Internal determinants of the Determinants of the Early and Rapidly Internationalizing Firms: Fresh evidence from the Cognitive Mapping of the   Entrepreneurs-Managers

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Abstract:

The objective of this study is to draw an average cognitive map of 106 Tunisian entrepreneurs-managers in order to contribute to the understanding of the Early and Rapidly Internationalizing of their businesses. By using the MICMAC program, the empirical results show that the cognitive approach is a relevant way for interpreting this phenomenon. Our study extends entrepreneurship literature and previous studies by using the cognitive approach to explain the phenomenon of early and rapid internationalization of Tunisian SMEs.

Abstract: Early and Rapidly Internationalizing, cognitive map, Tunisian SMEs.

Résumé:

L'objectif de ce papier de recherche est de définir une carte cognitive moyenne de 106 entrepreneur-dirigeants tunisiens afin de décrire et de comprendre les déterminants de l'internationalisation rapide et précoce de leurs entreprises. A travers l'utilisation du programme MICMAC, les résultats empiriques montrent que l'approche cognitive est une démarche pertinente pour mieux interpréter ce phénomène. Notre recherche apporte une contribution unique au champ de la littérature en entrepreneuriat et aux études antérieures en appliquant l'approche cognitive pour expliquer le phénomène de l'internationalisation rapide et précoce des PME tunisiennes.

Mots-clès: Internationalisation Rapide et Précoce, carte cognitive, PME tunisienne.

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1. INTRODUCTION

International activities are increasing and the modes of internationalization are becoming more diverse. The last decades have shown an increasing interest by researchers in firms that exhibit early and rapidly international development. This phenomenon has become an object of research, most often referred to as Born Global (Rennie, 1993 ; Knight and Cavusgil, 1996), but also as International New Ventures (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994), Global Start-Up or Early Internationalizing Firms (Rialp et al., 2005). This type of firm and the ability of its entrepreneur(s) to create and develop an international firm is definitely an increasingly important research topic (Cesinger et al. 2012). It is obvious that the dynamics of these firms are different from that of traditional exporters (Madsen, 2013).

Such questions are of great theoretical and practical importance. Today, the content of 'Born Global' strategies remains poorly described, causing both terminological and theoretical confusion. The importance of research into the issue is also emphasized the increasing number of start-up companies, particularly in high-technology sectors, who attempt to implement early and rapid internationalization strategies (Kuemmerle, 2002). These firms are in urgent need of vocabulary and frameworks that they can draw on when drafting strategies for early and rapid internationalization. In a review study, Rialp et al. (2005) note that a greater and more robust empirical base should be established in order to confirm or reject previous findings.

Therefore this paper is intended to contribute to filling this gap by focusing on firms that rapidly expand on international markets. The objective of this study is to identify the determinants of early and rapidly internationalization   applied by born globals from Tunisia through drawing their collective cognitive map. Our paper extends international entrepreneur-

ship literature by proposing a new approach to building an average cognitive map for the explanation the determinants of early and rapidly internationalizing firms. The rest of paper is organized in a following way: second part presents the literature review about the determinants of early and rapidly internationalization. The third part is devoted to the explanation of the methodological framework. The fourth part is about the analysis of the main results. Finally, the last part presents the concluding remarks and policy implications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DETERMINANTS OF EARLY AND RAPIDLY INTERNATIONALIZING FIRMS

The study of early and rapidly internationalizing ventures is an research axis in International Entrepreneurship (IE) which has been defined as '…a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-seeking behavior that crosses national borders and is intended to create value in organizations' (McDougall and Oviatt 2000, p. 903). The reasons for early internationalization are sought in external and internal factor related to the entrepreneur. As far as external factors are concerned, in a globalized world, business opportunities accelerate, reduce barriers and competition is increasingly growing. International logistics has improved with technology transportation and communication accessible and inexpensive. These changes have a high impact on resource-constrained firms such as new ventures. These environmental changes have exerted impact on internal situation of start-up firms as due to increased mobility, rising numbers of people exposed to international business experience and improving language skills firms more frequently possessed resources and capabilities helpful in international expansion (Oviatt and McDougall 1994). In this context, governments in all countries of the world encourage the development of overseas business which give benefits to local businesses and putting various measures to encourage the development of foreign trade.

