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PRE-PRINT VERSION

Exploring the role of ethnic networking ties in immigrant entrepreneurship: a comprehensive review and research agenda

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the role of ethnic networking ties in immigrant entrepreneurship

literature, shedding light on insights that have been overlooked in existing literature.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic literature review was conducted using a sample of 127 articles sourced from the Web of Science database. This review used a combination of bibliometric and content analysis.

Findings – The findings revealed the underproduction in this research field. The authors identified the dual characteristics and different types of ethnic ties, presented across various stages of immigrant business, the aspects often overlooked in current research. Drawing from these results, the authors proposed a conceptual model introducing four interconnected dimensions – local context, personal level, ethnic enclave and business development stages – that collectively shape the examination of ethnic ties and suggest avenues for further research to understand their role in the immigrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Originality/value – This study offers three notable contributions to existing literature. Firstly, to the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that systematically reviews the current research status of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship. Secondly, it uncovered the dynamic nature of ethnic ties and their roles across various immigrant business stages. Thirdly, it introduces a conceptual model that serves as a framework for future investigations, addressing the under-explored multidimensional nature of ethnic ties, thereby presenting several practical, social and theoretical implications.

Keywords Immigrant entrepreneurship, Ethnic ties, Ethnic enclave, Social ties, Social networks, Social resource, Social capital, Mix embeddedness, Systematic literature review, Content analysis

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Ethnic networking ties refer to interconnected relationships and patterns of communication among individuals who share a common national background or migration Experience (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). With increased global mobility and the growth of ethnic populations, such ties have become more prevalent. Ethnic entrepreneurship has been studied from the perspectives of ethnic minorities (Bonacich, 1973), ethnic enclaves (Ndofor and Priem, 2011) and collectivism (Portes, 1981). These perspectives have explored different reasons and influential factors contributing to why and how immigrant entrepreneurship develops. For instance, scholars have examined enclave economies and social networks among ethnic groups (Duan et al., 2021) to better understand how immigrant ventures use an enclave strategy, serving their ethnic community with products produced by ethnic labour from ethnic suppliers (Wang and Altinay, 2012).

In these contexts, in-group ties have been recognised as playing a crucial role in aiding new entrepreneurs to access various resources and improve business performance (Chung et al., 2020; Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990), positively influencing immigrant entrepreneurship (Biggeri et al., 2022). Scholars have also extensively examined ethnic ties in diverse aspects of immigrant entrepreneurs' business and life. Duan et al. (2021) found that personal circumstances such as social networks, social connections and social embeddedness influence individual determinants of immigrant entrepreneurship. Indarti et al. (2020) identified external factors, including religion, family and ethnicity, as significant influences on enterprises. Rodgers et al. (2019) suggested ethnic ties facilitate immigrants' adaptation to the host context via emotional and physical support. Also, in broader immigrant literature, the social and emotional support provided through kinship and friendship networks has been recognised as fostering job opportunities (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). Nonetheless, ethnic ties can also have negative effects. For example, intraethnic conflicts may hinder business improvement (Kim, 1999; Wu and Liu, 2014), limit the geographic reach of ventures, restrict access to new contacts outside the ethnic network and hinder novel management practices adoption (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). The current literature has predominantly emphasised the positive effects of certain aspects of ethnic networking ties on immigrant-owned businesses (Pruthi and Wright, 2017), making the allrounded understanding of the ties remain unexplored.

Studies have suggested the roles of ethnic ties can be developed and changed over time (Sommer and Gamper, 2021). However, the research field of immigrant entrepreneurship, to the author's knowledge, lacks a thorough investigation into the diverse roles played by ethnic ties across different stages of business development. It has mainly focused on the initial stage of business idea creation and entrepreneurial motivations (Yendaw, 2022; Pruthi et al., 2018), and the start-up stage of accessing fundamental business resources and capital (Yang et al., 2012; Zonta, 2012). Given this background, this study aims to examine the current research status of ethnic networking ties in immigrant entrepreneurship by establishing the field's intellectual, social and conceptual foundations through comprehensive bibliometric analysis. Additionally, the primary objective of this paper is to systematically categorise the various roles that ethnic ties play at different stages of immigrant business development. This is achieved through a content analysis, addressing the ethnic network ties characteristics, advantages, disadvantages, implementation dynamics and challenges identified by researchers.

To achieve these objectives, this study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1. What is the current landscape of research on ethnic networking ties in immigrant entrepreneurship?
- RQ2. What characteristics, advantages, disadvantages, implementation dynamics and challenges are commonly explored in studies on this topic?
- RQ3. What are the primary types of ethnic ties and roles they present throughout various phases of the immigrant entrepreneurs' business?

The findings provide policymakers and stakeholders in the host country with a comprehensive understanding of immigrant communities and their business systems, focusing on ethnic ties, which provides theoretical, practical and social implications. The main contribution of this study lies in the identification of interconnected dimensions within the immigrant entrepreneurial ecosystem, with a proposition of a conceptual model for future research. From a practical perspective, it categorises the advantages and disadvantages of ethnic ties within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, aiding policymakers in facilitating immigrant integration into the local context and reducing reliance on ethnic enclaves. The examination of the characteristics, dynamics and challenges of leveraging ethnic ties in the immigrant entrepreneurial process, highlights their dual nature across various business stages, which may guide immigrant entrepreneurs in effectively using ethnic networks while navigating potential conflicts and challenges. Social implications related to facilitating immigrant integration in the local context can support immigrant business performance improvement and benefit the local economy.

2. Data and methodology

This study used a systematic literature review with a mix-methods approach combining a bibliometric analysis (Gamarra and Giroto, 2022) and content analysis (Bahoo et al., 2020; Krippendorff, 2012) to analyse the existing research on ethnic networking ties in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship. Following the PRISMA flow diagram (Page et al., 2021), we designed a research protocol that enables the acquisition of a reliable and robust data pool, ensures the validity of the results and enhances the value of the findings. It includes formulating RQs, conducting a comprehensive literature search, collecting and assessing data quality (Acosta et al., 2020), analysing the results and interpreting the findings.

