (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Yin, 2014).

In the research, in line with the suggestion of Yin (1994; 2003) to increase reliability, the case study protocol in Appendix I was prepared and

followed. The case study protocol, which is an indispensable tool, especially for multiple case studies, includes the procedure and general rules to be followed during the research. The protocol is an important way to increase the reliability of research and aims to guide the researcher in the conduct of data collection (Yin, 2003, 67).

Sample Selection

The sample of the research consists of companies operating in the Marmara Region, one of the seven geographical regions of Turkey, among the finalists in the "Born Global Entrepreneur" category in the "SME and Entrepreneurship Awards Competition" organized by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization of Turkey (SMEDO). By applying SMEDO, information on these firms was obtained, and it was determined that 13 of the twenty-five finalists in the relevant category operate in the Marmara Region. The final sample consisted of four firms that responded positively to our interview request and continued their activities in the textile sector in Bursa province. The sample size was within the range of 3-12, described as appropriate in the case studies by Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2003).

In addition to meeting the requirement of obtaining at least 25 percent of their total sales from other country markets within the first three years following their establishment, which is generally accepted in the literature (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004), they also meet the application conditions for SMEDO's SME and Entrepreneurship Awards Competition. When the conditions of SMEDO's award are evaluated, in addition to the generally accepted criteria in the literature, firms are required to be "established in the last three financial years, developed growth strategies for the future, and set a role model for entrepreneurs by providing an increased performance in the amount of employment and net sales revenue."

Data Collection and Analysis

In our research, semi-structured interviews were used as the basis for data collection. Interview questions were prepared within the framework of

the relevant literature, shaped as a result of expert opinions, and finalized after the pilot interview. Subsequently, questions were applied to the entrepreneurs/top managers with the most profound knowledge about the internationalization of their firms. The interview form, which was used in all interviews, is given in Appendix II.

Audio recordings of all face-to-face interviews were obtained, and after the interviews, these recordings were transcribed and converted into text. During the conversion of the interview records into text, additional questions were asked by interviewing all the participants regarding hesitant issues to clarify dubious matters. The texts created for each business were then sent to the participants, and their approval was obtained.

Field notes taken by the researcher and interviews and promotions of businesses on their websites and social media tools were used as secondary sources in obtaining the data. In this way, data diversification was achieved through multiple data sources (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003), which is seen as a strategy that increases data reliability in case studies. All data from multiple sources were combined in the analysis process. Nvivo 12, a qualitative data analysis program, was used in data analysis.

In the conduct of the analysis process, in line with the recommendations of Eisenhardt (1989) and Miles and Huberman (1994), each case study was first handled independently. Then comparisons were made between the case studies. Thus, the comparative analysis determined the themes shared among the case studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As the data analysis technique, the research findings were obtained using descriptive and content analysis techniques, as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Analysis And Discussion of Findings

Study Firms' Profiles and the Internationalization of the Case Firms

General information about the firms in the research sample is given in Table 1 below. Accordingly, the average export rate of firms is 95 percent. All firms started international activities

simultaneously with their organizations. While all firms operate in the textile sector, one firm (A) continues its activities in the furniture and textile sectors. The number of full-time employees in firms varies between 5 and 110. Case firms are represented by the letters A, B, C, and D to protect their anonymity.

free machine to the company at that time. On the other hand, the entrepreneur also used the social relationships of his other relatives, especially his uncle, who lived there in the German market. In this way, new customers were gained by contacting the identified firms. The activities that

Table 1. Profile of the case study firms

Company	Sector	Foundation Year	First Exporting Year	Number of Employees	The Ratio of Exports to All Sales	Interviewed Person	Duration
A	Textile& Furniture	2012	2012	110	100%	Entrepreneur	1 hour 32 seconds
B	Textile	2013	2013	5	100%	Entrepreneur	1 hour 26 seconds
C	Textile	2012	2012	30	80%	Entrepreneur	1 hour 13 seconds
D	Textile	2012	2012	55	100%	Coordinator	1 hour 17 seconds

Company A

Company A was established in 2012. It produces bed covers, mattresses, bases, headboards, and sets. The young entrepreneur, an industrial engineer, has internationalized his firm, which he established in the light of his network relationships and his family's past sector experiences, as of its establishment. With this success, the firm received the Bursa Chamber Of Commerce and Industry- Adding Value to the Economy-The Most Successful SMEs Award; 4. SMEDO SME and Entrepreneurship Awards- Certificate of Achievement and Uludag Apparel and Clothing Exporters' Association- 2015 Ready-to-Wear and Apparel Industry Export Stars- Bronze Achievement Award in 2015.

Looking at the basics of company A, it goes back to the fact that the grandfather of the entrepreneur went to Germany to work at Mercedes, and thus he acquired a circle there. The family's industry experience is based on two separate firms operating in Turkey between 1989-1994 and 1999-2006. Having completed his education, the entrepreneur established his company in 2012 in light of these experiences, set out to export directly without targeting the domestic market, and his first market was Germany. He started activities with the only customer in Germany originating from the old family businesses he had contacted through his father. The German firm owner sent a

started in Germany continued with the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland, and Hungary. In these markets, the entrepreneur's father played a significant role in the beginning, and through his father, he revived the business relationships originating from old family businesses. Re-established contacts with two companies from the past that were given products in the Netherlands enabled the company to enter this market. In addition, his close friend in the Netherlands also supported the entrepreneur on technical matters and matters related to customers. A former client, contacted by the entrepreneur's father, was instrumental in the firm's entry into the Belgian market and the development the Dutch market. Then, two old customers from Poland and Hungary found the company and added it to the customer portfolio. The referrals provided by developing relationships with existing customers over time and the connections obtained from the fairs also contributed to the company's increasing customer portfolio.

