

# Impact of Personal Networks of Ethnic Minority Female Entrepreneurs' Growth Construct: An Egocentric Network Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper aims to explore personal networks of Pakistani female entrepreneurs for venture growth. They are a distinctive sub-segment of ethnic minority entrepreneurs as they represent an interesting blend of religious, socio-cultural and socio-economic traits. This research study underscores the interactional dimension of personal networks and its subsequent influence on the venture growth. It is mainly the contents and interactions within a network that determines the quality of a network and its influence on relevant aspects of network members. To explore the perceptual aspects of the network of relationships and their use for entrepreneurial ventures' growth, an egocentric network analysis is applied to narratives of Pakistani female entrepreneurs (the ego). Narratives were collected through in-depth interviews with 'name generator' questions. Egocentric network analysis was carried out using sociograms to details the formation and utilization of network ties. By generating the understanding of the structure and use of personal networks for venture growth by ethnic female entrepreneurs, the paper adds to the literature on ethnic minority female entrepreneurship and provides fresh insights for practice.*

**Key Words:** *Personal Network, Ethnic Minority Female Entrepreneurs, Egocentric Network Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurial behaviour is socially organized across multiple ethnicities and communities, where social context plays a crucial role in shaping it. To explain this socially embedded nature of entrepreneurial behaviour and activities, researchers have employed a 'network' considering entrepreneurs to be embedded in a network of social relationships. Such a perspective considers an entrepreneur as (a) a network actor, and (2) one who utilises the network for extracting resources and generate useful information for venture growth purpose. From the embeddedness perspective economic activities are considered to be rooted in the socio-cultural context (Mitra and Basit, 2021; Wang and Altiney, 2012; Granovetter, 1985). Individual and institutional actors and their interactions in a particular social context constitute the the network of relationships. For ethnic minority entrepreneurs (EMEs), such a viewpoint develops interesting outcomes as their entrepreneurial activities are rooted in the context of migration, ethnicity and minority statuses that make it difficult to access mainstream channels. A network acts as a "channel through which entrepreneurs obtain necessary resources for business start-up, growth

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and success” (Chapus and Nordman, 2021; Kristiansen 2004; Jack, 2010). However, gender plays significant role in determining the network ties and their support patterns ( Nakash, et. al., 2022; Ibarra and Andrews, 1993, Aldrich et al., 1989). Entrepreneurial practices of women are shaped by their social experiences that are generate unique networking practices. The concept of gender is a result of social practices ( Nedkovski & Guerci, 2021; Verheul, 2005), therefore, ethnicity significantly shapes the networks of women. Furthermore, interaction of socially constructed gender and ethnicity generate unique networking patterns that can influence their ventures’ growth ( Fraudatario, Giordano, & Zaccaria, 2024; Halkias et al., 2011), however, the research to date failed to reach any consensus on gender-based differences and/or similarities in networks. Limited studies have empirically proven that venture success or failure has no relation with the gender-based/neutral network, whereas, other have found a significantly high correlation between entrepreneurial venture start-up and growth with a gendered network (Fuhse and Gondal, 2022; Deguilhem, Berrou, and Combarous, 2019; Nordman, 2016). Mitra & Basit (2021) empirically established ‘women-only-networks’ for Pakistani female entrepreneurs (PFEs) in the UK, depicting an interesting mix of ethnicity, religion and developed economic context.

Previous research studies studied the networks of EMEs to generate an understanding of network type, in terms of their functionality, informal networks with strong ties (Venkataraman et al., 2022, Lindvert, Patel, & Wincent, 2017, Rosenbaum, 2017; Al-Dajani et al. 2015), new venture creation (Gibbs, et al., 2018; Bird and Wennberg 2014; Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986a, Blois, 1990), aspects of gendered network ( Lagrasta, Scozzi, & Pontrandolfo, 2024, Belz et al., 2022, Aldrich et al., 1996), use of network for information, emotional support, and confidence building (Villesèche, Meliou, and Jha, 2022, Jennings and Brush 2013, Goyal and Yadav, 2014; McGregor and Tweed, 2002) tangible/intangible resources(McAdam 2022; Rosa and Hamilton, 1994). For EMEFs literature has extensively worked on network ties within the multi-ethnic and co-ethnic network of relationships (Avnimelech & Rechter 2023, Petrucci, 2022, Mitra & Basit, 2021; Renzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Wong, 1997; Iyer and Shapiro, 1999) and contribution of a semi-formal network, network as a part of success ( Guzman and Kacperczyk, 2019; Burt, 2019; Iyer and Shapiro, 1999; Katz & Williams, 1997; Basu, 1998; Wong and Ng, 1998), use of network for start-ups and discovery of new markets (Swartz, Scheepers and Toefy, 2022; Bosma et al., 2020; Saxenian, 1999), for central role in business operations (Javadian, Opie, and Parise, 2018; Ram, 1994; Ram et al., 2000), as a source of capital, co-ethnic labour, and clients ( Bae, 2024; Azoulay et al., 2020; Walton-Roberts and Hiebert, 1997; Basu, 1998; Chu, 1996; Marger and Hoffman, 1992; Iyer and Shapiro, 1999b). The brief summary of research shows that interaction of gender, ethnicity and social context produce varying patterns of network compositions and usage. EMEFs use their ethnic networks consisting of family ties and ethnic friends, hence, their ‘loyalty to ethnicity’ originates from belonging to a specific minority group. Meagre ethnic resources gathered from a strong network are used for venture start-ups within ethnic enclaves. Ethnic networks maintained by EMEFs impact their entrepreneurial ventures in terms of entrepreneurial performance and outcomes (Varadarajan and Cunningham, 1995, Human and Provan, 1997) where such impact vary according to the venture phase (Greve and Salaff, 2003) such as, a new venture requires opportunities, information and resources; however, for the growth phase new ties are needed (Jack, 2010, Hite, 2005, Donckels and Lambrecht, 1995). Despite this realisation, the research remained focus on network utilization for new venture creation largely ignoring the growth of the entrepreneurial venture. The research focus on the new venture

creation and initial phases of venture cannot capture the nuances of entrepreneurial process. The network of relationship are important in the venture growth as the indispensable financial resources information, advice, mentoring, and emotional support providers. Also, there is scant literature on the interplay of social context of gender construction and ethnicity and their combined influence on the network composition and growth of ventures. The construction of gender roles and the subsequent network composition resulting in growth patterns. Hence, the integrated impact of gender, ethnicity and network influencing the growth aspirations of EMFEs in distinct ways remained understudied.