2.1 Search strategy and data collection

Web of Science (WoS) was chosen as the search database due to its widespread use in bibliometric studies within the management and organisation field (Zupic and Čater, 2015) and its capability to export articles with relevant meta-information. While we recognise the value of other databases, such as Scopus and Google Scholar, we have chosen to use WoS to ensure the high quality of the sample papers, following a similar approach used in previous studies (Ding and Yang, 2020). To ensure comprehensive coverage, the search string was divided into two parts (Table 1).

We combined Boolean operators (OR, AND), using search strings to metadata fields encompassing titles, keywords and abstracts across a range of categories and research areas, including business, management, sociology, economics, ethnic studies and interdisciplinary social sciences. Only articles in English were included in the search. The selection process was conducted in the last quarter of 2022, resulting in the retrieval of 243 papers at this initial stage.

Table 1. Search string

Scope	String
Immigrant entrepreneurship	TS (Topic Search) = “immigra* entrepreneur*” OR “migra* entrepreneur*” OR “ethnic entrepreneur* OR minorit* entrepreneur* OR “immigra* business*” OR “migra* business*” OR “ethnic business* OR “minorit* business*” OR “immigra* enterprise*” OR “migra* enterprise*” OR “ethnic enterprise*” OR “minorit* enterprise*”) AND
Ethics networking ties	TS = (“ethnic network* OR “ethnic tie*” OR “ethnic bond*” OR “social tie*” OR “social network*” OR “social capital*” OR “social network* tie*” OR co-ethnic OR “ethnic enclave*” OR “community bond*” OR “community tie*” OR “community network*” OR “social bond*”)

Source: Authors’ own work

2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria and quality assessment

Inclusion criteria (IC) and exclusion criteria (EC) were applied to screen the metadata of the 243 retrieved papers. Discrepancies of search results were resolved by repeated screening by the two authors. To be considered for inclusion, papers had to meet at least one of the following IC:

- (IC1) exploring aspects of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship;
- (IC2) evaluating the influences of ethnic ties on immigrant entrepreneurship;
- (IC3) presenting empirical evidence and scale measures of ethnic ties; and
- (IC4) discussing the different roles that ethnic ties play in immigrant entrepreneurship.

EC included:

- (EC1) non-traditional journal articles such as tutorials, posters, proceedings, reviews and notes;
- (EC2) studies that did not refer to social capital or related concepts of ethnic ties when researching immigrant entrepreneurship; and
- (EC3) studies published in journals not listed in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR) or Journal Citation Index (JCI).

To eliminate potential bias in this systematic review, all selected papers were double-checked by two researchers using a quality assessment criterion (Acosta et al., 2020), which included a series of closed questions to evaluate their relevance and quality (Table 2). Papers that scored 0 in the assessment were excluded from the samples.

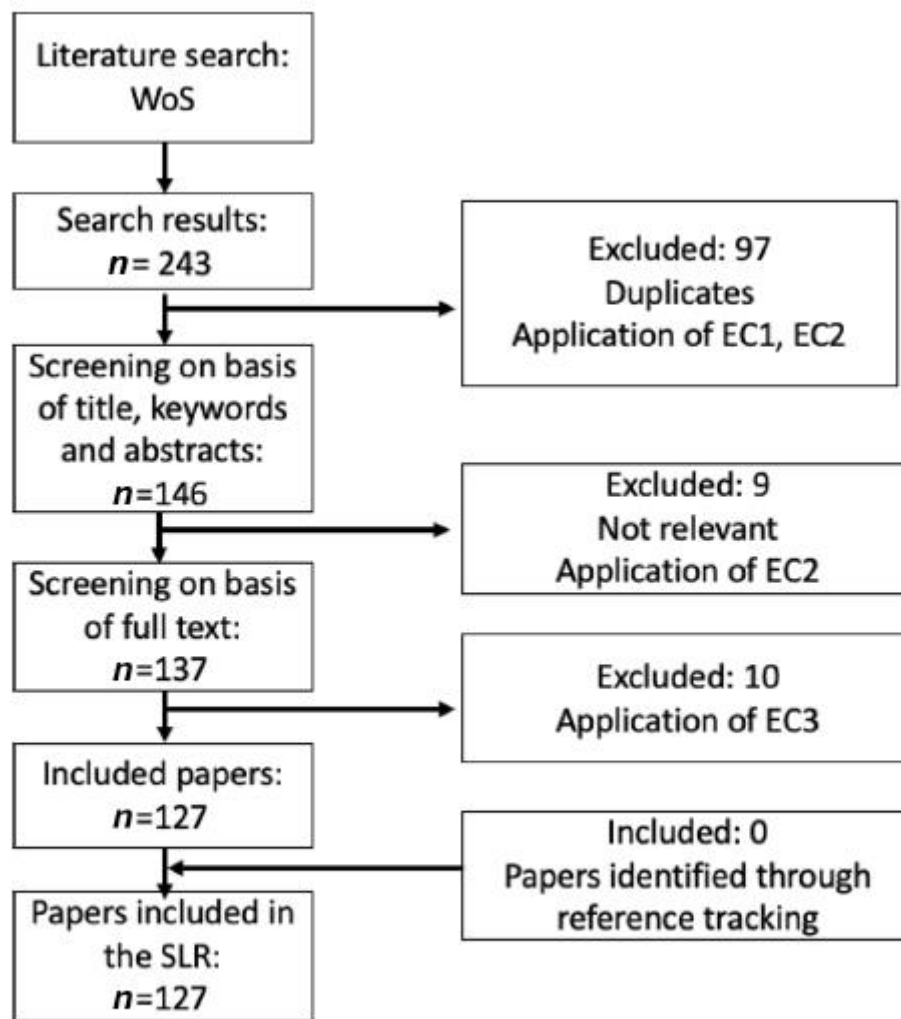
Following the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 127 papers were chosen, as illustrated in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1).