In 2015, a partnership was established with a company with a business relationship to obtain additional resources that will enable the firm to make the necessary investments to increase its market share. However, this partnership failed to reach the desired goal and ended in 2018. Company A has also developed strategic cooperation with two agencies in Germany and Belgium. With this cooperation, it was aimed to

provide better service to customers and to acquire new customers. The agency in Belgium assists customers in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and the agency in Germany helps customers in Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Austria in the execution of the business and responding to the problems encountered quickly. In addition, the company cooperated with a huge company in Europe for two products (trolley beds); all of the product designs were made in Turkey and sold to this Germany-based company. Furthermore, firms pay commissions to each other during sales. The development of this cooperation, which continues successfully, has been realized thanks to the German company's contact with various companies in the sector in Germany while searching for a manufacturer when company A asked an existing mattress customer, "whom we can trust in Turkey" and reached them with his guidance.

Currently, the company sells products to the markets of Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium, Israel, and the USA. The share of sales to Germany, the firm's largest market, in all deals is 70%. The Dutch market follows this rate with 15%, Poland 5%, Belgium 5%, and other markets (Israel, USA, etc.) 5%.

Company B

Company B was founded in 2013 by a young Iranian entrepreneur and childhood friend. In the textile sector, it serves in the home textile field. The company, which has made all its sales to foreign markets since its establishment, was evaluated as a finalist in the 5th SME and Entrepreneurship Awards by SMEDO in 2018 in the category of born global entrepreneurs. In addition, in 2016, the Bursa Chamber Of Commerce and Industry- Adding Value to the Economy- The Most Successful SMEs award was received.

The firm's development is based on the entrepreneur's industry background in Iran. Thanks to his industry experience dating back to his childhood, the entrepreneur had the opportunity to develop various network relations and specialize in his job. One of these relations was with the owner of a textile firm in Turkey, whom he met in Iran in 2005. The entrepreneur, who came

to Turkey for the first time through this person, started to come and frequently go afterward. Thus, he had the chance to develop various relations in the Turkish market. Then, between 2009-2013, he worked as a foreign trade manager in a textile company in Turkey. Subsequently, the idea of establishing a business of his own appeared in the entrepreneur's mind, both with his relations in Iran and with the advice and encouragement of some of his customers, whom he currently describes as a friendship relationship. He mentioned this idea to his close friend, who was living in Iran and had known him since childhood, and the business was founded in 2013 by two Iranian friends. Thanks to the connections of the entrepreneurs in Iran, it started exporting to the Iranian market with its establishment. However, the partnership ended in a short period, and the entrepreneur successfully continued his path.

After the Iranian market, an Azeri minister's palace was arranged entirely with a project-based study via a close friend of the entrepreneur. After that, expansion was achieved in this market. Next, the entrepreneur met a Turkish citizen living in Russia and working in the same sector through a close friend, and the relations that developed after this meeting resulted in the entrepreneur opening an office there and incorporating this person, whom he saw as dominating the market, in line with the strategy of focusing on the Russian market. Then, the firm's entry into the Chinese market was realized through a close Turkish friend of the entrepreneur, whose wife was Chinese and who lived in China. First, ready-made set products were sent to this family several times, and then other orders were sent. Similarly, sales began in France through an entrepreneur's friend.

Currently, Iran, where 68% of the sales are realized, ranks first among the markets. Russia follows Iran with 20% and Azerbaijan with 10%. In addition, 1% of the sales are made to France in the European market and another 1% to China in the Far East market.

Company C

Company C is a family firm established in 2012 by a father and three brothers to produce upholstery fabrics. The export activity, which started with two

foreign connections obtained unexpectedly from the fair, and was attended simultaneously with the establishment of the enterprise, increased gradually. The export rate, 65% in the first year, continued in the band of 60-65-70% in the following years and reached 80%. With this success, the firm was awarded the SMEDO 3rd SME and Entrepreneurship Awards Born Global Entrepreneur Category finalist in 2014.

The family's adventure in the textile sector, which forms the basis of the firm, started in 1974 with the retail sale of home textile products in a 9m² store. Then, in 1992, the family opened a larger wholesale store and began selling draperies, upholstery, sheets, duvet covers, curtains, and home textiles. Then, in 1996, they established a factory in Bursa with their uncle and started to produce curtains and upholstery fabrics. Finally, in 2012, they decided to continue their activities as a nuclear family and established company C to produce upholstery fabrics. Although they did not set out with the goal of exporting immediately, they participated in the home textile fair held in Istanbul in May 2012, four days after the establishment of the firm. As they never expected, they started exporting immediately with the first foreign connections they obtained from this fair. The first customer obtained through the fair link was from Israel, and the second was from Libya. Afterward, their business expanded through recent customers and people who knew them from previous business activities. Especially the new connections mediated by the relationships established in the past allowed the firm to expand its customer portfolio gradually in the early days. One of these relationships is their 30 year old customers who took them to the Iraqi market. This person accompanied them on their first trip to Iraq and three subsequent expeditions and introduced their customers. In this way, Company C started to work with five companies in the Iraqi market at that time. The owner of the textile business in Bursa, whom they know from the industry, also introduced themselves to a company owner from Venezuela who was looking for a manufacturer during the new establishment of the business. Thus the firm made its first Venezuelan market export.