Capitalizing on the research gaps, this study aims to explore the personal network of EMFEs to understand the nature of ties and their utilization from the EMFE's perspective. The study aspires to appreciate the intricate connection between networking and the growth aspirations of Pakistani female entrepreneurs (PFEs) in ethnic and minority context. A personal network angle will help to appreciate the distinctiveness of the gender dimension in Pakistani business communities regarding growth-oriented entrepreneurial activities. The objective of this study is to critically and qualitatively examine the impact of gender and ethnicity of network ties on growth aspirations of EMFEs. The study attempts to answer the broader research question;

*How does the interaction of ethnicity, gender and social context impact the network ties and growth aspirations of EMFEs in the context of the metropolitan city of London, UK?*

The proposed relationship between the EMFE and her social context is not limited to the venture start up only but affects her entire life. This necessitates employing a “situated view of entrepreneurial action” of PFEs highlighting the “emergence perspective” in which all actions of individuals are situated in real life (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Social Construction of reality can address such a view academically incorporating the lived experiences of actors in their normative context. Contemplation of social construction of EMFE's lived experiences can have academic and practical implications. From the academic stance, it offers fresh insights into the growth aspects of gendered ethnic and minority ventures. It allows for deeper insights into the peculiarities of growth dynamics by providing a test bed for their profile as aspirational entrepreneurs. It advances the agenda of broadening the horizons of EME beyond ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘marginalized’ notions. Hence, the projection of ‘EMFEs as independent ‘beings’ would direct the policymaking from facing the “low-skilled”, “dependent”, ethnic minority women to formulating policies for growth oriented EMFES who are contributing to the society and economy.

After introducing the research study, the subsequent sections detail the literature, framework of the study, and methodologies employed to achieve the research objectives. After the findings section, the article presents the Discussion and Conclusion sections followed by future research directions.

## **REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE**

This section aims to review the relevant literature to identify the theories/model, methods used, and gaps in existing research and to locate the current study in the field of ethnic minority female entrepreneurship.

### **The Dynamics of Personal Network**

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The basic assumption of social embeddedness and a network approach is that entrepreneurs utilise their network for venture creation, information, resource generation, and various forms of support (Choban and Hashim, 2022; Berntsen, et. al., 2022; Deepali et al., 2017; Stephens, 2013). The argument ignores that the nature of the network ties contained in the network determines nature of resources and the support. The network ties maintained by EMFEs with family, friends, and business colleagues are their personal choice (Pregam, et. al. 2022; Hall and Wellman, 1998). Hence, a ‘personal network can be defined as all the network members with whom the entrepreneurs (the focal actor) have a direct relationship’. Jack and Anderson (2002) note that an “ego network (personal network) is based on the perspective of an individual. If someone is asked to list all the people with whom they have relationships, this list would constitute the individual’s ego network”.

Personal network studies employ the entrepreneur’s perspective to study the network relationships (Fang, et. al., 2022). This approach considers the entrepreneurs as socially embedded network actor (Babajide, et. al. 2022; Shi, et.al. 2015; Putnam, 2000; Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986) who utilizes the network to obtain resources and support. Such a network is embedded in the broader social context showing that relations and interactions are entwined to the wider social structure influences formation of the network and hence, determines the resources’ availability to the entrepreneurs. Several social factors including socially constructed gender roles in ethnic groups, personal choices of EMFEs, family background, and demographic factors influence the formation and utilization of personal networks. For different social/ethnic groups, these factors may vary according to their respective position in society and the nuances of their culture.

### **Stimuli of Personal Network – Gender, Generation and Ethnicity**

Social networks play a crucial role in determining the position of EMFEs in the host country as many of the ventures depend on ethnic support and resources. However, the network ties sustained by the EMFEs defines the support structure available to them. Granovetter (1973) attempts to link the individual behavior to wider social context by examining the nature of network ties in ‘*strength of weak ties*’. The ‘*strength of ties*’ preposition spotlights the nature of network between individual and her influence on the availability and quality of information and resources. However, such relationships in the network are not independent of the socio-cultural influences hence, shaping the internal dynamics of the network in various ways. Ethnicity, socio-cultural influences, and gender roles are some of the potent factors influencing the personal network of entrepreneurs to a huge extent. EMFEs depend on ethnic ties in their network to extract financial and emotional support; hence, they the venture creation is done with the help of family members, friends and other ethnic ties however, the expansion and growth of the venture require them to extend their network to *non-ethnic ties*.

The research found differences between males and females regarding their network formation, its utilization, network expansion, and perception of ties in personal networks (Lee and Singh, 2024; Balcar, et. al., 2024; Lizardo, 2006; Dubini & Aldrich, 2002; Verheul and Thurik, 2001; Ibarra, 1993; Aldrich, Stackman and Pinder; 1999). Such differences have largely ignored the social construction of gender roles which vary with the context. Females are ‘conservative’ in their networking practices whereas, men make ‘bolder’ and confident choices as compared to their counterparts (Ibarra, 1992; Hodgetts and Hegar, *Bahria University Journal of Management and Technology (BJMT)*. 2024, Volume 7, Issue 2.

2007). Socially constructed gender roles reflect in the labor force, familial, and communal matter (Bonvillain, 2020; Williams, 2012; Bastani, 2007; Lomnitz, 1982). The collaboration impact of gender roles, ethnicity, and social context in EMEs on the formation and use of networks is substantial. Their networks depend on the normative structure and socio-cultural rules shaping their gender roles. Largely, EMFEs utilize their networks to obtain resources and information for assimilation and integration into the host society. Such a utilization and formation of a network of ties diverges for various EMFEs based on belongingness to ethnic groups. The interaction of normative factors is also context-bound.