2.3 Data extraction and analysis method

VOSviewer software was used for bibliometric analysis, allowing keyword network analyses and graphical representations (van Eck and Waltman, 2010). Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012; Bahoo et al., 2020) was conducted using Atlas.ti software (Hwang, 2008) to gain a comprehensive understanding of relevant insights in the sample papers. A structured sheet was used to extract data from each selected paper based on a previous template (Sardi et al., 2017).

Table 2. Quality assessment criteria

Quality assessment (QA) criteria	Possible answers
QA1. Does the paper detail the role of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship?	“Yes (+1)”, No “(+0)” and “Partially (+0.5)”
QA2. Does the paper detail the characteristics and attributes of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship?	“Yes (+1)”, No “(+0)” and “Partially (+0.5)”
QA3. Does the paper provide empirical results related to ethnic ties?	“Yes (+1)” and No “(+0)”
QA4. Has the study been published in a relevant journal?	Rated by the JCR or JCI 2021 impact factor: Q1 (+2), Q2 (+1.5), Q3 and Q4 (+1) and (+0) if not indexed
Source: Authors' own work	



Source: Adapted from page *et al.* (2021)

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram

The first reviewer completed the data extraction, and the second reviewer verified the accuracy to avoid biases.

To answer RQ1 about the current landscape of research on ethnic networking ties in immigrant entrepreneurship, we first assessed publication information gathered on WoS, and we conducted a co-authorship analysis (Glänzel, 2001) on VOSviewer to get insights from the networks of collaborations between authors, institutions and countries. To identify the frequently researched topics, we conducted a co-occurrence of keywords (van Eck and Waltman, 2010) to map the primary themes studied in ethnic ties. Furthermore, content analysis was used to identify common theories and methodologies and involved a systematic examination to derive replicable and valid inferences from texts or other symbolic material (Krippendorff, 2012). Subsequently, content analysis was also conducted to address RQ2 on prevalent research focusing on ethnic ties, and RQ3 on types and roles of ethnic networking ties across immigrant entrepreneurs' business stages. Two researchers independently performed meticulous scrutiny of the articles, reviewing titles, RQs, subjects, variables and key findings (Bahoo et al., 2020). This methodology, widely acknowledged in social science research (Gaur and Kumar, 2018), entails categorising textual material to extract manageable and relevant data. Biases were mitigated through repeated reviews, resulting in a unanimous consensus. All 127 selected papers were uploaded to Atlas.ti for category coding directly derived from the texts. This approach avoided preconceived categories, allowing them to emerge organically and facilitating new insights. We used an inductive qualitative method to extract factual

information from the text. This included identifying mentions in the papers related to the methods and theories used to study ethnic ties, the main characteristics attributed to ethnic ties, their advantages and disadvantages across various studies and how these ties facilitate or hinder immigrants in different phases of the entrepreneurship process. Then, we looked for the most common and frequent appearance of each identified category across the papers. A common critique of content analysis is that journal articles often prioritise reporting results over describing the analysis process (Elo et al., 2014). To address this issue, we ensured that our results section includes a detailed explanation of the analysis process alongside the reported findings.

3. Results

3.1 Current landscape of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship research: intellectual, conceptual and social structures

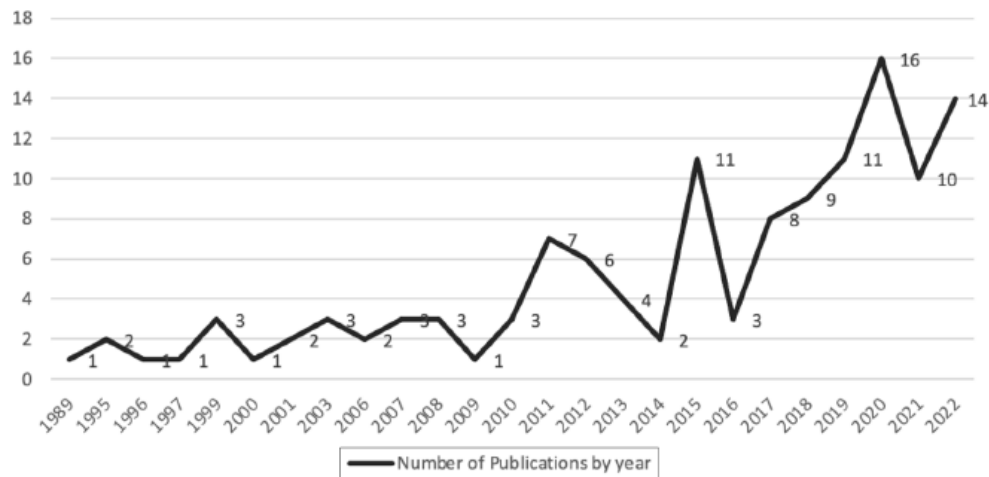
This section presents the bibliometric analysis along with content analysis results used to gauge scientific progress and production within the research area over time (van Raan, 2005). Addressing RQ1 related to understanding various aspects of the current research landscape, focuses on key publications, sources, institutions, authors, countries, methodological designs and underlying theories.