In addition to past business relationships, the strong relationships established with current customers also significantly impacted the increasing course of the company's exports. The trust established with customers enabled entrepreneurs to acquire new foreign customers without any promotional activities or customer visits in the first few years. With the help of such a network relationship, the business began to export to the US market. A person in Yemen visited the company with reference to the firm's existing customers. After this visit, a year later, he sent his American friends, and the firm started exporting to the US market. However, the mediation effect provided by kinship relationships is also crucial. Thanks to their uncle's Israeli customers, ten new customers have been gained in the Israeli market.

Currently, the firm sells 80% of its production abroad with an annual production capacity of 1 million 250 thousand meters and exports to 50 countries. 45% of all exports are carried out to the Middle East, the largest market. The Balkans, with 35%, and the American market, with 20%, follows the Middle East market.

Company D

Company D, which makes ready-made clothing designs for world brands in the textile sector and produces these designs, was established in 2012 with three partners. The firm has succeeded in realizing all of its sales to foreign markets every year, including the year of its establishment. In this way, it became a finalist in the 4th SMEDO SME and Entrepreneurship Awards, Born Global Entrepreneur Category. It was also deemed worthy of the "Golden Exporter" awards in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 at the Silkworm Export Awards given by Uludag Exporters' Association (UIB).

During the establishment of Company D and the internationalization process that took place simultaneously, the business relationships stemming from the previous commercial activities of the entrepreneurs related to fabric production played an important role. The world-famous fabric customers encouraged the establishment of the

business. France was the first market of the enterprise, which started its activities with direct exports with its establishment. In 2012, the first orders for three brands (Promod, Cache Cache, Tally Weijl) in the French market were received through the French agency, which the entrepreneurs are familiar with from previous sector activities. In 2013, while exporting to France, the company entered the Spanish market and started working with Inditex Group and Mango. In 2014, operations began in the UK market, with orders from British brands Sainsbury's and Topshop, in addition to French and Spanish markets. Again, the reference effect provided by past business experience has been an important factor in receiving these orders.

As of 2017, the firm was become 65% of its sales to Spain, 20% to the UK, and 15% to France. Until 2018, operations continued with the markets of France, Spain, and England, and as of 2018, the dominance of the Spanish market increased. Therefore, it was decided to continue with the single market—currently, the firm exports all of its production to Spain. To ensure the coordination of the activities, the need to establish a team arose in the Spanish cities of Barcelona and La Corona, and a branch was opened in each of these cities.

The following section includes evaluations based on a cross-case analysis of data collected from four born global Turkish textile firms to answer the research questions.

The Role of Social and Business Networks on the Internationalization of Turkish Textile-Born Global Firms

Findings from four firms suggest that social and business networks play essential roles in early internationalization. Our conclusions are structured and discussed as shown in Table 2.

Social-Business Networks and the Beginning of Internationalization

It has been observed that networks effectively initiate internationalization in the born global firms in the research. As seen in Table 2, while the social ties of entrepreneurs played an important role in triggering the onset of internationalization

in two firms (A and B), business networks played an essential role in the other two firms (C and D).

Take firm A. In the interview, the entrepreneur explains the significant role of his father at the beginning of the firm's internationalization like this; "*My father's share was 50 percent in us. Fifty percent we are ourselves*". The first export activity was conducted by a company with former customers in Germany, with the connection provided by the entrepreneur's father. Like A, in company B the entrepreneur's social networks in Iran were influential in establishing and simultaneously initiating internationalization activities. Relying on these relationships, the entrepreneur established his business with his childhood friend and started exporting directly to his hometown, Iran. In company D, establishment and simultaneous internationalization were enabled with the encouragement and direction of previous business networks. The firm was established upon the call of fabric customers to "produce apparel and sell us." French orders, as the first export, were received through the French agency, which had been contacted thanks to previous business activities. Strong ties with other firms facilitate entrepreneurs' access to different sources of information. It provided the opportunity to use the experiences of others to encourage the decision to internationalize (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Similar to D, in Company C, business networks initiated internationalization.

However, internationalization in C started as reactive and unplanned. Two unexpected connections from the fair triggered this.

"Export was in our hearts, but initially, our target was the domestic market. However, the export took place quickly, which we did not expect. We were saying in 2 years. It happened in just two months." (C's entrepreneur)

In general, the above analysis has shown that networks are an essential factor that triggers the beginning of internationalization in Turkish-born global textile companies. Moreover, this networks types could have both social and business characteristics.

Table 2. The Role of Social-Business Networks on the Internationalization of the Case Firms