### **The Temporality of Personal Networks in the Growth Orientation of Entrepreneurs**

The temporal aspect in the development of social network ties is central to immigrants' settlement in the host society's normative framework and forming cross-ethnic ties with other communities. The ethnic enclaves lead to strong ethnic networks, because EMEs must support their ethnic community members in venture creation leading to the saturation of the ethnic market warranting venture growth in ethnic markets. The tendency to grow require EMEs to invest outside the ethnic enclave and to join 'professional trade associations and/or formal networks (Galbraith and Stiles, 2006). Research in the field of ethnic entrepreneurship has focused on new venture creation paying less attention to growth aspects. Some studies have identified the factors that hamper the growth of minority businesses, such as dense networks (Kontos, 2004; Hoanga and Antoncic, 2003), lack of required skills and resources (Teixeira, Lo, and Truelove, 2007; Evans, 1989), operating in traditional sectors (Dhaliwal, 2000; Basu, 1998), and availability of finance (Dyer and Rose, 2007; Chaganti and Greene, 2002).

Research studies show that ethnic minority women entrepreneurs rely mostly on informal, particularly kinship networks to get hold of ethnic community-based resources and to draw emotional and instrumental support from them (Light et. al., 1994; Basu, 1998; Iyer and Shapiro, 1999). According to Granovetter (1973) a dense network with strong ties may restrict the growth prospects of the entrepreneurs, hence emphasizing the importance of sporadic contacts with acquaintances (weak ties) in the network. The growth orientation of entrepreneurs is driven by the desire to achieve independence which drives female entrepreneurs to grow their businesses (Barringer *et al.*, 1998). However, the growth and expansion of a business is the personal choice of an entrepreneur. Hence the entrepreneurship literature establishes that network expansion is usually coupled with the growth orientation of the entrepreneurs and venture growth is the outcome of a network with a range of weak ties.

### **Theoretical Framework: Preference Theory of Growth and Personal Networks**

This section presents a suitable framework by bringing together various concepts of gender, ethnicity, network, and entrepreneurship. The study proposes that entrepreneurship can be understood by conceiving a contextual view of the entrepreneur, acting in a networked environment that affects her growth aspirations. Individual's entrepreneurial acts are mediated by various overarching phenomena such as the social construction of gender, ethnicity, and context. This section conceptualizes the growth aspirations of ethnic minority female entrepreneurs through the theory of a socially embedded network of relationships. Growth aspirations are underpinned by using the preference theory of growth that exhibits growth as a personal choice of ethnic minority female entrepreneurs.

## **Social Embeddedness and Growth Aspirations of Ethnic Minority Female Entrepreneurs**

The social embeddedness framework asserts that studying the economic activities of individuals must include the influence of social context (Granovetter, 1985, Uzzi, 1997a, Uzzi, 1999). Embeddedness can provide a ‘particular set of ontological focal points’ (Kewell, 2006) and also acts as a subjective epistemology by providing an embedded view of knowledge (Jakubik, 2007). In this sense, embeddedness acts as a broader perspective for conceptualizing the micro-macro relationships through a variety of theories. It serves this study by relating the economic view of the entrepreneur (particularly growth aspiration) with its social context (network theory). This study takes a person-centric approach, which necessitates appropriate theoretical constructs that can conceptualize both the network and growth aspirations from the viewpoint of the individual entrepreneur.

In a socially constructed view of reality (used in the previous chapter), the entities are not mutually exclusive but bound in a two-way relationship. On one hand, the entrepreneur’s growth aspirations are influenced by her choice of network, and on the other, the choice of relations in the network can indicate their intention to grow. The following two sections adopt specific manifestations of network and growth before illustrating them within a dynamic relationship.

### **Adopting the personal network perspective**

This study derives the concept of personal networks from social network theory (SNT). A personal network, also known as ego network, is a part of a wider social network which is studied from the individual’s (focal person’s) viewpoint. A personal network can be described as the network of a focal actor (ego) who is connected to several network members (alters) (Bastani, 2007). The ego in the personal network is the focal person from whose viewpoint the whole network is studied. Ego mentions alters and explains the relationship (ties) he/she perceives with the other network members (alters). The terms personal and egocentric are interchangeably used in social network theory. Facebook is an example of an egocentric network where the user, constituting an ego, can choose and add from among a wide range of people in the contact list. This flexibility gives the egocentrism more strength.

In a social context, some relationships are given, while others are the matter of individual actor’s choice. For instance, kinship relations (parents, siblings) are given, however, the extent and use of relationships still depend on the individual actor. Other relationships are deliberated through the choice of the individuals; for instance, non-kin relations (neighbours, friends, and co-workers). The choice of such relationships depends on the diverse meanings attached to individual’s experiences. Therefore, a personal network can be termed the ‘person-centred’ (Hanneman A.R. and Riddle, 2011, Wellman et al., 1988). The personal network perspective allows access to the interactional dimension of network along with the more ‘observable’ morphological dimension. This is achieved through the exploration of the entrepreneurs’ meaning-making processes which are socially constructed ongoing phenomena. In line with the aims of the study, meaning-making that leads to the choice of specific relational ties influence the growth aspirations of the entrepreneur. Thus, it is necessary to theoretically underpin the growth aspiration from the individual entrepreneur’s perspective.

### **Theorise Growth from Choice Perspective: The Preference Theory**

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Venture growth can be considered as an intermediate layer between the individual entrepreneur and the economy and broader social context. The venture growth among EMFEs is necessitated by the tendency to achieve independence, however, growth and expansion are dependent on the personal choice and perceptions of the entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs' growth aspiration is driven by the aspiration for independence; nevertheless, actual growth and expansion depend on the individual decisions and outlook of the entrepreneur (Barringer et al. 2005). An entrepreneur's network plays a critical role in shaping their perceptions and growth orientation. Ethnic minority entrepreneurs might not aspire to grow as their venture is the source of sustainable income and satisfaction with a basic livelihood (Chaganti and Greene, 2000). They are likely to perceive their business as a source of 'social mobility' which enables them to join the mainstream market. Contemporary debates on perceptions of women entrepreneurs regarding venture growth and her business choices have used British Sociologist Hakim's (2002) 'preference theory'. The minimal growth of women-owned ventures is the result of their modest growth aspirations (Liao, 2004). This argument recognizes the element of 'choice' in female entrepreneurs' decision to grow or not to grow the business.