Perks and Hughes (2008) note that the characteristics of the entrepreneur may have a more important effect than the external factors on the early and rapid internationalization of new firms. Researchers have proposed that entrepreneur's international experience (Crick and Jones 1999, Zucchella et al. 2007) and knowledge of foreign languages (Zucchella et al. 2007) could serve as a driver of early internationalization. Another factor which research has regarded as contributing to early internationalization was entrepreneur's global vision (McAuley 1999) or global orientation (Rasmussen and Madsen 2002). Analysis of entrepre-

neur's profile have found also that the entrepreneurial orientation enabled them to acquire knowledge of markets in a faster way (Zhang and Dodgson, 2007).

McDougall et al. (1993) confirm the important role of the past international experience of the entrepreneur in building a competitive advantage for young firms operating international opportunities and therefore rapid integration in foreign markets. They also linked the past international experience of the entrepreneur to the creation of international business from their startup. They showed that new businesses run by managers with international experience were able to internationalize their business faster and more successfully.

In addition, the link between early and rapid internationalization of new ventures and social networks of the entrepreneur is largely developed in the literature on international entrepreneurship (Coviello and Munro, 1995). Julien and Ramangaly (2003) recognize the informational role that reflect networks and its impact on the degree of uncertainty and risk taking on the internationalization decision. Thus, according to these authors, social networking in a business allows it to provide a more fast learning and the international orientation of the latter. In the same context, Oviatt and McDougall (2005) present the social network as one of the moderating forces which is the most influential on the speed of internationalization. With networks, entrepreneurs confront ideas, validate the opportunity and consider the feasibility of their projects by specifying the appropriate actions to be taken.

Therefore, our research question is to confirm the importance of the external and the internal factors discussed earlier on the early and rapidly internationalizing firms.

Research question: The early and rapidly internationalizing firms resulting from the combination of external factors (International environments, role of government, international transport and telecommunication, lower costs of international trade, etc.) and internal factors (entrepreneurial training, past international experiences, international vision, social networks, the knowledge of foreign languages, etc.) related to the entrepreneur.

Do we find – in the special case of ERINV Tunisian small firms > 200 people – the same determinants than in other (say, more developed, or, more HiTech) countries/industries?

2.2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

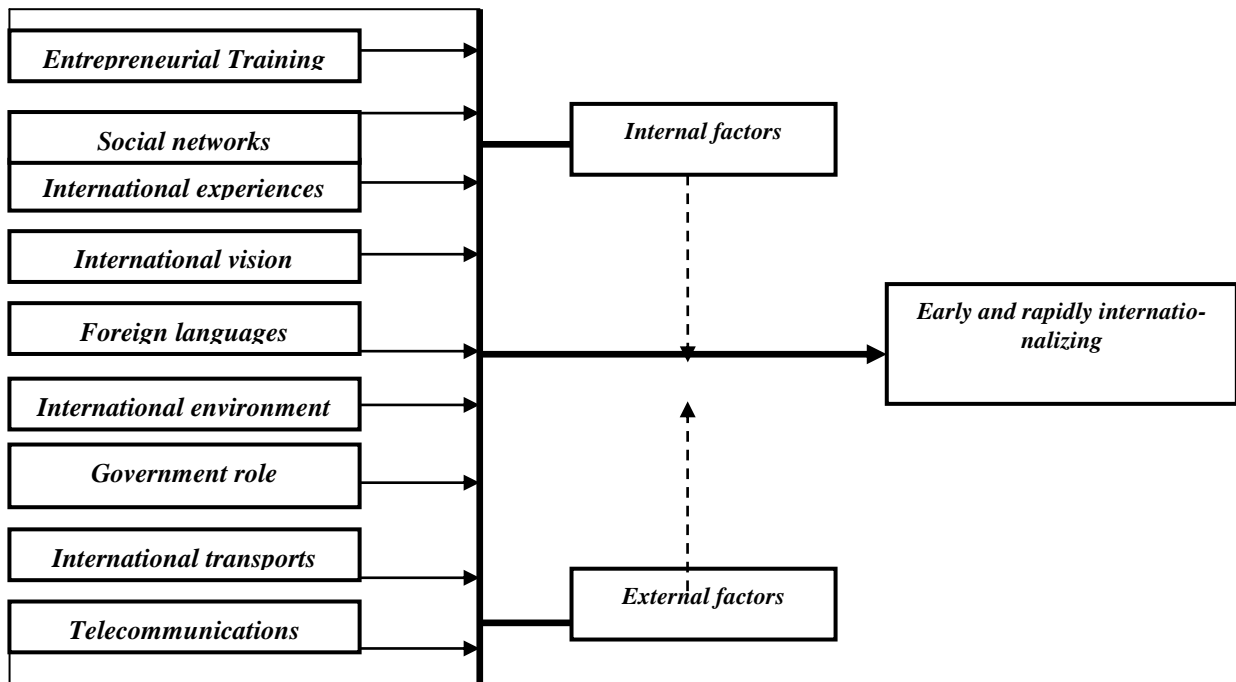Based on the arguments presented above, the conceptual model proposed in this study is presented in Figure 1.