	At the beginning of the internationalization	In identifying foreign market opportunities and providing market information	In the foreign market and entry mode selection	In reducing perceived risk	In overcoming resource constraints	Other roles
A	Social networks The first export was made by contacting an old customer from Germany through the entrepreneur's father.	Firstly social, then both social and business networks In the first place, the connections, information, and research provided by the father of the entrepreneur and his relatives living in Germany regarding the German market were critical sources of information for identifying the companies to be contacted and preliminary assessments. It was also the entrepreneur's father in the first place who provided market information and identification of opportunities for the Polish, Hungarian, Belgian, and Dutch markets through his old customers. However, business network relationships (contacts with existing customers from the fair) were also influential in the later stages.	Both social and business networks Although the social network relations initially guided the new market entries through exports, the business networks were also effective in the later stages. Cooperation was developed with one agency each in Germany and Belgium. In addition, the business has strategically collaborated with a German company through an existing customer under a production contract.	Most social networks His father and relatives living there were influential in reducing the perceived risk of the entrepreneur, especially in entering Germany, the first and the most significant market.	Business networks were effective in accessing financial resources. Social networks were effective in accessing physical resources and complementary resources and capabilities.	Both business and social networks were effective in providing operational support. Although social networks are most effective in accessing important actors, business networks have also been found to have an effect. Strong social ties were effective in providing moral support. Fairs (business networks) with confidence restoration functions played a role in customer relations.
B	Business networks With the connections provided from the first fair attended, the company started exporting first to Israel and then to Libya.	To a large extent, business networks The company started exporting with its first fair contacts within a reactive rather than a proactive process. Afterward, it entered new markets by seizing new market opportunities with connections driven primarily by past business network relationships and obtaining market information from these sources.	To a large extent, business networks There were official business contacts originating from the fair, which provided the initial internationalization of the firm with the export method. In the next period, new markets were entered with the export method, mainly through business networks from past commercial activities.	Business networks The reference effect of past business relationships in reducing the perceived risk for entry into new markets in international expansion has been significant.		Business networks were mainly influential in gaining access to critical actors. Strong social networks were effective in providing moral support. In building trust, business networks played an important role.
C	Social networks The entrepreneur's social networks in Iran guided the establishment of the business and its exports to its primary market, Iran.	Social networks Social networks initially directed international activities in the Iranian market and later became effective in identifying opportunities and providing market information for Azerbaijan, Russia, China, and France markets.	Social networks The entrepreneur's social networks in Iran ensured the firm's entry into its first market through export. Then, entry to new markets by the export method was triggered by social networks again. Finally, the entrepreneur's friend provided a connection that enabled foreign direct investment, and an office in Russia opened.	Social networks In establishing the enterprise, simultaneously at the beginning of internationalization and subsequent expansion, social networks effectively reduced the perceived risk of the entrepreneur.	Social networks played an important role in accessing financial resources.	Although social networks were primarily effective in accessing important actors, business networks also had an effect. In addition, social networks effectively provide moral support to the entrepreneur.
D	Business networks The business networks originating from the past commercial activities of the entrepreneurs enabled both the establishment of the enterprise and the first export to France.	Business networks Business networks originating from past sectoral activities effectively played the role of defining opportunities for internationalization. Through these connections, the firm identified opportunities and obtained market information, first for the French, then for Spain and England markets.	Business networks Exports to France were the first. Afterward, the Spanish and British markets followed the French market. All market entries were driven by past business relationships of entrepreneurs and entered these markets by export method. Finally, direct capital investment was made to manage the intense exports to Spain, and a branch was established in two cities.	Business networks At the start of the establishment and simultaneously at its international activities, encouragement by business networks stemming from the entrepreneurs' previous actions reduced the perceived risk. The firm was founded with this encouragement and started its operations for a ready market.	Business networks played a role in accessing complementary resources and capabilities.	Business networks were influential in gaining access to critical actors.

Social-Business Networks and Identifying Foreign Market Opportunities- Providing Market Information

In sample firms, networks have been observed to play an essential role in identifying opportunities for foreign markets and providing market information. For example, consider firm A; initially, social networks and later, both social and

business networks played a role in identifying opportunities and acquiring market information. Initially, the entrepreneur's father was an essential source of information and guided the entrepreneur to his connections from his past sectoral activities. In addition, his relatives living in Germany also played a crucial role for the entrepreneur in identifying opportunities related to that market and gaining market knowledge.

"In the German market, My uncle and my relatives are there. I ask them who are the big companies here. They say that there is such a company. You are writing to them; you have an appointment request. You reach people. They look at these three, price-quality-term. Once you start working, they do not let you go unless you make a mistake in one of these three." (A's Entrepreneur)

For Company A, while the entrepreneur's father defined the first opportunities in Poland, Hungary, Belgium, and Netherlands markets, business networks (existing customers' referrals and fair contacts) also played an important role afterward. For example, in developing strategic cooperation with a German company, an existing customer in the market created this opportunity for the firm. For entrepreneur B, purely social networks were instrumental in identifying opportunities and providing market information, first in the Iranian market, then in Azerbaijan, Russia, China, and France. Accordingly, our findings in the early stages of firm B and firm A are in line with previous research results that conclude that social networks are significant in the opportunity identification process (Ellis & Pecotich, 2001; Crick & Spence, 2005; Harris & Wheeler, 2005; Komulainen et al., 2006; Zain & Ng, 2006). In previous research, Ellis and Pecotich (2001) found that, just like firms A and B, decision-makers often discover international opportunities through their previous personal connections, and these relationships strongly influence the initiation of exports; Crick and Spence (2005), on the other hand, showed that in the early stages of internationalization, the networks of born global firms consist of previously developed relationships by their owners and managers. In addition, in line with our findings in A and B firms, Riddle and Gillespie (2003) found that informal social ties, especially friends and family ties, are essential sources of information for entrepreneurs of Turkish-born global businesses. In their research on transition economy SMEs, Musteen, Datta, and Butts (2014) found that social networks are effective for improving performance in the early stages of internationalization by providing market information. Looking at firm D, the firm was driven towards international opportunities

entirely by business connections stemming from the past activities of its entrepreneurs.

"Business relations played an important role in our internationalization, in short. We knew the market. Previous communication networks before the establishment of the business had an impact. Customer relations were effective in this process, not relatives or friends." (Interviewed coordinator in firm D)

The internationalization of firm D reflects the finding of Ozgen and Baron (2007) that information from informal industrial network relationships helps identify opportunities for new ventures. In company C, opportunity identification for internationalization was not planned. However, it was driven by business networks such as company D. First exports were realized thanks to the first fair attended. It continued to increase with references provided by business networks from the past.