Preference theory addresses the gaps in existing theories of gender and growth. Firstly it addresses the personal choices of women based on their 'experiences' (Hakim, 2002, 2003). A theory developed to address the issues of self-employment and entrepreneurship, specifically using women experiences, addresses the criticism of using male norms by reflecting on women's perspective (Marlow, 2002; Ahl, 2006). It recognizes the perceptual nature of choices made by women regarding their ventures. Secondly, it acknowledges the heterogeneity of work/life choices of women (Hakim, 2006). Women are heterogeneous in their preferences and priorities, including work-life balance preferences, which result in variable responses to policies (ibid).

Growth and expansion of the business depends upon the perception of the entrepreneurs- the growth aspirations. 'Aspirations act as a strong predictor of outcomes' (Hessels, Gelderen & Thurik, 2008; Cassar, 2007; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2003) therefore, this study adopts the preference theory of growth to explain the how personal networks impact the growth orientation of PFEs. To account for the shortcomings of the preference theory, this study takes into consideration the contextual factors impacting the preferences of female entrepreneurs. The next section presents a dynamic view of interrelationship of entrepreneur's personal network and growth aspirations.

## **Personal Network and Growth Aspirations**

This study employs the personal network theory and preference theory of growth to conceptualize both network formation and growth as a personal choice of ethnic minority female entrepreneurs. Both choices are bound in a two-way relationship and are also influenced by various contextual factors including gender role requirements, and the normative framework of ethnic groups. The socially constructed view of the embedded entrepreneur, along with the constituent elements are depicted in a dynamic relationship in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Interaction of personal network and growth aspirations

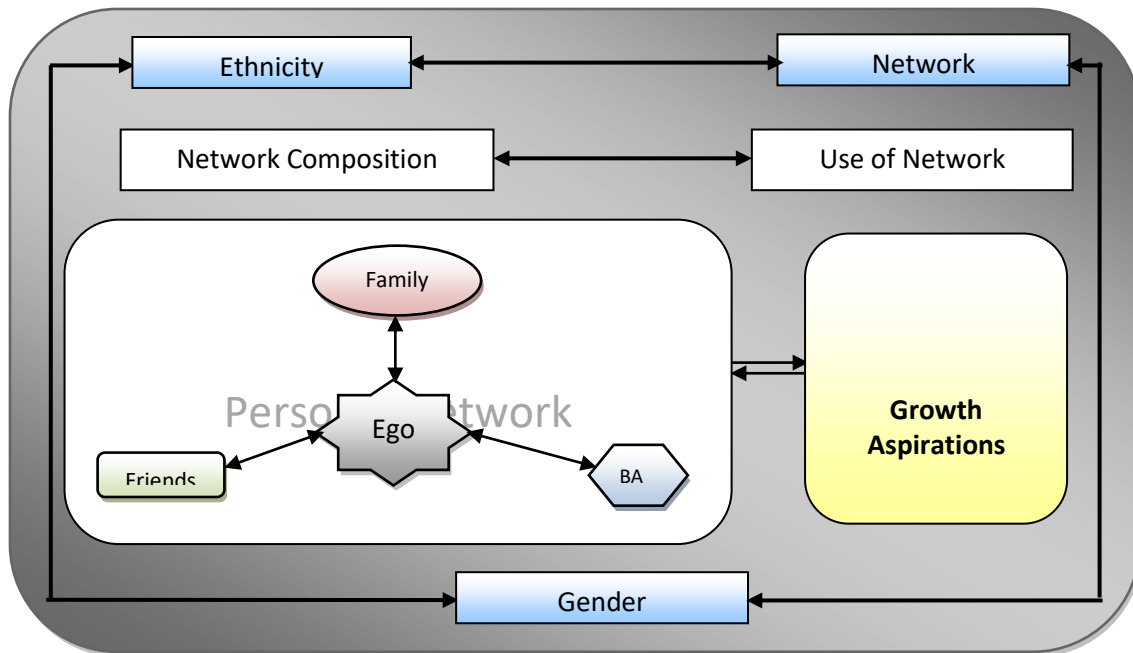


Figure 1 shows that a network can be influenced by ethnicity, gender roles in forming and using the network of social relationships. Socially constructed gender roles are dynamically constructed and re-constructed. They include specific ‘sources’ such as family, friends, customers and institutions, and they use particular ‘resources’ including information, capital, advice and, quite importantly, emotional support. The uniquely composed network also evolves over time and ethnic minority entrepreneurs may decide the inclusion or exclusion of network ties with the passage of time. Influences on personal network determine the nature of network ties that facilitate or hinder the growth. Growth orientation of ethnic minority entrepreneurs dictates the choice of nature of ties in the personal network. The critical aspect here is the perception of individual entrepreneurs which is directly influenced by such factors as access to information, resources, support for growth, availability of role models and access to institutional support (Belcourt, 1987, McCuddy, 2007; Kalantaridis, 2004). Focusing on subjective perceptions of an individual presents a distinct dimension on growth aspirations because it represents the interaction of sociological, psychological and economic spheres. Giving primacy to individual’s perception is also compatible with the notion of constructed reality (as opposed to given realities) thus providing a framework for integration of multi-levelled phenomenon. The framework provides a suitable view that can be used to fulfil the aims of this study in exploring this two-way process for ethnic minority female entrepreneurs embedded in the social context.

## GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The geographical context of the study is multicultural, cosmopolitan city of London, which is the home of several ethnic groups. This section sketches the profile of Pakistani women regarding their settlement patterns, scenarios for employment and self-employment in London, and societal factors affecting them.

Migrants from the Pakistan are 5% (International Migration Outlook, 2023) resulting from 65% increase in total number of migrants since 2020. This figure includes 21.2% labor migrants, 51.5% family/dependents and 11.3% are humanitarian migrants. Pakistanis constitute a considerable majority among the migrant population in London. The census of 2001 depicts a 63 percent increase in Pakistani migrants out of which a 65 % increase is reported in Pakistani women in London (Data Management Group, 2005). According to the Data Management group's briefing (2005) majority of Pakistanis live in Outer London with 59 percent of the population settled in just six boroughs. Newham in Inner London is reported to have a high percentage of Pakistanis where over eight percent of the population is Pakistani. London boroughs of Newham, Redbridge, and Waltham Forest account for one-third of the Pakistani population in London having their biggest concentration.