Fig.1. Conceptual model of study

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3. METHODOLOGY

In this part, precisions will be supplied, first on the cognitive approach as a research tool used (3.1) and then, to describe the used data (3.2).

3.1 THE COGNITIVE APPROACH AS A RESEARCH TOOL

In this study we used, as a research tool, the cognitive approach which has been very little used until now in the international entrepreneurship. The use of the cognitive map in entrepreneurship is recent and dealt with by few empirical studies. It can lead to a better understanding of the individual cognitive universe (actors, entrepreneurs, managers) and it is very important to understand the key factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing of new ventures (ERINV).

3.1.1 Cognitive map and ERINV

Since the study of Axelrod (1976) in political sciences, and especially, since the pioneering study of Bougon et al. (1977) and Eden et al. (1979) in the organization field, the researches carried out on the use of the cognitive maps has undergone a considerable development . The use of cognitive maps in recent years in scientific research has grown (Huff, 1990). Therefore, we use the cognitive map to give a collective view of the ERINV. The cognitive map is only a discursive representation (of a researcher) of a mental representation (of a subject). Therefore, the researcher who uses this technique draws the map according to his own perception of the reality. He also suggests that the researcher draws the map from the written and oral speeches of the subject by connecting with causality relations (influences) the expressed concepts, i.e. the map is composed of nodes representing concepts connected by arrows representing the links of influences or causalities.

3.1.2 Construction phases of collective cognitive map

The drawing of a collective map is made through the aggregation (assembly) of individual cognitive maps (Ozesmi and Ozesmi, 2004).

A cognitive map, whether collective or individual, is composed of two essential elements: concepts and links. Concepts are considered as variables and links which explain the relationships between these variables. A concept can be influenced by other concepts according to their degree on the map. Thus a concept (variable) is said to be important if it possesses numerous links with the other concepts (variable) on the map.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the collective mental representation of the Tunisian entrepreneurs concerning the factors which have, according to their beliefs, an impact on their early and rapidly internationalizing. To achieve this objective, we propose a gait of three phases to build a collective cognitive map. This gait relies on the alternation of two phases of conceptions: individual and collective.

Table1   **The three construction phases of "aggregate" cognitive map**

1st Phase *The identification of concepts (variables)*	**a**- Collect the individual perception of respondents about their early and rapidly internationalizing through semi-structural interviews. **b**- Clear through these interviews, different concepts, ideas, or examples related to this question. **c**- Creation of a concept (variable) list to be used in the second stage.
2nd phase *The description of relationships between concepts*	**a**- Every interviewee will assess the strength links between these concepts (the concepts identified during the first stage) by building a cross-impact matrix for each of them which contains only the common concepts (Figure 2).
3rd phase *The construction of the collective cognitive map*	**a**- Building a collective matrix in which one finds all the common concepts of the respondents and "an aggregated causal intensity". **b**- Construction of the cognitive collective map through the (MIC-MAC) software.

This approach combines qualitative and quantitative measures in order to construct the collective cognitive map (aggregated map).