To understand top journals in the literature, using VOSviewer citation analysis and using van Eck and Waltman's (2010) association strength method for normalization, we set threshold cut-off criteria with 5 as the minimum document number and 50 as the minimum citation number for publication sources, as we wanted to extract the sources publication higher impact research in terms of citations. Table 3 shows that only five journals meet these criteria, all of which are Quartiles 1 and 2 impact factor journals, implying research on ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship is limited. Ethnic and Racial Studies published the most papers (seven), followed by Entrepreneurship and Regional Development and International Small Business Journal (six each). International Small Business Journal had the highest citation count (286), followed by Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (244). To comprehend the temporal distribution of publications, we intentionally refrained from using a specific cut-off period in selecting publications, as we aimed to observe the evolution of publications over time. The overall temporal distribution is presented in Figure 2, and it shows the first eligible publication in 1989. It shows a limited number of articles published over time, with a gradual increase from 2015 onwards and some minor fluctuations rather than a steady upward trend. The highest number of publications was recorded in 2020, indicating a recently growing interest.

Table 3. Top publication sources

Publication titles	N°	Q	% of 127	C
Ethnic and Racial Studies	7	Q2	5.5	129
Entrepreneurship and Regional Development	6	Q1	4.7	244
<i>International Small Business Journal</i>	6	Q2	4.7	286
<i>Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies</i>	5	Q1	3.9	154
<i>Journal of Small Business Management</i>	5	Q2	3.9	171

Notes: N° = Number of published papers on the topic; Q = quartile in journal of citations report; C = citations
Source: Authors' own work



Source: Author's own work

Figure 2. Temporal view of publications

To examine the geographical distribution of articles, we analysed the authors' affiliations by country.

Figure 3 illustrates the countries where authors have published at least three articles out of a total of 42 countries, with the most prolific countries highlighted in dark blue. Most publications were concentrated in Anglo-Saxon countries, with the USA being the most productive with 43 publications, and the UK being the second most productive with 29 publications. China and Canada published ten and nine articles, respectively. We found that Western countries and China were the most represented, with a lack of research from other regions of the world.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 3. Geographic distribution of publications

For the co-authorship analysis, we set a minimum threshold of one document and ten citations for each author, resulting in 136 authors meeting these criteria out of the initial pool of 263. By examining co-authorship and author affiliations, we identified knowledge networks and collaboration patterns among scholars and scientific schools. This approach is in line with previous studies (Glänzel, 2001) and provides valuable insights into the current research landscape. The results illustrated that the co-authorship network in the samples was fragmented, suggesting a lack of collaboration among scholars in this field. Notably, Mike Wright, Peter Nijkamp and Sarika Pruthi merged as the most influential authors with the highest number of publications and link strengths, based on their work in related fields

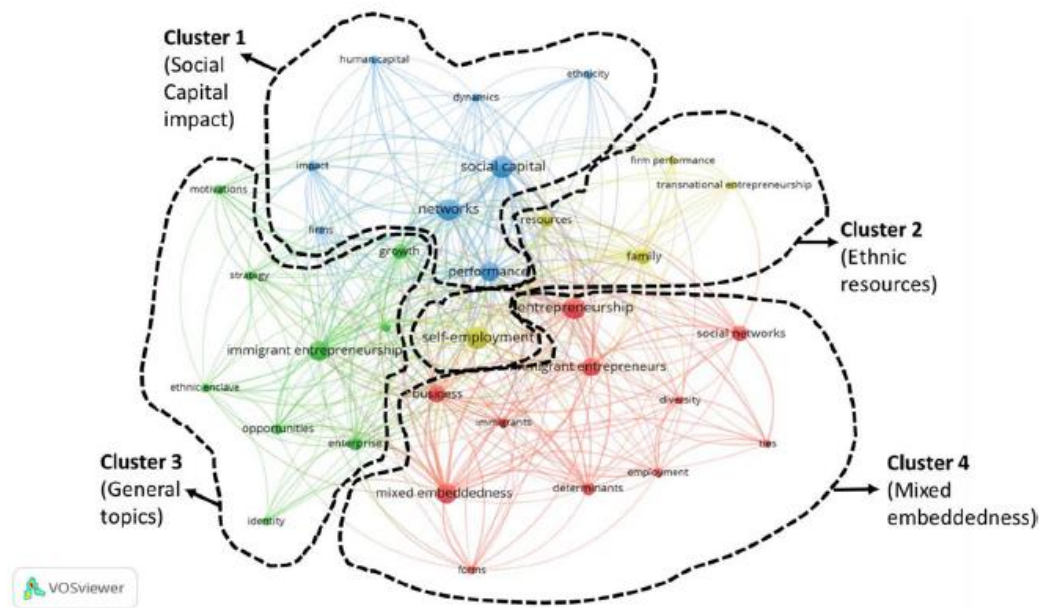
(Pruthi and Wright, 2017; Pruthi et al., 2018; Sahin et al., 2011; Tubadji et al., 2020; Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022).

Among the 200 author affiliations, we set the minimum number of documents per organization at 1 and the minimum number of citations at 10, resulting in 103 institutions meeting the criteria. De Montfort University stood out as the most prominent institution, with five articles and a total link strength of 4. It collaborated with other universities such as Aston University and Leicester Business School. Nevertheless, we observed a limited level of collaboration among institutions, and the publication count for each institution remained relatively low. The collaborations between authors and institutions also indicate a similar trend with limited publications.

To understand the primary topics that examined ethnic networking tie's role in immigrant entrepreneurship, we conducted VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence analysis, by setting a minimum threshold of five occurrences for each keyword and using van Eck and Waltman's (2010) association strength method for normalization. We chose this cut-off criterion to enhance data visualisation (Zupic and Čater, 2015) and to ensure a diverse representation of the key terms used by authors to define their research. After removing duplications, 42 out of 633 keywords met the criteria, forming four clusters based on connection strength and frequencies. This approach offers insightful perspectives on prevailing research topics, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Node and font variations delineate keyword weights while connecting line thickness signifies co-occurrence strength between paired keywords. We summarised keywords in each key cluster by frequency in Table 4 for subsequent discussion.

