

NEWCOMERS' PROACTIVE NETWORKING IN DIGITAL AND FACE-TO-FACE ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORKS: A SIGNALING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing prevalence of technology-enabled entrepreneurial activity, we still do not fully understand how digital environments alter socialization dynamics, signaling processes, and relationship formation in entrepreneurial networks. Taking a behavioral perspective in network literature and drawing on signaling theory and proactive socialization frameworks, we examine how digital environments moderate newcomers' proactive networking, advice-tie formation, and peer reputation in entrepreneurs' formal networks. Using three-year longitudinal data with 1767 person-month observations from 151 newcomers across 6 entrepreneurial networking groups in Switzerland, we estimate multilevel mixed-effects models. We find proactive networking tactics to help newcomers to build advice ties and reputation. Paradoxically, we further find newcomers' proactive networking to be significantly more effective for building advice ties in online-groups, suggesting a social compensation effect in online networking. Our study makes three major contributions: it introduces an instrumental, signaling-based lens to proactive socialization; it provides a first longitudinal test of proximity (i.e. online compared to in-person groups) in formal entrepreneurial networks; contrary to popular beliefs it demonstrates that digital environments can paradoxically strengthen certain socialization outcomes in extra organizational contexts. Practically, our findings offer guidance for entrepreneurial networking-groups and organizers in their digital transformation.

Keywords

entrepreneurial network, newcomer socialization, proactive behavior, signaling, proximity

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