In the phase below, and after having elaborated the individual matrices of interviewees (entrepreneurs), we are going to construct a collective matrix where we find all the concepts and common weights of all the respondents. The construction of this one is from aggregation (addition) of matrices collected during the second phase. Ozesmi and Ozesmi (2004) suggest that it is possible to aggregate the individual maps. Also, Damart (2006) notes that the individual maps with individual interviews can be aggregated. This technique allows us to construct a collective matrix where there are all the common concepts of all respondents and an aggregate weighted causal relationship between these concepts (variables).
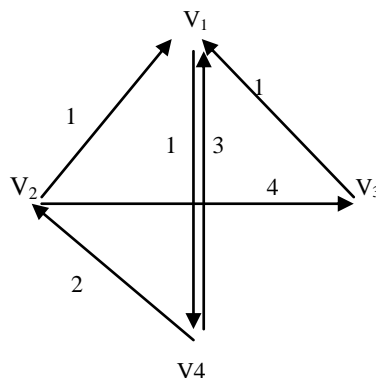
$$
\text{``A''} = \begin{array}{c|cccc|}
 & \textbf{V1} & \textbf{V2} & \textbf{V3} & \textbf{V4} \\
\hline
\textbf{V1} & 0 & 0 & 0 & 3 \\
\textbf{V2} & 1 & 0 & 4 & 0 \\
\textbf{V3} & 1 & 0 & 0 & 0 \\
\textbf{V4} & 1 & 2 & 0 & 0 \\
\hline
\end{array}
$$

					Total
Motricity (Σ of the ith ligne)	3	5	1	3	12
Dependence (Σ of the jth column)	3	2	4	3	12

Fig. 2 Cross-impact matrix
(Source: Smida, 2003).

3.2. DATA DESCRIPTION

About our sample, we have chosen as unit of study a manufacturing Tunisian business wholly or partly export, commercializing directly or indirectly finished or semi-finished products. We also limited our analysis to young businesses with workforce less than 200 employees. Due to the reluctance of some leaders and managers we could collect information only from 106 firms with 40 are totally exporting and 66 are partially exporting. The sample included firms in the following industrial sectors: clothing, food processing, and textiles. Participants were asked about the factors influencing the early and rapidly internationalizing of their businesses. These interviews allowed us to identify a list of 20 common concepts. These concepts will be structured using the individual and collective cross-impact matrix.

The construction and analysis of the collective cognitive map were made by the MIC-MAC software. This program allows identifying the explanatory variables from the cross-impact matrix (structural analysis matrix). It can also classify these variables according to their sensibility to the environment (dependent variables) and to their impact on other variables (motricity variables), (figure 3). It also allows treating the information collected in the form of graphs and plans configuring the mental representation of interviewees.
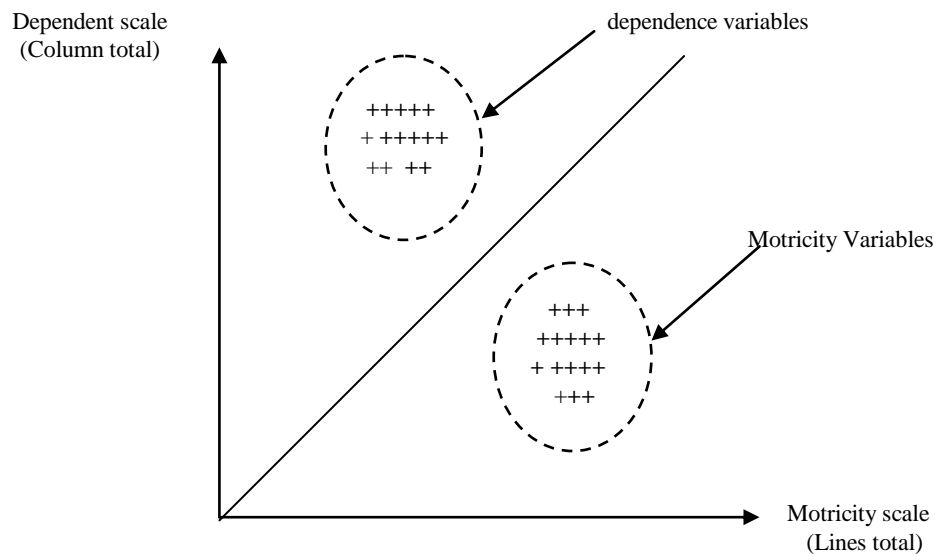
Fig. 3   Variables classification

4. ANALYSES AND RESULTS

Our average cognitive map of entrepreneurs is based on the structural analysis matrix, on the influence-dependence graph and on the influence-dependence chart and the essential categories of entrepreneurial failure.