Cluster #1 highlights the importance of social capital and networks in immigrant entrepreneurship. Research has shown that social capital and networks can have significant impacts on various aspects of business performance, including internationalisation and organisational innovations (Chung et al., 2020; Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022), as well as economic growth (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022; Abu Nasra and Oliver, 2022). Cluster #2 examines the experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs in different host countries, with a focus on the use of ethnic ties, particularly family ties, as crucial resources in the process of starting and running a business (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022; Yendaw, 2022) or the role of female entrepreneurship within immigrant communities (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022; Zani, 2022). Cluster #3 investigates the strategies that immigrant entrepreneurs use in ethnic enclaves, including customer service (Haq et al., 2021), product strategy (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022) and financing decisions (Boateng et al., 2019). Cluster #4 highlights the importance of fitting into both the ethnic community and the broader local context of host countries, such as market, community and cultural norms (Ram et al., 2001; Wahlbeck, 2013). The primary focus was centred on the social capital and diverse resources engendered by ethnic ties, and their impact on diverse aspects of immigrant entrepreneurship within a mixed embeddedness setting. Specifically, it has been mentioned that cultural adaptation and conflicts are potential challenges in the process of embeddedness (Kloosterman, 2010). In this regard, interaction and communication with the broader local context have been heightened through the utilisation of ethnic ties, as social capital greatly impacts immigrant's intercultural development (Lee, 2014; Njaramba et al., 2018; Collins, 2003). This underscores the significant role that the ethnic ties may play in intercultural communication and in addressing potential cultural mismatches in a mixed embedded environment.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 4. Co-occurrence of keywords

Table 4. The most prevalent topics in ethnic ties in entrepreneurship research

Cluster	Focus	Top keywords	Frequency
#1 Social capital impact	Immigrant business performance and intangible capital impacts	Social capital	33
		Networks	29
		Performance	24
		Impact	7
		Human capital	5
		Firms	5
#2 Ethnic resources	Entrepreneurship using ethnic resources by immigrants	Self-employment	33
		Family	15
		Resources	12
#3 General topics	Immigrant business general topics and ethnic enclaves	Immigrant entrepreneurship	25
		Growth	14
		Enterprise	12
		Motivation	7
		Strategy	6
		Ethnic enclave	6
		Mixed embeddedness	26
#4 Mixed embeddedness	Embedding process in host country	Immigrant entrepreneurs	21
		Business	19
		Social networks	15

Source: Authors' own work

The next step in addressing the current research landscape was to conduct a content analysis aimed at examining prevalent methodological designs and the contexts in which the studies were conducted. The majority (94.5%) of studies used empirical sample analysis, while a small minority (5.5%) used a conceptual approach. Among empirical research articles, qualitative designs, addressing “how” and “why” questions (Yin, 1989), were most common (59.1%), suitable for exploring the behaviour and experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs. Conversely, 32.5% of studies used quantitative research design. A small proportion (8.3%) used hybrid designs, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, often with larger sample sizes collected from local contexts or accessible databases.

Table 5 categorises research subjects (immigrant entrepreneurs) based on their respective home and host countries. Asia is the most common home region of immigrant entrepreneurs, while Europe and North America are the most popular migration destinations. This trend is expected, considering these continents are widely viewed as highly developed areas. Among countries of origin, Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs and their businesses received the most attention in the literature, highlighting a blend of Chinese values and Western practices (Collins, 2002).

Most studies on immigrant entrepreneurship focus on migration from less developed regions, specifically Asia and Africa, to more developed areas like North America and Central Europe (Malerba and Ferreira, 2020). Comparative research explores a single immigrant group across different host locations (Prashantham et al., 2015; Poblete and Mandakovic, 2021), multiple immigrant groups in one host country (Wang and Altinay, 2012; Poblete and Mandakovic, 2021) or multiple groups in various host contexts (Churchill, 2017; Ashourizadeh et al., 2022). These comparative studies shed light on cultural disparities, migration histories and institutional policies (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). Furthermore, our analysis of the geographic distribution of authors publishing on this topic (Figure 3) indicates a higher interest among institutions in Western regions. This aligns with our finding that Europe and North America are the predominant migration destinations, reflecting their significant representation in the literature. These results may also shed light on the factors driving greater publication interest in specific Western regions.

For the identification of the prevalent theoretical underpinnings, the categorisation of the content focused on the identification of how researchers used specific theories to study ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship. The literature predominantly uses mixed embeddedness theory and social capital theory to analyse ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship. Mixed embeddedness theory suggests that immigrant entrepreneurs are a part of the broader context in their host country, beyond their ethnic community (Kloosterman, 2010), and argues that entrepreneurial outcomes result from interactions and connections within this embeddedness. Immigrant entrepreneurs acquire diverse resources – human, financial and social capital – through these interactions (Wang and Warn, 2018). Simultaneously, social capitals encompass networks, norms, relationships and values that shape the quantity and quality of social interactions in a society (Deakins et al., 2007).

Table 5. Regions of home country and host country

Region	Home country	Host country
Asia	43	11
Europe	13	45
Africa	14	4
Latin America	7	2
Oceania	1	11
North America	0	38

Source: Authors' own work

On the other hand, social capital theory defines social capital as “the aggregate of actual or potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 2). Immigrant entrepreneurs’ social capital is conveyed through the social networks they establish, which are based on several different but complementary ties, including family, community, business and ethnic ties (Deakins et al., 2007). Both theories emphasise measuring social ties through capital and resources, leading researchers to explore immigrant entrepreneurs’ capitals and resources linked to various ties or relationships (Sundararajan and Sundararajan, 2015).