The migration history of Pakistani women to the UK presents a view of several complex and interweaved trajectories with common and distinct elements. Pakistani women have migrated to Britain in various capacities such as dependents (wives of Pakistani workers in UK), bridal Diasporas (trans-national marriages), and recently as highly skilled migrants (in their own independent capacity). Dependent and bridal Diasporas exhibit a mixed tendency in economically active or adhere to Pakistani tradition and remain dependent upon 'men as bread earners'. The latest wave of migrant Pakistani women is primarily motivated to lift their standards of living and show a marked tendency to be economically active. In a general sense, they can be deemed as more enterprising than the previous migrant Pakistani women. The abidance of core religious and socio-cultural values (e.g. dress code, connection with mosque and basic religious knowledge, raising offspring as Muslims) allows them to retain their distinct Pakistani identity.

The struggle to remain loyal to the culture of origin, in a variety of forms, appears through varied influences. A primary outcome is the settlement patterns, which, although driven by the quest for finding proximity with a common (sub) culture, shape the economic opportunity structure. Settlement patterns are also instrumental in determining the networking practices of Pakistani women. Becoming an entrepreneur is intricately tied to the network of Pakistani female entrepreneurs which provides them the chance to identify and exploit business opportunities. Being an entrepreneur provides a better opportunity (than employment) to flexibly practice their socio-cultural and religious values. Practicing these socio-cultural and religious values restricts them to traditional sectors and generally do not allow them to gain advanced skills (or even aspire to) grow. It can also restrict their networks to Pakistanis or Muslims only, effectively isolating them to a restricted flow of market information and opportunity structure. But do Pakistani women remain isolated and remain without any potential or aspiration to grow their entrepreneurial venture? Do they find ways to expand, and if yes then how? Finding answers to these questions necessitates the use of methodologies that are academically robust, and practically feasible.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This section presents the research methodology for collecting, analyzing, and presenting the data to achieve the research objectives.

### **Social Constructionist Approach and Qualitative Methodology:**

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A social constructionist stance is adopted based on subjective ontology to explore the network of relationships of participants and to investigate the role of their perceptions of relationships in shaping their growth aspirations. It provides a suitable lens to investigate the perceptual phenomenon of growth aspirations embedded in the socio-cultural context. Employing this approach allows the researcher to understand these phenomena from the point of view of participants. Furthermore, a critical appreciation of nuances of gender, and ethnicity on the network of relationships of ethnic minority entrepreneurs necessitates a contextualized and situated understanding. The complementary combination of a social construction and qualitative approach has been adopted to understand and analyze the network of relationships impacting growth aspirations. The choice of a qualitative research strategy is considered appropriate to meet the needs of the research objectives set out for this study. A qualitative approach employs understanding the “participant’s perspective” on the events and activities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

### **Unit of Analysis and Sampling Technique:**

As the study focuses on how social experiences shape networks and the entrepreneurial behavior of Pakistani female entrepreneurs that in turn determines the entrepreneurial outcome, particularly their growth aspirations, therefore, the study takes the individual entrepreneur (Pakistani female entrepreneur) as a unit of analysis and employs purposive sampling to identify the research population. The primary criteria for recruiting the study respondents encompassed gender (female), ethnicity and migration (Pakistani), and geographical location (London).

### **Data Collection Technique and Fieldwork:**

The two intertwined aspects of fieldwork were getting access to respondents and conducting the in-depth interviews to collect data. In the first step to identify the respondents (Pakistani female entrepreneurs in London), leads were generated through personally visiting the South Asian marketplaces in London (mainly Green Street and Southall), and snowball sampling (referrals) was employed. Hence, a community-based quasi-ethnographic approach was employed.

In-depth interview technique seemed more appropriate for collection of qualitative data required to answer the research question. A total of 21 PFEs in London were interviewed to narrate accounts of their lived experiences regarding their networks regarding their entrepreneurial ventures. Name generators and name interpreter questions (as detailed in the next section) were asked during the interview. Pre-scheduling of the interviews was done, where the duration of each interview session was 60-80 minutes. These interviews were conducted at the business sites of the respondents. Digital recording of the interviews was done with the consent of the respondents. The informed consent from the research participants was obtained and special care was taken regarding the confidentiality of the information shared by the organizations about the potential respondents.

### **Egocentric Network Data Generation and Analysis Technique:**

Egocentric network data focus on the ‘relations of focal actor (ego) in the network to explore the ego’s perspective on the network of relationships’ (Hogan, et al., 2020; Hanneman and Riddle, 2010;

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Wellman, 1979; Marsden, 1987). Unlike whole network analysis, egocentric network analyses individual egos and their networks, however, egocentric networks do not focus on data collection from alters. The 'ego' in the egocentric network is treated as the units of analysis, hence the data is collected from respondents using the name generator, name interpreters, interviews, and observations (Wellman and Frank, 2001). Name generator questions require that egos be inquired to identify members of the personal network. Secondly, name interpreters are used to define some attributes of the alters such as age, ethnic origin, gender and education etc., and to help in providing some information about the network composition (Laumann, 1973; Fischer, 1982; Burt, 1984; Völker, 1995; Requena Santos, 1996; Straits, 2000; Marsden, 2003).

Name generators and name interpreters are mainly used to generate data on egocentric networks that undergo statistical analysis, however, when used in combination with interviews and/or observation, are helpful in textual analysis of the egocentric network and its context. The latter combination of the data collection techniques is used for this study to elicit the relevant relational data and to explore its embeddedness in the context of Pakistani culture.

### **Egocentric Network Analysis of Data**

Interview data was analyzed using the egocentric network analysis method. An egocentric network consists of 'a central node (ego) and all nodes connected to the central node' (these nodes are called alters). In addition to the links between the ego and alters, the egocentric network also includes links between alters. This kind of network is represented through a sociogram which is defined by Wasserman and Faust (1994) as "a picture in which people (or more generally, any social unit) are represented in two-dimensional space, and relationships among pairs of people are represented by lines linking the corresponding points" (p.11-12). The field of social network analysis has made valuable use of sociograms to visualize the linkages between network actors and channels through which one individual could influence another for instance the flow of information from one person to another.