"Our first customer was from Israel. We are still working with him. We had a connection from Libya again at this fair. Afterward, our business expanded through them and people who knew us in the market." (C's Entrepreneur)

This picture in Company C reflects the finding of Kontinen and Ojala (2011) in their research with eight Finnish family SMEs that lack network connections at foreign market entry and recognize opportunities through the relationships they create at international fairs. In addition, our findings from businesses C and D support previous research findings that business networks are critical in the early stages of internationalization. Business networks have allowed these businesses to recognize new opportunities and rapidly internationalize by providing market information and knowledge (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004). On the other hand, when evaluated in general, the results are fragmented, as can be understood from the above analysis. While social network relationships in company B played a role in identifying opportunities related to foreign markets and obtaining market information, in Company A, initially social ties such as B and later stages social and business ties played this role; as for companies C and D, this role mostly was played by business ties.

Social-Business Networks and Foreign Market-Entry Method Selection

It has been determined that in all firms within the scope of the research, the foreign market and entry method choices are guided by networks rather than the decisions taken as a result of strategic evaluations (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997). In other words, firms' choices do not result from a cost-benefit analysis or detailed market research (Ellis, 2011). Instead, it evaluated the opportunities that emerged with the guidance of the networks. Network relationships, as invaluable sources of information about foreign markets (Ellis, 2000; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003), play an essential role in the strategic decisions of firms such as market selection and entry (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997; Moen et al., 2004). For example, take firm A; it was to enter the German market through export, using family-based social ties that guided the establishment of the business. In addition to social networks, business networks (existing customers and fair contacts) also contributed to expanding this market and entering new markets with the export method. Over time, the firm developed strategic cooperation with two agencies, one in Germany and the other in Belgium. In addition, with the guidance of a business network, a strategic collaboration was made with a massive company in Germany within the scope of a production contract. As can be seen, all market entries and method choices of the firm were driven by network relationships.

All the relationships that guided company B's foreign market entry decisions were social. The entrepreneur's previous relationships in Iran influenced the start of exports to Iran, the first market. After the Iranian market, an Azeri minister's palace was organized through a close friend of the entrepreneur, and that market expanded over time. The Russian market was first entered using the export method. Afterward, the entrepreneur met a Turkish citizen living there and working in the same sector through a close friend and decided to open an office in Russia by including this person in the business. The social networks also guided the enterprise's entry into the Chinese and French markets with the export

method. When we consider company C, the company's export started with two companies from Israel and Libya, which the enterprise contacted at the fair, continued to increase in various markets, and began exporting to fifty countries. Direction by business networks, many of which date back to the pre-establishment of the firm, based on the trust stemming from the family's past textile industry experience, played an essential role in this expansion. In addition, good relations with existing customers contribute significantly to acquiring new customers through reference. In company D, as in C, the business network relations of the entrepreneurs from their past activities guided the foreign markets and market entry method in which they operate.

"The biggest factor in company D's internationalization with its establishment is that we were a fabric manufacturer before. We were already selling much fabric to all the brands D works with, either through other suppliers or directly. The biggest reason for D's success so fast, reaching such high numbers; I think that the quality of the fabric is very well known and the experience in the business." (Interviewed coordinator in Company D)

Company D's first orders from France, the first market, were received through the French agency, which is known from the previous business activities of the entrepreneurs. Afterward, the French market was followed by the Spanish and British markets. The collaborations that the company developed with representative companies through its past references were effective for new market entries. In addition, the company made a direct capital investment by establishing branches in Barcelona and La Corona to manage its intensive exports to Spain.

While some researchers stated that networks that guide market and entry method choices in the early stages of born global firms are primarily social (Andersson & Wictor, 2003; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004; Komulainen et al., 2006; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011), there are also researchers (Bell, 1995; Moen et al., 2004; Coviello, 2006) who argue that business networks are more beneficial in this process in general.

When the case firms' foreign market and entry method choices were evaluated in general, it was seen that business networks played an essential role in the two firms (C and D) in this process. While social networks gained more importance in company (B), the other company (A) social and business networks influenced these decisions. Overall, our findings support the findings of Coviello and Munro (1995; 1997) that the contacts providing this referral can be work-related or social.

Social-Business Networks and Reducing Perceived Risk

In all case studies, network relationships were found to play a role in reducing perceived risk to foreign markets. Let us first consider what entrepreneur A provides through social networking relationships in Germany, the business's first and most significant market.

"I have friends and a social circle there. Those people are not in my industry. They are not in the sector, but they analyze the environment very well, they know. For example, they say there is a company here. I say let us go there. Or we go to fairs; we give each other cards. I am asking this place my acquaintances, and I get information. There are companies whose feasibility I have even taken out in this way. This is how I do preliminary research." (A's entrepreneur)

The experiences of entrepreneur A in Germany show that decision-makers faced with uncertainty need to create, develop and manage their social resources when deciding to enter the foreign market (Ellis & Pecotich, 2001). Like A's entrepreneur, B minimized his perceived risk based on his relationships in Iran and decided to start his firm with his childhood friend, despite all the financial resource constraints. For firms C and D, business network relationships reduce the risk of internationalization. Although firm C started exporting as of its establishment with unexpected developments, the contacts provided mainly through the connections based on past business relationships effectively increased exports. Additionally, the referential effect of these relationships reduces the perceived risk of internationalization. Company D, on the other hand, was founded with the encouragement of

customers, which stemmed from past commercial activities of its entrepreneurs to "enter the apparel production." As a result, it minimized the perceived risk of internationalization thanks to the support provided by its customers in its worldwide growth. Our findings in D are consistent with those of Gabrielsson and Manek Kirpalani (2004) and Parida, Pemartin, and Frishammar (2009). Gabrielsson and Manek Kirpalani (2004) find that the worldwide growth of a born global firm is due to its ability to establish and leverage relationships with the primary customer in its network; Parida, Pemartin, and Frishammar (2009) presented the finding that networking with customers is more important than networking with other partners in the network, as it triggers innovation.