4.1 THE STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS MATRIX

According to Arcade et al. (1999), structural analysis is a tool designed to linkup ideas. It allows describing the system thanks to a matrix which links up all its constitutive elements. The method enables, by studying these relations, to underline the variables that are essential to the system's evolution. It has the advantage of stimulating reflection within the group, and leading it to think about certain aspects, which are sometimes counterintuitive. It applies to the qualitative study of extremely different systems. Also, it is used to measure the influence (lines sum) and the sensibility (columns sum) of each variable on the failure or success of the micro-enterprises (table 2). We have succeeded, with the MICMAC software, a classification of these holding variables according to their order of motricity and sensibility to sort out the 10 critical factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing of the 106 Tunisian manufacturing businesses (table 3).

Table 2   Classification of variables according to their motricity and sensitivity

N°	VARIABLE	LINES SUM	COLUMNS SUM
1	Training	2	3
2	Social networks	10	1
3	Creativity	3	7
4	Past international experiences	11	0
5	International vision	7	1
6	Innovative behavior	6	9
7	Role of government	4	3
8	International environment	11	0
9	Competitiveness of the firm	2	12
10	Foreign language of entrepreneurs	2	1
11	International transports	6	1
12	International telecommunications	6	0
13	Activity sector	2	6
14	Proactive behavior	8	1
15	Risk-seeking behavior	6	2
16	Strategic direction of the firm	11	3
17	Skills in international marketing	1	5
18	Ability to set the international objectifs	3	10
19	Education level of entrepreneur-manager	2	3
20	Initial capital	0	35
	Totals	**103**	**103**

Table 3   The top 10 factornationars of early and rapidly int

Rank	Variable
1	4- Past international experiences
2	8- International environment
3	16- Strategic direction of the firm
4	2- Social network
5	14- Proactive behavior
6	5- International vision
7	6- Innovative behavior
8	11- International transports
9	12- International telecommunications
10	15- Risk-seeking behavior

Looking closely at these two tables, it seems essential that the "international environ-ment", the "strategic direction of the firm", the "international transports", the "international telecommunications, and the internal factors related to the human capital of entrepreneur

such as the " past international experiences ", the " social network ", the entrepreneurial orientation of the entrepreneur ("proactive behavior", "innovative behavior", and "Risk-seeking behavior") are leading the pack. These variables or factors are both very influent and little sensitive. They represent the explanatory elements of the early and rapidly internationalizing for the Tunisian new ventures.

4.2 THE INFLUENCE-DEPENDENCE GRAPH

The cognitive map can have the form of an influence-dependence graph. In our study, the analysis of our average cognitive map (Figure 4) puts clearly two categories of variables. The first includes the sensitive factors, known as influenced factors or "consequences" because they are influenced by other variables (this category is placed in the center of the map). While, in the second category, we find the motricity variables, also known as the influencing variables, which exert a direct influence on many others. This second category of the influencing variables relates directly the strong influence of the external variables (see for example, the "international environment", the "international transports", the "international telecommunication", and the "strategic direction of the firm) and of the internal variables related to the entrepreneur on the early and rapidly internationalizing ventures.
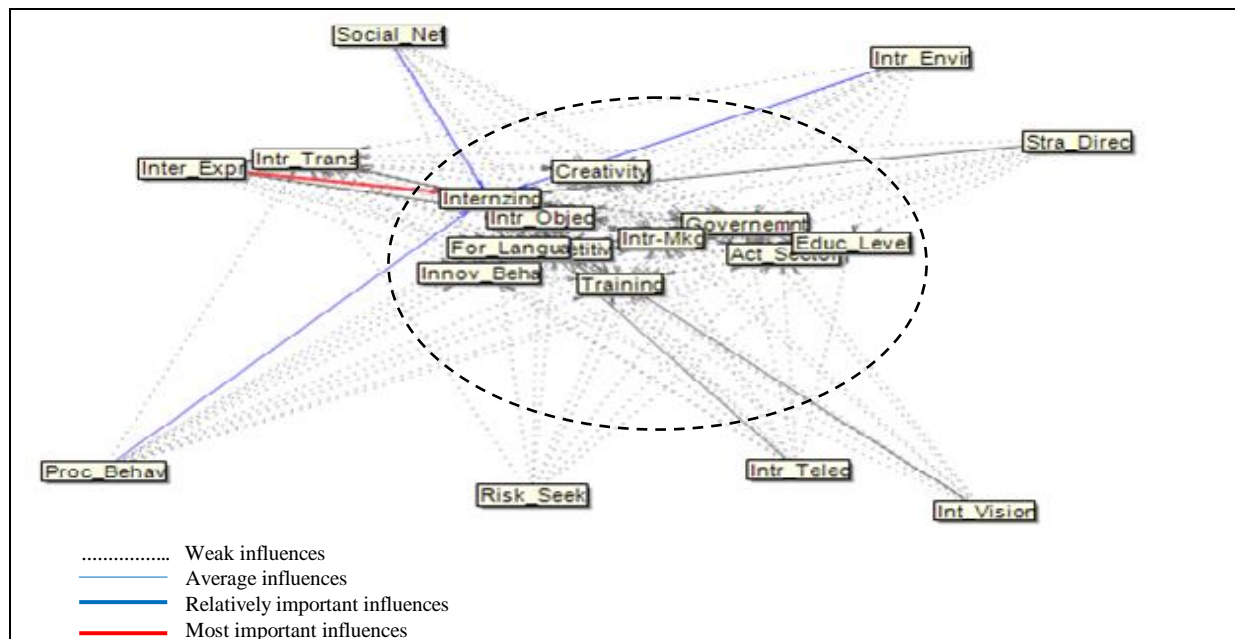