Egocentric network analysis technique is employed for the current study to scrutinise the egocentric networks of PFEs by visual representation (sociograms) of the ego and the alters and to explain the type of relations between them, as well as through the direction of the linkages an attempt was made to investigate the influence of the network members on the Pakistani female entrepreneurs and her entrepreneurial activities. To analyse the interview data a reductionist approach was taken by which the data was condensed to 1) 'nodes – people (alters) identified by the ego' (PFE) who are in contact with her 2) 'linkages – the relationships with alters as identified by the ego'.

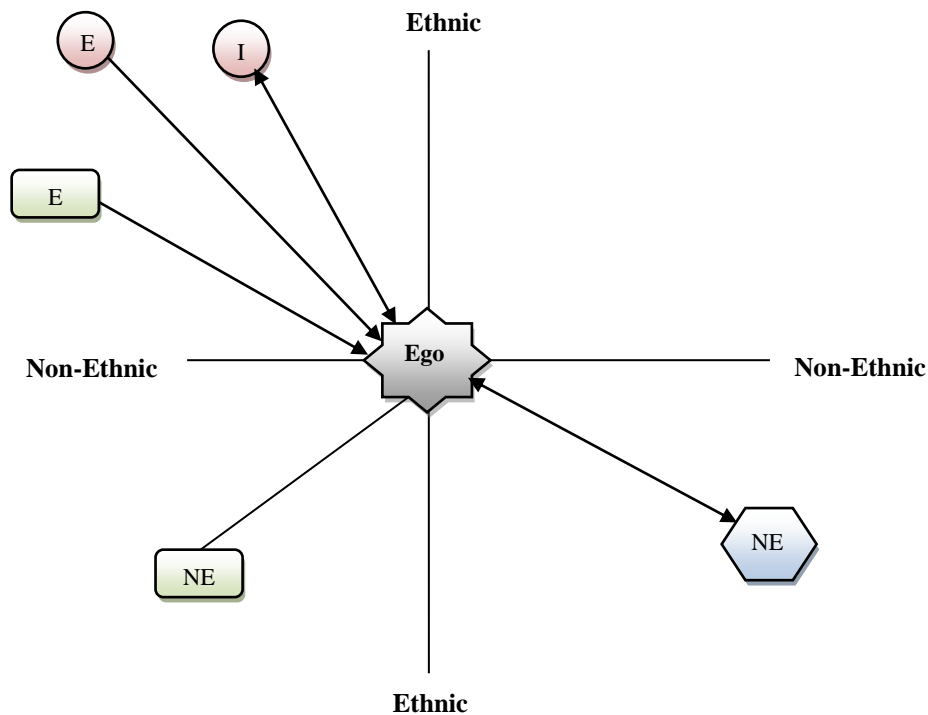
The egocentric network of the PFE (ego), is aimed at showing the connection of ego with diverse network members including her family, friends, and business associates, however, the nature of relationships varies with each group of alters. The common parameters were adopted from Mitra & Basit (2021) to draw the egocentric networks of immigrant and British born PFEs.

	Egocentric Network Composition			Network Composition Basis	Type of Support
	Formal	Informal	'Tie' Type		
Parameters	Ethnic Non-ethnic	Ethnic Kinship	Multiplex Uni-plex	Ethnicity Religion Gender	Active Participation Emotional support Ideas/Information

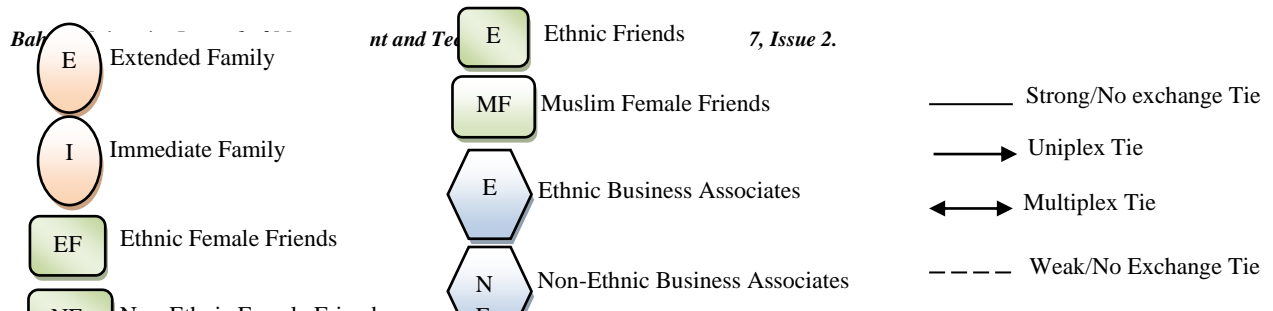
Source: Mitra and Basit (2021)

The parameters are the common properties of the egocentric networks of PFEs are drawn from the individual ego networks and are summarised in the above table. These properties helped in visualizing the representative egocentric networks for Pakistani female entrepreneurs. The representative egocentric network of each group serves as a basis for concluding the composition, distinguishing features of linkages, and their impact on the entrepreneurial practices of each group respectively. This representative network is presented on the next page with the key describing the type of nodes and linkages shown in the networks.

Figure 2: Egocentric Network of Pakistani Female Entrepreneurs



**Key – Nodes and Linkages**



## **FINDINGS FROM EGOCENTRIC NETWORK OF FES**

Egocentric network analysis of Pakistani female entrepreneurs revealed that PFEs prefer dense networks with ethnic ties based on gender and religious homophily. A formal business network with business associates consists mainly of non-ethnic ties. Their network is used for extracting resources and emotional support for entrepreneurial activities.

### **Composition of Egocentric Network of FEs**

Egocentric network analysis of PFEs network of relations reveals that they are closely connected to their families (nuclear and extended family) with a majority of ethnic ties in their network. Their network ties consist of Pakistani Muslim friends and business associates. There prevails a strong connection with the native country (Pakistan) and Pakistanis in the UK. Such belongingness defines their 'ethnic network' but restricts their ties with multi-ethnic communities in London.