When all the findings are evaluated together, it is seen that the born global firms in the research reduce their perceived risks towards internationalization thanks to their network relations, reflecting the previous research findings (Ellis & Pecotich, 2001; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003; Mort & Weerawardena, 2006); When we look at the type of network relationships that provide this effect, it is understood that it can have both social (in A and B) and business network relationships (in C and D).

Social-Business Networks and Overcoming Resource Constraints

In the study, networks were found to play a role also in overcoming resource constraints in the born global firms. In this direction, attains from networks emerged under three themes: financial resources, physical resources, complementary resources, and access to talents.

Findings from two firms (A and B) suggest that partnerships play a role in "access to financial resources" in born global firms, showing that they are effective in compensating for resource disadvantages (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). In A, business networks; in B, social networks provide this effect. In 2015, in firm A, the need for additional financial resources to expand international activities was met through a partnership with a business network relationship. In establishing B, the entrepreneur set out with his

childhood friend, whom he knew from the Iranian job market and described as "we grew up together" due to the capital constraint. In the founding of A, the entrepreneur provided a free machine from a former customer in Germany through his father, which he referred to as "felt like medicine at the time"; In addition, social networks facilitated the "access to physical resources" of the firm (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Nummela, 2002; Hoang, Antoncic, 2003; Chetty & Wilson, 2003; Tang, 2011) by providing various supports such as programs, designs, and the installation and preparation of molds through colleagues from the engineering circle of the entrepreneur.

In addition, findings from companies A and D showed that social and business network relationships could also play a role in businesses "accessing complementary resources and capabilities." The internationalization skill in the fabric opened the way to internationalization for D. The company achieved early and rapid internationalization thanks to this complementary capability.

"Internationalization is not something that starts with D. Internationalization started with the fabric. The success of the fabric gave birth to D." (Interviewed coordinator at D)

A's entrepreneur, on the other hand, expressed the complementary resources and talents he gained from his social ties with the following words:

"I benefited greatly from my friends in purchasing machines, programs, designs, and installation. I did not pay any money. Or I will buy a machine, I say right away, son, how will we do this? What someone else would do for 50,000-60,000 Euros, I did for 30,000-35,000 Euros. For example, the design of the rally car over there is entirely my own. I had the molds made by a close friend of mine from university. They wanted 60.000-70.000 TL abroad to have his mold made; I had him do it for 10.000 TL. It works very well in production; for example, I cannot make a design, or it comes from abroad. I can make it and send it after 1 hour. It takes 2-3 days for another company." (A's Entrepreneur)

Social-Business Networks and Other Effects on Internationalization

Other themes that emerged as a result of the analysis regarding the role of networks in internationalization in case firms; are "operational support," "moral support," "access to key actors," and "trust."

Agents in A's business network in Germany and Belgium, and the entrepreneur's close friend in the Netherlands, led to the emergence of the "operational support" theme. It was understood that the agencies were influential in the success of foreign market activities by providing crucial operational support to company A, which facilitated its international activities.

"...a phone call and it comes into play. I say get the sample, and it solves the problems at the customs and markets us at the fair. He does things for me that I cannot get done with the money I give him." (A's Entrepreneur)

This finding in A is compatible with Madsen, Rasmussen & Servais's (2000) recommendations that having a manufacturing establishment or many sales subsidiaries abroad is unnecessary to be a full-fledged global business. Instead, companies rely on different collaborative arrangements with partners such as intermediaries, agencies, distributors, and suppliers. In addition, the entrepreneur of A also benefited from social networks in providing operational support and received significant support from his close friend in the Netherlands on technical and customer-related issues.

In addition, it was found that networks played an essential role in providing access to "important people and institutions" in all case firms. In A and B, this effect was mainly supplied by social relationships; while in C and D, business relationships were more effective. Suppose we consider A, social networks, especially the entrepreneur's father, provided access of firm to influential people and institutions on the way to internationalization. In identifying target customers in the German market, the social environment of the entrepreneur there was also of great benefit:

"We used our social relations there. We used the social relations of our relatives. We talked together and determined the companies we would like to work, met from the fairs." (A's entrepreneur)

Like firm A, social relationships became the source for accessing important actors in firm B. During the establishment, simultaneous internationalization, and subsequent business development stages, the entrepreneur's social networks had driven access to critical actors. For example, the contact provided by a social bond triggered the entrepreneur's decision to open his Russia office. Accordingly, our findings in firms A and B showed that direct ties, powerful ones, are crucial not only for the entrepreneur's access to people with whom he is directly connected but also for indirect access to people beyond his close contacts (Aldrich, Reese & Dubini, 1989; Dubini & Aldrich, 1991). In addition, the fact that the person who was the head of the office in Russia in firm B was an indirect bond, but became a direct bond by joining the enterprise, supported the findings of Sharma and Blomstermo (2003) that the indirect ties of the born global firms could turn into a direct link in the process of expanding abroad. Besides, it has been found that partial business network relations benefit A and B firms in accessing essential actors. For example, while the birth of business A's cooperation with a German company was based on the mediation of an existing customer, the fairs had the following impact on entrepreneur B's access to critical actors:

"I go to fairs; I appear there and meet people. After all, even a card exchange is critical for people. I see Ahmet. Ahmet knows a foreign American, and cards are exchanged. Then you say I am doing this job. You see, the man calls me when he needs something." (B's entrepreneur)

In D, purely business networks (entrepreneurs' ties with world-famous customers, which are essential actors from other business activities); in C, mostly business networks were instrumental in gaining access to critical actors. For example, the first fair attended by the enterprise enabled it to connect with its first foreign customers and simultaneously brought the firm to the success of internationalization with its establishment. Later, thanks to these relationships and with reference to the influence of previous business relationships, company C; gained many customers by reaching important actors in many markets such as Iraq, Venezuela, Palestine, Lebanon, Kuwait, USA, and Israel.