Fig. 4 Aggregated cognitive map of Tunisian entrepreneurs in form of the influences graph

4.3 THE INFLUENCE-DEPENDENCE PLAN

The variables characterizing the system under study and its environment can be projected on the influence/ dependence chart. In this chart we distinguish between four categories of variables (influent, relay, excluded and depending) allowing legibility perfect of the early and rapidly internationalizing. These categories distinguish from one another depending on the specific role that the variables can play in the internationalization processes.
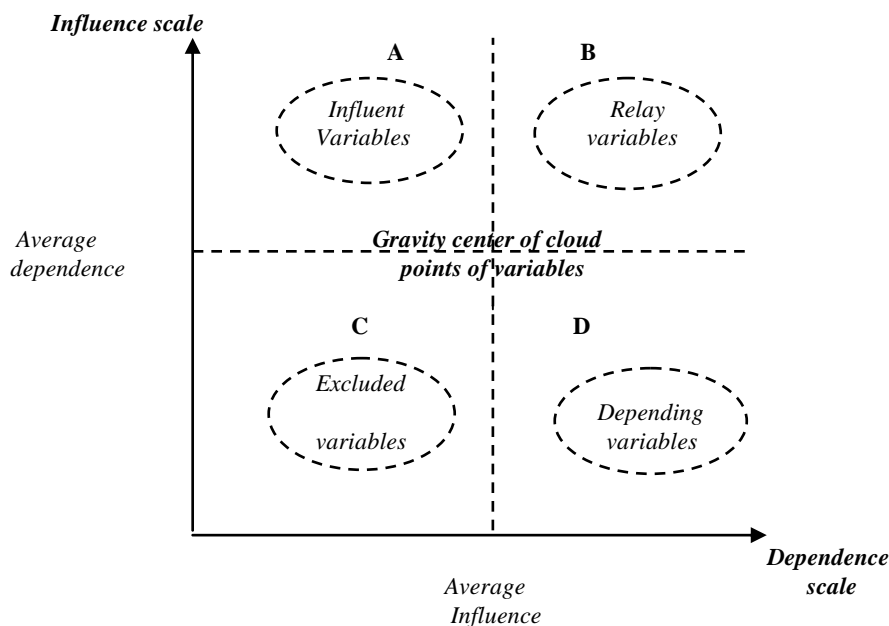

Fig. 5   The influences x dependences chart

(**source:** Arcade et al., 1999)

- *Zone A.   Influent variables*

These are variables which have a high index of influence and a low index of dependence, i.e. they are altogether very influential and little dependent on the rest of the variables. The influent variables are its most important elements because they can act on the system depending on how much we can control them as a key factor either of movement or inertia. These variables are settled "explanations" because they are the elements enplaning of research phenomenon (Figure 6).