3.2 Ethnic ties characteristics, dynamics and challenges in immigrant entrepreneurship

RQ2 investigates the characteristics, advantages, disadvantages, implementation dynamics and challenges commonly examined in studies. Initially, the content analysis focused on the implementation dynamics related to the use of ethnic ties. Within implementation dynamics, we identified three subcategories:

- (1) “Who”: describing the characteristics of those involved in the ethnic network ties;
- (2) “How often”: frequency of occurrences of these ties; and
- (3) “Resource provided”: quality of information and resources.

The results indicated that the initial research focus centres on the “Who”, exploring preferred individuals with whom immigrant entrepreneurs discussed business in the co-ethnic community and the relationships with these individuals (Ndofor and Priem, 2011). This encompasses individuals whose business opinions held significant value in the immigrant entrepreneur network (Ndofor and Priem, 2011; Chen et al., 2015), including co-ethnic stakeholders (Yang et al., 2012), and the nature of relationships with co-ethnic members, considering interactions, trust and reciprocity (Prashantham et al., 2015).

The second prevalent aspect explored the frequency of ties dynamics, specifically examining “how often” contacts occurred with formal or informal community groups (Ndofor and Priem, 2011; Prashantham et al., 2015). The third aspect focused on the relevance of the “resource provided”, in terms of content and resources within the ethnic ties. This encompasses advice given through ethnic ties regarding starting a business, training and business or personal services (Chen et al., 2015), financial support, including private loans, financial assistance, start-up capital or emergency funds from the ethnic community (Yang et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2015; Rosique-Blasco et al., 2017). Within this category, we also identified mentions of a key aspect that shifted the focus to “What additional resources can be generated”. This involved comprehending the establishment and maintenance of valuable business contacts (Kharel, 2016), assisting other family members in becoming entrepreneurs (Sahin et al., 2011), acquiring physical resources (Chen et al., 2015) and the entrepreneur’s membership in immigrant or business associations (Rosique-Blasco et al., 2017).

Subsequently, the content analysis focused on extracting essential findings from each article, categorising mentions within the articles regarding negative and positive characteristics of ethnic ties. The subcategories organised under each positive and negative characteristic of ethnic ties, as depicted in Table 6, illustrate the multifaceted nature of these ties, encompassing both advantageous and challenging dimensions. While mainstream views often praise the virtues of ethnic ties for connecting resources and capital, and boosting immigrants’ business success, our synthesis also uncovers shadows beneath this seemingly bright surface, exploring nuanced complexities.

The positive characteristics of ethnic ties were organised into six sub-categories that elucidate the advantages highlighted in existing research. The first aspect is the entrepreneurial motivations, exchange of knowledge and resources. Co-ethnic groups often engage in the sharing and exchange of information, advice and experiences related to business, which serves as a source of inspiration and encouragement for peers interested in starting their businesses in the host country (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022). In particular, the presence of ethnic networks can be a key factor in motivating immigrant entrepreneurship (Rodgers et al., 2019).

Adaptation to the local context is the second positive aspect. Immigrants face numerous challenges when moving to a new country, such as cultural barriers (Yuengert, 1995). Therefore, it is common for them to settle in ethnic enclaves where they can find emotional and physical support from co-ethnic members who share a strong ethnic identity and common origin (Chung et al., 2020). Pre-existing contacts in the host country were found to facilitate the process of adaptation (Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022).

Co-ethnic networks can provide financial benefits to immigrant entrepreneurs through loans from trusted ethnic group members (Yendaw, 2022). Furthermore, ethnic ties in entrepreneurs’ home countries can provide access to cheaper production sources and raw materials, enhancing product competitiveness in the host market (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022; Abu Nasra and Oliver, 2022). Differences in taxation between home and host countries can facilitate better financial performance and the accumulation of financial capital (Zani, 2022). Labour capital accessibility is another identified positive characteristic, driven by trust within co-ethnic groups and lower costs associated with hiring co-ethnic workers (Altinay and Altinay, 2006). In traditional sectors serving ethnic enclaves, high co-ethnic labour proportions can positively impact business performance and growth. This reciprocity benefits ethnic employers through a large pool of low-cost co-ethnic workers allowing them to provide job opportunities (Ram et al., 2001).

Facilitation of ties re-creation is another positive aspect identified. Maintaining ties in coethnic groups is crucial for building and expanding both ethnic and non-ethnic networks (Wu and Liu, 2014), and adopting both ethnic enclave and breakout strategies to succeed in their host country (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). By leveraging current ethnic ties, entrepreneurs expand social networks beyond their co-ethnic group, including deriving benefits from both strong and weak informal ethnic ties within their enclave (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022) and establishing weak ties outside their group with institutions and business partners to access the mainstream market (Wu and Liu, 2014; Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). Dynamic resource utilisation enables immigrant entrepreneurs to gain a competitive advantage (Shinnar et al., 2011). Lastly, ethnic ties aid inward and outward business internationalisation, where entrepreneurs by embedding in social networks in both their host and home countries, can gain access to foreign market information, cheaper production sources, raw materials, personnel and clients (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022; Pruthi et al., 2018). We identified three sub-categories encompassing negative aspects that ethnic ties can pose to immigrant entrepreneur's business journey. The first negative aspect is resource limitation. Immigrant entrepreneurs frequently rely heavily on strong co-ethnic networks, which, while providing access to resources and capital, may also stifle innovation and limit information flow by restricting contact with those outside their ethnic group (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). Additionally, conversations with unprofessional ethnic group members may lead to suboptimal decisions, confining businesses to ethnic enclaves and limiting access to mainstream markets (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022), which hinder swift internationalisation, especially for ethnic tech businesses reliant on knowledge and innovation (Abu Nasra and Oliver, 2022).