The reliance on kinship, ethnic, and gendered networks show the relations of trust with female, ethnic, and Muslim fellows. Trust is a significant outcome of entrepreneurs' ego networks. It is the main aspect in shaping a dense network consisting of family and shaping the choice of formal (business) ties in the network. The ego network of PFEs shows a separation of the social world from business, where the social world is shaped by frequent contact with extended family, and the business associates are only non-ethnic members of the network. The absence of non-ethnic ties in the network confirms the results.

### **Characteristics of Egocentric Network of Pakistani Female Entrepreneurs**

Characteristics of the egocentric network of PFEs are detailed as follows;

#### **Basis of Egocentric Network Composition**

PFEs ego network consists of ethnic ties particularly more 'gendered' ties. The ethnic network ties in the ego network are restricted to the 'kinship' ties only but their friendship with 'Muslim females' and their preference for business in the 'environments' describe their 'gendered' network. They showed great affiliation with the Pakistani culture which developed into their network of more ethnic ties.

#### **Dense Network with Strong Kinship Ties**

PFEs have dense networks characterized by strong ties with kin, as evident from the egocentric network Figure 2. A comparison of the egocentric networks of PFEs shows that though both have dense networks, however, kinship network is wider.

#### **6.2.3 Multiplexity of Ties**

The relationship of Pakistani female entrepreneurs with some network actors is single-stranded (uni-plex) and with others multiple-stranded (multiplex). Uni-plex ties in the egocentric network show the involvement of alters in single exchange relations such that the suppliers of the business or 'friend of the

focal network actor', whereas 'multi-stranded' relations are more complex such as if suppliers are family members and/or friends are customers. Uni-plex ties are represented with the single arrowed line and multiplex relationships are notated with double arrowed lines in the ego networks in Figure 2.

Egocentric network analysis shows that Pakistani female entrepreneurs have more multiplex ties with family members and with business associates. For instance, co-ownership with family members is a multiplex tie because the kinship tie is also a formal business tie, hence sharing two relationships at one node. In the majority of cases, husbands are co-owners in the entrepreneurial venture of Pakistani female entrepreneurs.

### **Ethnic, Religious and Gender Homophily**

Homophily is the tendency to connect to alike/ similar people, such as connection to one's ethnic group and networking of females with ethnic females (McPherson, 2001). Strong ethnic ties of Pakistani females show ethnic homophily whereas, strong ties with 'females' and 'Muslim females' depict gender and religious homophily as the basis of network ties. Homophily underlies the dense egocentric network of Pakistani female entrepreneurs by providing a base for

- 1) high number of multiplex and close ties in the personal network,
- 2) very low cross-sex ties, and
- 3) very little network diversity across ethnicities.

### **Exchange Relationship and Access to Resources and Support**

Pakistani female entrepreneurs get network support in multiple ways including emotional support, services, and providing tangible resources for business support. Network members are involved in the exchange relationship with the ego which is generally depicted by the directed arrows in the egocentric network diagrams of PFEs. Pakistani female entrepreneurs extract resources, information, and emotional support for their entrepreneurial activities from their kinship, friendship, and business network. Resources include all types of tangible resources that PFEs take from their network either for starting the business and/or for expanding/growing their businesses.

### **Conception of Growth is Socially Constructed**

For Pakistani female entrepreneurs, growth aspiration is an outcome of diverse factors and is exhibited as a subjective choice. The issue of growth is neither mentioned in isolation nor explicitly stated as an aim by most of the interviewees. However, it was expressed about the multifaceted utilization of personal networks which emerged because of following socio-cultural norms in various ways. In other words, socio-cultural norms only acted as broad guidelines or 'rules of the game' whose subjective abundance led to distinct patterns of growth aspirations.

Due to varying migration patterns, diverse social backgrounds, and a range of network patterns, various patterns of choice of growth are observed for immigrant Pakistani women entrepreneurs. Belonging to urban or rural background was the first decisive factor in this regard. The migration and

settlement patterns in Britain indicate the type of network maintained, business sector (employment), and growth orientation of migrant Pakistani women. The village dwellers with low awareness and education do not easily socialize in the UK. They hardly become economically active without any long-term vision for the growth and prosperity of business. The rural background in Pakistan, migration as a bride (dependent), adherence to a normative framework, and low education level give rise to mono-ethnic, dense networks that lead to the choice of traditional business sectors to produce ethnic products or services. In this scenario, Pakistani women are more concerned with the social prestige that can be acquired through adherence to traditional gender norms in Pakistani society, and work-life balance. In contrast to this picture, independently migrated, career-oriented, highly educated Pakistani women belonging to developed urban areas of Pakistan compose networks differently and are highly growth-oriented.

In the case of Pakistani women, although socially constructed gender roles restrict them to the household, their choice of business (traditional businesses) breaks this barrier. As family support in the business is an asset, proving the ascribed role of 'being a Pakistani woman' appears to be an advantage rather than an impediment to growth aspirations. One of the possible reasons for opting for no (optimal/less) growth can be the desire to sustain the business to a level where a Pakistani woman can prove herself to be a good mother, a responsible wife, and a modest daughter. In Pakistani society, a woman is respected because of her social status which she can acquire by clinging to her traditional social role, instead of the image of a successful career woman. In a broader sense, this re-emphasizes the notion that growth aspirations are not primarily linked to business ventures but are deeply rooted within the socio-cultural values. Thus, growth might be a favourable and desirable prospect for most Pakistani women entrepreneurs; however, it does not complement their overall identity as they have a specific use for business in their lives.

It appears from the 'loan-based expansion' notion in the interviews that Pakistani female entrepreneurs avoid formal modes of financing for religious reasons. However, no (or low) growth orientation cannot be attached to religious values as it only forbids a specific way of financing. Most of the respondents argued in favour of an expansion of the business despite being religious. Pakistani female entrepreneurs use other sources of financing which might induce them to find cheaper ways of funding new business activities. Savings and resources at hand act as investments in the business, hence, opportunistic and entrepreneurial behavior favors growth. However, most respondents argued growth is equivalent to capital accumulation and they want to be content with a modest level of earnings. Expansion is differentiated from growth which is conceived as capital accumulation. In other words, the term 'growth' is specifically linked to wealth accumulation which conveys negative connotations in Pakistani society. Along with societal and cultural reasons, the desire to maintain a sustainable business network of relationships has a deep impact on the growth aspirations of PFEs.