Zone A of the most influential variables clearly shows two major categories which influence the early and rapidly internationalizing. The first category refers directly to the importance of some external variables to the entrepreneur on the explanation of the early and rapidly internationalizing (such as the international environment, the strategic direction of the

firm, and the international transports and telecommunications). Then, the second category refers directly to the importance of the internal variables related to the entrepreneur such as the past international experiences, the social networks, the international visions, and the entrepreneurial orientation (innovation, proactivity and risk-seeking) are major factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing ventures.
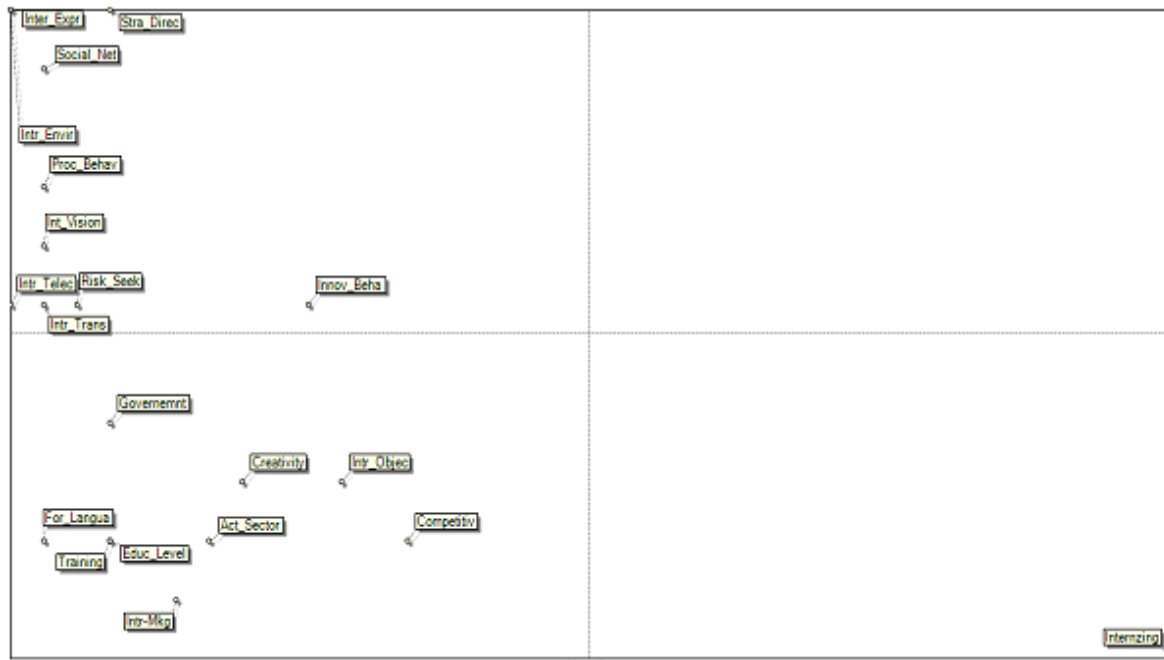

Fig. 6 Aggregated cognitive map of Tunisian entrepreneurs in the form of the influence-dependence plan.

- *Zone B.   Relay variables*

Intermediate or relay variables are at the same time very influent and very dependent (high influent and highly dependent). These variables are situated in the north-east frame of the chart. They are, by nature, factors of instability because any effect on them will have an affect the others and on themselves.

- *Zone C.   Excluded variables*

The excluded or autonomous variables are those which have, at the same time, weak influence and little dependence. These variables are positioned in the south-west casing, and appear quite out of line with the system because they permit neither to stop a major evolution undergone by the system, nor to really take benefit of it. Their development is relatively autonomous: they have no serious influence on early and rapidly internationalizing. Considering

the influence-dependence plan (figure 5) we can single out certain "excluded" variables, namely the role of government, entrepreneurial training, the education level, the foreign languages, the creativity, etc.

- *Zone D.   Depending variables*

Result, or rather, the dependent variable, located in the south-east frame of the chart, is little influential and very dependent. Thus, they are particularly sensitive to the evolution of influent and/or relay variables. They are exit variables from the system. These variables, which can be explained by their acting on the influent and relay variables, are conditioned by too many factors. The early and rapidly internationalizing is considered as the result of other variables of the zone A.

4.4   THE FACTORS CATEGORIES OF THE EARLY AND RAPIDLY INTERNATIONALIZING FIRMS

To identify the major factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing ventures, the cognitive mapping of entrepreneurs allowed us to classify variables into several categories, where each category is, in reality, only a subset of key factors. These factors/variables were grouped was according to their proximity in the influence-dependence plan and their semantic approximation. Each subset has a title expressing the meaning of the concerned variables. The application of these led us to the construction of two major categories of failure (see table 4):

- Category related to the internal variables of the entrepreneur;
- Category related to the external variables;

Table 4   The factors categories of the early and rapidly internationalizing firms.