The second negative characteristic of ethnic ties is the exploitation of co-ethnic employees, which it may occur in traditional ethnic business sectors that do not require specialised or professional skills (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022; Duan et al., 2021). Securing employment with co-ethnic employers is often easier in this context, given the shared cultural background (Yuengert, 1995). Literature has pointed out disadvantaged situations for ethnic workers, including long hours, low salaries and unfavourable working conditions (Wu and Liu, 2014). Additionally, the closed nature of ethnic communities can obscure the exploitation of co-ethnic employees (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022), leading to strained employer-employee relations, prompting Chinese employees, for example, to use avoidance tactics or public denouncements (Wu and Liu, 2014).

Lastly, ethnic ties may lead to intra-ethnic competition and tensions. Immigrant groups clustering in certain industries can result in market saturation and heightened competition within co-ethnic groups (Lee, 1999), which creates tension among individuals pursuing selfinterest (Chen and Redding, 2017) and intensifies intra-ethnic competition. As a response, immigrant employers may choose to hire workers from other ethnicities, anticipating potential competition from trained co-ethnic employees in the future (Kim, 1999).

3.3 Primary types and roles of ethnic networking ties across immigrant entrepreneurs' business stages

To answer RQ3, first, we explored the mentions within the articles describing ethnic ties. Based on the results, we grouped them into three categories: informal strong ties, informal weak ties and formal weak ties. Subsequently, to comprehend their roles across various business stages, we looked for mentions within the articles of how the studies described the ethnic ties' functions and potential limitations at specific stages in the entrepreneurial journey. Table 7 presents the integration of the content analysis, and the associations identified.

Informal ties are characterised by close relationships built on trust and reciprocity within the ethnic community and typically include family, friends, acquaintances and kinship groups across home and host countries (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022). While strengthening social bonds and generating bonding social capital (Deakins et al., 2007), they normally perform less formally. However, as the business advances beyond the start-up phase, the limitations of informal ties become more apparent (Deakins et al., 2007), often restricting contacts and information flow beyond the co-ethnic group (Gomez et al., 2020).

We identified two categories within informal ethnic ties: strong and weak. Among the strong informal ties, pre-migration informal ties shared among family members is characterised by existing before migration (Zonta, 2012; Sommer and Gamper, 2021) and provide benefits like access to family capital, market information, advice, labour resources and knowledge of local regulations (Yendaw, 2022). These ties are common in family businesses and traditional migrant sectors relying heavily on ethnic resources and capital (Abu Nasra and Oliver, 2022), particularly valuable in the early adaptation stage and business start-up (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022). Pre-existing informal ties may motivate migration to a host country with family or friends, aiding business initiation (Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022). However, excessive closeness within the ethnic network can hinder mainstream market access (Biggeri and Braitto, 2022).

Table 6. Positive and negative characteristics of ethnic ties

Main category	Subcategory	Advantages/Disadvantages	Studies
Positive characteristics	Entrepreneurial motivations, knowledge, and resources	Share and exchange information, advice, experience and resource	Pruthi and Tasavori (2022), Abu Nasra and Oliver (2022), Duan <i>et al.</i> (2021)
	Adaptation to the local context	Physical and emotional support	Rosique-Blasco <i>et al.</i> (2017), Rodgers <i>et al.</i> (2019), Abd Hamid and Everett (2022)
	Financial capital and performance	Financial help, lower product price and higher profit	Yendaw (2022), Zonta (2012), Rodgers <i>et al.</i> (2019), Somashekhar (2019), Pruthi and Tasavori (2022), Zani (2022)
	Labour capital	The lower labour cost of co-ethnic employees	Kim (1999), Ram <i>et al.</i> (2001), Altinay and Altinay (2006), Yang <i>et al.</i> (2012), Somashekhar (2019), Abd Hamid and Everett (2022), Abu Nasra and Oliver (2022)
	Ties re-creation	Create and grow non-ethnic ties to reach out to the mainstream market	Yasin and Hafeez (2022), Zonta (2012), Kharel (2016), Williams and Krasniqi (2018), Pruthi <i>et al.</i> (2018), Pruthi and Tasavori (2022)
Negative characteristics	Internationalisation	Using the resources from ties in both host and home countries to establish cross-border business	Prashantham <i>et al.</i> (2015), Pruthi <i>et al.</i> (2018), Pruthi and Tasavori (2022)
	Resource limitation	Hinder the flow of information and new ideas, limiting business innovation and expansion	Biggeri and Braitto (2022), Yasin and Hafeez (2022), Brzozowski and Cucculelli (2020), Abu Nasra and Oliver (2022)
	Exploitation of co-ethnic employees	Long working hours, lower salaries, unfavourable working conditions, etc	Wu and Liu (2014), Kharel (2016), Biggeri <i>et al.</i> (2022)
	Intra-ethnic competitions and tensions	Ethnic market saturations; tensions for self-interest	Chen and Redding (2017), Lee (1999)
	Source: Authors' own work		

The second category of informal ties comprises informal weak ties, including “postmigration informal ties”. They are formed through established networks or chance encounters in the host or home country after migration (Deakins et al., 2007; Pruthi et al., 2018; Rodgers et al., 2019; Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022). These ties may involve friends, acquaintances, ethnic community members and associates, resembling informal strong ties but with less trust, closeness and stability (Kharel, 2016). They assist immigrant entrepreneurs in identifying potential business partners, recognising opportunities and establishing social capital (Deakins et al., 2007).

The last category is formal weak ties, including co-ethnic and business-oriented ties. Formal co-ethnic ties substitute the need for intermediaries, offering stable resources and reliability through contracts for greater control and flexibility (Sommer and Gamper, 2021). Business-oriented formal ties focus primarily on business activities and are considered as weaker ties that help entrepreneurs bridge future social networks and potential capital (Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022), becoming more important for later entrepreneurial development beyond the start-up phase (Deakins et al., 2007).