"We worked with Libya. You will say, how did the Palestinian, Lebanese, Kuwaiti man come? The people you work with, after all, are merchants. They somehow coincide in a country, somewhere, at a fair. They ask, whom do you work with? Where do you buy goods from? What goods are you buying? They tell each other. Which prices are affordable, what are the prices, who do you buy from in Turkey, is it reliable, is there any problem? He says I am going to Turkey too. He is coming to Istanbul. He says, "I will be in Istanbul at 9 am". We go and receive our guests." (C's entrepreneur)

Another theme that emerged in the content analysis of the research data was the "spiritual support" provided by social network relations. In general, in the establishment and early stages of case firms, it was determined that the strong social ties of entrepreneurs with their family members played an essential role in providing moral support. For example, consider the entrepreneur of A, who expressed the moral support he received from his social relations in Germany with the following words.

"...Some relatives in Germany could not give me much about the industry, but I know the culture there. At least I have a door there. I can ask in Turkish what is that here? What can we do there? They provide me with social and emotional support." (A's entrepreneur)

While the entrepreneur of B expressed the emotional support he received from his mother in his entrepreneurial adventure with the words, "my mother is my biggest moral support," the entrepreneur of C saw the prayers and moral support he received from his parents as critical to the success of the firm with the words, "I received the greatest support from my parents with their prayers."

Another theme that emerged from the analysis is "trust." This theme was especially prominent in firm C. Thanks to the trust it gives to its customers, the company acquired new foreign customers in different markets in its first years without any promotional activities or even customer visits:

"The interesting thing is that while we were exporting, we did not even travel abroad for the first two years - 3 years. However, we worked on 60%-70% export. How is it? For example, a customer in Libya buys goods from you. You sent it on time. Prices seem reasonable to the man, and colors and details are okay. The man is satisfied. When his friend asks, "where can I buy goods," he says, "from here, I will give you their

card." We did not travel abroad for the first 2-3 years due to trust. Then, you are giving goods; we visited them to say hello. Trust is important." (C's Entrepreneur)

Entrepreneur of A, on the other hand, highlighted the role of fairs with its renew confidence functions:

"Fairs are significant. Our customers are delighted when they see us there. We talk about new products; we take our new designs. Or we renew our old connections; we renew confidence." (A's Entrepreneur)

As can be seen, although common interests encourage actors to develop and maintain network relations with each other (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003), such relationships usually require time and effort to establish and develop mutual trust and shared knowledge. On the other hand, it provides a high degree of loyalty to the market with increased mutual trust and the amount of shared information in the long run (Madsen & Servais, 1997).

Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to investigate the role of networks in the early and rapid internationalization of Turkish-born global textile firms using a case-based approach with a bifocal perspective provided by social and business network lenses. The theoretical contribution of the study is that the findings obtained from Turkey, a developing country, and the textile industry, which is a low-tech industry, enrich the internationalization literature, which studies carried out mainly in developed countries and high-tech industries. Furthermore, it aimed to contribute to the literature by listening to the research calls made to fill the gap in the field with the dual-focus perspective provided by the distinction of social-business network relationships.

The study results show that networks, in line with previous research, are critical in facilitating the internationalization of born global firms. The analysis results in the examined Turkish-born global textile enterprises; revealed that network relationships play an indispensable role at the beginning of internationalization in identifying foreign market opportunities and obtaining

market information, choosing the market and entry method, reducing the perceived risk of internationalization, and overcoming resource constraints. In addition, the research revealed that networks provide operational support, access to critical actors, moral support, and trust to businesses. It has been determined that both social and business networks play an essential role in early and rapid internationalization, and the two types of networks provide benefits that cannot be easily categorized in their importance. Finally, it was concluded that a combination of social and business networks is beneficial in early internationalization, as noted by some researchers (Rialp et al., 2005; Melen & Nordman, 2007; Eberhard & Craig, 2013). However, in the early stages, the relationships that entrepreneurs developed before the business establishment seemed influential (Crick & Spence, 2005; Evers & O'Gorman, 2011). Afterward, established relationships with new actors have gained importance. In addition, in all firms, it was determined that the opportunity identification that triggers internationalization stems from opportunities created through network communication rather than the businesses' own proactive identification processes (Coviello & Munro, 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997), both social and business networks provide this orientation.

Managerial Implications

Our study offers practical implications for entrepreneurs and SME managers in developing countries who want to internationalize their operations with or shortly after establishment.

The main managerial implication of the study is to show how personal and business networks assist early internationalization in becoming a born global firm. These findings reinforce previous research findings that highlight the critical importance of networks in promoting firm internationalization and enabling international expansion. Therefore besides Turkish SMEs, SME entrepreneurs and managers from other developing countries need to activate and strengthen existing networks and create new connections in a planned manner toward internationalization goals.

The finding that the early and rapid internationalization of research firms is primarily due to networks before the establishment of the firm reveals the importance of previous relationships in internationalization. In this direction, entrepreneurs should seriously consider which actors they know in the targeted markets and how they can support their international expansion plans. In other words, entrepreneurs are advised to maximize the benefits they can derive from these relations with their proactive behavior by being aware of the importance of networks in internationalization.