ERINV categories		Associeted factors
Internal factors to the entrepreneur	*The human and social capital*	• Past international experiences • International Vision • Social networks
	The entrepreneurial orientation	• Proactive behavior • Innovative behavior • Risk-seeking behavior
Exteral factors to the entrepreneur	*Business environment and strategy*	• International environment • International telecommunications • International transports • Strategic direction of the firm

Note : ERINV indicates Early and Rapidly Internationalizing New Venture

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this research is to apply the cognitive approach, using the method of structural analysis as a tool for structuring ideas and collective reflections, in order to identify the determinants of the early and rapidly internationalizing new ventures. The use of this approach in the field of entrepreneurship is a little recent and has been dealt with by few empirical studies. This approach leads to a better understanding of the cognitive universe of individuals (actors, leaders, entrepreneurs) and appears to be important in the context of our study to identify the major factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing. 106 entrepreneurs' owners of 106 industrial firms allowed us to present, in the form of a collective cognitive map, the factors which seem to influence their internationalization processes. Therefore, the determination of individual visions, their grouping, under the form of an aggregation and their detailed analysis using the MICMAC program, constitutes practically crucial steps of a successful approach in tracing a common vision of the reality. Our main wishes are to have a methodological contribution, during the elaboration and analysis of the collective cognitive map and to confirm the cognitive mapping utility mainly in situations where the analysis of the maps structure and continuity are important to understand the problem studied. The application of the structural analysis method and of the cognitive mapping within the framework

of our research opens the door for other various ways of researches for us and for those who are interested in these methods.

The empirical analysis was based on the following three aspects: the matrix structural analysis (allows to measure the influence or the sensibility of each variable/concept on the early and rapidly internationalizing), the influence-dependence graph (allows us to reveal the influencing and influenced variables) and, finally, the influence-dependence plan (allows to group the variables into four groups allowing a perfect understanding the internationalization phenomenon. To sum up, we can say that the study of these three aspects has highlighted the dimensions/categories and their associated factors of the early and rapidly internationalizing new venture in Tunisia. The findings reveal that the international environment, the strategic direction of the firm, the international transports and telecommunications, and some internal factors related to the entrepreneur-manager (such as the past international experience, the international vision, the social networks, and the entrepreneurial orientation) represent the main determinant of the early and rapidly internationalizing new ventures in Tunisia. This verifies the initial hypothesis, i.e. the early and rapidly internationalizing firms resulting from the combination of external and internal factors related to the entrepreneurs-managers. These results give us an idea, essentially, about the importance of the internal variables related to the entrepreneur-manager. In the same line, several studies, such as Bloodgood et al. (1996), Autio et al. (2000), Allali (2003), Chetty and Campbell-Hunt, (2004), Knight et Cavusgil (2005), Weerawardena et al. (2007), Zucchella, et al. (2007), Casillas et al. (2009) insist on the importance of the entrepreneurial behavior of the entrepreneurs-dirigeants on the early and rapidly internationalizing ventures. These authors find that strategic skills related to the international business, past international experiences, social networks, constitute with the international vision of the entrepreneur-manager the key variables of border crossings.

By doing this study we have managed to come up with fthree suggestions and recommendations for born global firms and its entrepreneurs-managers. First, it is crucial for entrepreneurs-managers to be innovative, we strongly recommend them to implement activities that stimulate the creativity and innovation. Second, according to previous research and our study, entrepreneurs tend to be risk-takers, they also tend to have higher risk-tolerance than domestic entrepreneurs. Third, being proactive is important since it allows born global firms (entrepreneurs) to seek and identify opportunities. As we have discovered, some of the firms had lower

proactiveness than the others as they managed to build a strong brand image, which allowed them to become more selective. We in this case recommend the entrepreneurs-managers to always be proactive since the competition can increase, which can force them to be aggressive when searching for opportunities since the firm's competitive advantages can decrease.

At the end of the present research, we can see that all interviewed entrepreneurs-managers were located in one emerging market – Tunisia. In addition, on the basis of our observations it seems worthwhile to undertake comparative studies that would involve born globals from both developed and emerging countries. In particular it would be interesting in such a context to analyze whether firms from emerging and developed markets might experience different resource pools and as a result use different strategies compensating these resource shortages.

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