It can be stated that Pakistani women entrepreneurs exhibit an array of growth aspirations that appear because of their network and the meanings they attach to their relationship. Although there is no conclusive factor that determines their growth aspirations, educational and personal background emerge as the most distinguishing features. It appears that less or lower growth aspirations of entrepreneurs follow a contiguous cycle between self-actualization and subsequent satisfaction with a given status.

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Pakistani female entrepreneurs with high growth aspirations do not enjoy a cohesive social circle based on Pakistani socio-cultural norms and thus their ventures take a primary role.

## DISCUSSION

The framework of the study specifies the theoretical lens to conceptualize the entrepreneur as a socially embedded actor whose actions are ‘situated’ while her subjectively manifested growth aspirations and personal networks continuously influence and construct each other. This interaction is subject to the influence of contextual factors including ethnicity, gender construction, and migration. Growth aspirations have been theoretically underpinned through the preference theory of growth which rejects the taken-for-granted notion of growth as a natural tendency of entrepreneurs. It focuses, instrumentally, on women’s experiences in determining their growth aspirations; growth aspirations are not only limited to and expressed as business venture specific but drawing on and emerging as diverse priorities.

The findings resulting from egocentric network analysis and interview data analysis presented the experiences suggest that PFEs have close ties with their families and have many ethnic members in their network of relationships with friends and business associates from Pakistani descent. Pakistani female entrepreneurs maintain social ties apart from the business network. They define their relationships based on functionality, such as family and friends are a part of their social world, but business associates form their business network. For women, kinship ties have priority on their time and energies, and are of much practical and psychological importance (Bastani, 2007, Sharma, 1986, Lomnitz, 1982). Kinship ties play an important role in providing labour, capital, information and social support for female entrepreneurs. This explains the importance of family resources for the establishment and development of businesses in Pakistani society. The role of family in facilitating business activities is taken for granted by the respondents. The notion of joint family systems is one of the cornerstones of Pakistani society and has been acknowledged by researchers(Qadeer, 2006). Pakistani female entrepreneurs included in this study exhibit an explicit reliance on family for support in various entrepreneurial activities. However, this collectivism can also hinder entrepreneurial activity and growth aspirations. Negative social perceptions of certain businesses can provoke dissent from joint family members.

The tendency to overtly rely on cultural values is more vivid in Pakistani female entrepreneurs. They reject networking as a deliberate activity and rely on ‘networking by chance’ and retain a strong ethnic orientation which allows them to have only Pakistanis as their network ties. The reliance on kinship, ethnic, and gendered networks show the relations of trust of Pakistani female entrepreneurs on female, ethnic, and Muslim fellows. Trust is a significant content of entrepreneurs’ networks (Septivani, Sari, & Husna, 2024; Moletta, et al., 2023). It is the main ingredient in shaping dense networks consisting of family and shaping the choice of formal (business) ties in the network. A collective family system and ethnocentrism are the defining characteristics of the social sphere of the personal network of Pakistani female entrepreneurs. On one hand, these characteristics help female entrepreneurs acquire resources and support from the network; however, the flip side of the picture is that the heavy reliance on dense and

smaller networks has implications for their businesses, particularly for growth. The social role and values are not merely replicated but transferred and subjectively manifested according to the context and personal dispositions ( Moletta, et al., 2023; Schweizer and White, 1998). The shift is argued to be related to the availability of more choices in making personal networks, exposure to the host society, environment of educational institutes, and paid employment experiences. Commitment to kinship ties is related to following a traditional lifestyle and social values, and preservation which results in limited interaction with members of other communities.

## CONCLUSION

This exploratory analysis allows us to sketch the personal networks of PFEs in London. Pakistani female entrepreneurs prefer to retain ethnic ties in their network which is based on a strict adherence to religious values and traditional gender norms. Density and lack of diversity in the personal network has a considerable impact on the choice of business sector, information and resource availability, and growth prospects for their entrepreneurial ventures. According to Granovetter's (1967) weak ties theory, strong ties in dense networks hinder business growth. Due to all the strong ties in the network information becomes redundant therefore, lack of knowledge of opportunities in the market and access to limited resources causes slow (or no) growth of business as compared to competitors. The case of business in the traditional sector and slow growth in the presence of diverse cross-ethnic ties cannot be explained with Granovetter's 'weak ties, strong ties' metaphor. It can be concluded that PFEs' growth can be termed as a personal choice because they are 'entrepreneurs by choice' and in trying to obtain their required socio-economic status they stop struggling regardless of opportunities.

The rigor of the research is partially constrained by the sensitivity of and limitations of access to the population (ethnic minorities and gender issues) under study. The limited access to data and respondents selected for this study posed the greatest challenge for the research. Furthermore, Pakistani females were invisible due to their inactivity in business operations. The study draws the personal network cross-sectionally, and the findings show that PFEs' network experienced transitions. It would be interesting to explore the temporal transitional dimension in depth through a longitudinal study. Additionally, the generalization of findings of this study is limited to the Pakistani or minority community; therefore, the study cannot claim to be representative of all ethnic minority women entrepreneurs.

Recommendations for future research directions arise from the limitations of the study. This exploratory research study has laid the foundation of an emergent phenomenon of personal networks impacting the growth aspirations of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. It delineates an agenda for future research by being the first attempt to study the network of ethnic minority female entrepreneurs beyond ethnic enclaves. This study has attempted to detail the transition of the personal network and the impact of its dynamic nature on the growth aspirations of ethnic minority female entrepreneurs over time, however, a longitudinal study to compare the dynamics of the personal network at the start-up and growth phases of the business would provide an alternate perspective. It suggests that the priority of ethnic/religious identity in pluralistic societies is at the core of uniquely composed networks. Focusing on 'how religious

or ethnic identity shapes the choice of ties in the network' was beyond the scope of this study, hence, it offers the opportunity to explore this atypical relationship in the future.

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