In addition, while the particular importance of social and business networks in the initial phase and subsequent expansion of internationalization in research firms seems to be consistent with previous research evidence, the critical role that social networking plays in the internationalization of Turkish-born global enterprises may be due to the collectivist trend in Turkish culture (Hofstede, www.geerthofstede.com). On the other hand, firms in emerging economies often have fewer resources than those in developed countries. As a result, they likely rely on informal governance mechanisms and relational networks to achieve their strategic goals (Khanna & Palepu, 2010). This situation highlights the need to consciously raise resources such as knowledge and mutual trust embedded in interpersonal relationships within the organization (Masiello & Izzo, 2019).

On the other hand, in the case firms, as stated by some researchers (Björkman & Kock (1995); Mainela (2002); Smith-Doerr & Powell (2005); Vasilchenko & Morrish (2011), it has been observed that a relationship that started as a business relationship can turn into a social relationship over time. In the words of Smith-Doerr and Powell (2005), because social ties and economic exchange are deeply intertwined, the intended activity may be mixed with friendship, reputation, and trust. Considering that people like to do business with people they love, it is natural that business relationships can turn into personal relationships after a while (Masiello & Izzo, 2019). In this direction, it is necessary to advise the managers that these relationships should be carried out in a way that will not harm professional business life

and that strategic decisions should be as objective as possible.

The export of one of the research firms, which started with the contacts obtained from the fair and reached 50 countries in a short time, reveals the critical role of the fairs in establishing networks with international actors in the eyes of SMEs. Apart from this, the finding that although the other two of the case firms do not have fair connections that initiated internationalization, the results show that they benefit from developing their existing relationships as well as gaining new contacts from the fairs in the subsequent expansion process, accordingly is suggested that SME entrepreneurs and managers should seriously evaluate the functions of renewing existing relationships, as well as the functions of developing new network ties of international sectoral fairs. As the previous research results indicate, well-planned participation in sectoral international fairs can be essential for meeting potential beneficial actors. Considering the government support for their participation in the fair, SMEs are advised to take advantage of such opportunities.

Limitations and Future Research

This research, like any other research, has some limitations. First, the fact that it is not possible to include a sufficient number of samples, which has the power to represent the relevant universe in qualitative research, prevents the generalization of the findings. Therefore, it is impossible to generalize the research results to all born global firms in Turkey. In this direction, it is recommended that future research design a quantitative research to complement the case-based approach of the current study or a mixed research design that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The number of born global firms will inevitably increase in the world economies that are becoming increasingly integrated. For this reason, more research is needed in Turkey and other developing countries from the perspective of network relations, which is seen as the critical view in explaining these firms' early internationalization. In future research, integrating social and business

networking approaches will allow us to compare our results across different samples.

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APPENDIX-I. CASE STUDY PROTOCOL

I. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
Determining the roles of network relationships in the early internationalization of born global Turkish businesses
II. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES
- Determining the sample of the case study,
- Introducing the research to the entrepreneurs/managers of the businesses that make up the sample and inviting them to participate in the research,
- Determining the interview schedule with entrepreneurs/managers who agree to participate in the research,
- Conducting a pilot study,
- Conducting Meetings,
o Introducing the interviewer herself
o Informing participants about the details of the research
o Obtaining participants' consent for audio recording
o Providing information to participants about the operation of the meeting
- Keeping field notes,
- Examining the websites of businesses,
- Examining videos, promotions, and press news on businesses' social media tools.
III. DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES
- Conducting single case study analyses
- Performing comparative case study analysis
IV. CREATION OF CASE STUDY REPORTS

APPENDIX-II: INTERVIEW FORM

I. Questions Regarding the General Characteristics of Business and Entrepreneur
1. General Features of the Business
Founding year:
Industry:
Size (Number of employees):
Products:
Exported product ranking:
Year of first export start:
First export market:
Other export markets (since establishment until today):
Annual export rates since establishment (international sales/all sales):
Branches and representatives abroad:
2. General Characteristics of the Entrepreneur
Nationality:
Age:
Education:
Knowledge of foreign languages:
Previous professional work experiences:
Previous entrepreneurial experience:

Industry experience and technical knowledge:
3. Current Geographic Diversity
Foreign markets in which the business currently operates
The company's current export rates in foreign markets:
II. Questions About Network Relationships
1. Can you tell the founding story of your business? How did your business idea come about and how did your business come to life? Which people or institutions played an important role in this process?
2. How have the people and institutions you mentioned affected your work? What kind of support did you get from them?
3. How did your internationalization begin? What was the number of people you were in contact with in your network during this period? Who were these people and how did you meet/how did they become involved in your contacts?
4. Did the previous communication networks you or your partners had before establishing the business impact this process? How?
5. What was the role of your family and close friends in this process?
6. What external relationships would you consider critical for the internationalization of your business? What did you gain from these relationships?
7. Were there other people who played an important role in the development of your business? How would you describe your relationship with them? When and how did you meet with them? What role did these people play in the internationalization of your business?
8. How did you choose your first market, how well did you know it? Was there anyone in your business, in your family, or around you who had first-hand experience in that market? Did your business have indirect or direct connections in that market?
What role (if any) did this person(s) play in the beginning of your internationalization?
(if not available) How did you obtain market information?
9. What were the major problems you encountered at the beginning of internationalization? How did you overcome these problems?
10. Have there been any government supports that facilitate the internationalization of your business? If so, which institutions did you benefit from support? What did these provide you?
11. Which methods of entry into international markets has your business used and does it use? Why was this method chosen? What are the advantages it provides you?
12. Does your business use strategic alliances/collaborations or partnerships in foreign markets?
<u>If used;</u>
How were these partnerships or alliances formed?
What were the most important criteria when choosing partners?
Did your relationships play any role in creating these alliances?
What benefits does having these alliances and partnerships provide to your business?