The formal weak “co-ethnic ties” stem from local co-ethnic associations, community networks, workplaces, religion-based groups and other sources (Wang and Warn, 2018; Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022). They may involve relationships with governments, institutions and clients (Shinnar et al., 2011), and aid immigrant entrepreneurs in entering new markets including those in their home country (Pruthi et al., 2018), leveraging both existing and new connections (Pruthi and Tasavori, 2022). However, these ties often exhibit less trust than strong ties (Deakins et al., 2007).

Lastly, formal weak “business-oriented ties” involve relationships with individuals or organisations in business, like former co-workers, suppliers, co-ethnic partners and business contacts (Brzozowski and Cucculelli, 2020). These kinds of ties provide immigrant entrepreneurs access to professional entrepreneurial information and opportunities through consultants, accountants, suppliers, bankers, lawyers, partners and co-workers established via agencies and service providers (Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022). However, relying solely on co-ethnic members for business activities may lead to increased homogeneity (Chen et al., 2015).

Initially relying on pre-migration informal strong ties, immigrant entrepreneurs gradually establish both informal and formal co-ethnic ties and formal business networks, accelerating their business development and market knowledge (Prashantham et al., 2015; Sommer and Gamper, 2021). Our findings suggest that ethnic ties influence various business stages: during creation, strong ethnic ties, such as family and close ethnic groups provide business ideas, financial support, experiential learning, labour assistance and start-up capital (Rodgers et al., 2019; Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022). In the survival stage, ethnic ties remain essential for business success as entrepreneurs leverage both their business-oriented and co-ethnic formal ties to connect with the mainstream market, to address limited resources challenges (Brzozowski and Cucculelli, 2020). In the growth stage, while connection with the local mainstream market remain important, ethnic ties with the home country become crucial for resources and materials needed for cross-border business expansion (Pruthi et al., 2018).

4. A conceptual model for future research on ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship

The results of the co-keywords analysis highlighted key aspects of the current landscape of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship research. One key aspect was the critical role of contingent resources and capital derived from ethnic networking ties in initiating and sustaining immigrant businesses, as well as their impact on business performance and business strategy in an embeddedness environment (Yendaw, 2022; Abu Nasra and Oliver, 2022). Furthermore, the content analysis acknowledged that while existing literature predominantly highlights the positive role of ethnic ties in immigrant businesses, a research gap exists in understanding the specific mechanisms immigrant entrepreneurs use to overcome challenges and hurdles, including, the dark sides of ethnic ties, and resource limitations, particularly in stages following business creation and early market break out, when entrepreneurs need to expand beyond the ethnic enclave to access the local market (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). This includes addressing intra-group competition and the exploitation of co-ethnic employees (Biggeri et al., 2022). Thus, this highlights the need to diversify social networks, possibly through recreating existing ethnic ties to consequently

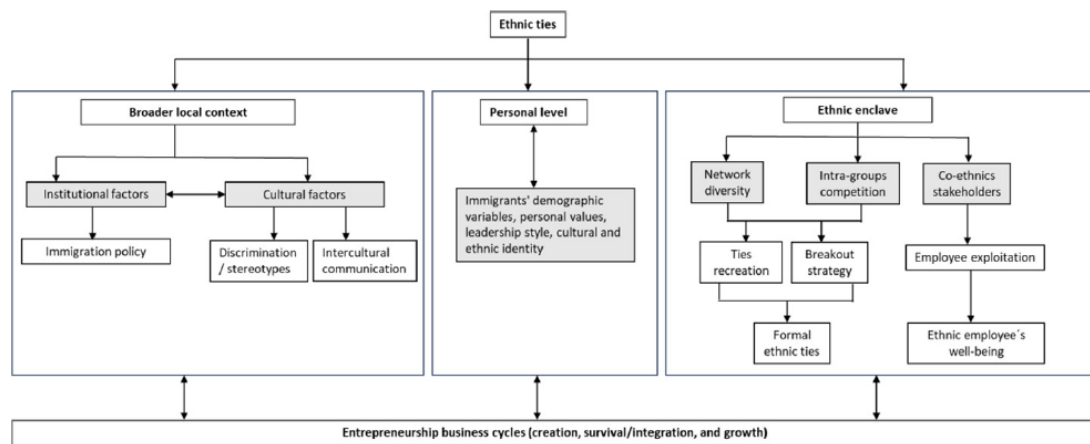
expand and diversify the capital available through these connections. This approach also ensures the well-being of co-ethnic workers and fosters a healthy relationship between immigrant entrepreneurs and their co-ethnic stakeholders, contributing to a healthy business ecosystem (Pruthi et al., 2018).

Meanwhile, the analysis also indicated that institutional factors have been largely neglected in the immigrant business lifecycle. It is necessary to consider the conditions of the local society where institutional factors are particularly significant as a vital part of the broader local context in mixed embeddedness (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). This consideration has implications for understanding the later stages of immigrant businesses. The identification of limitations of ethnic ties in terms of homogeneity, closeness and resource constraints highlight the need for more diverse social networks and additional capital to successfully reach and integrate into the mainstream local market. Host governments and policymakers should be more extensively and deeply discussed in future research as integral components of the mixed embeddedness theory, providing institutional support within the local context. Conversely, institutional barriers, such as restrictive immigration policies or discriminatory practices (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022; Shinnar et al., 2011), which involves the role of local government and institutional factors that impact immigrant entrepreneurs' abilities to embed in the local context should also be further addressed. It is significantly valuable to explore the relationship between institutional factors and immigrants' interactions and social activities as mix embeddedness theory suggests (Kloosterman, 2010). However, questions remain regarding how these institutional barriers or support systems affect the formation and utilisation of social capital and networks.

Apart from institutional factors, cultural factors are another aspect to consider when examining broader local context in mixed embeddedness. While much research emphasises the opportunity structure (Kloosterman and Rath, 2001), focusing on the importance and outcome of mixed embeddedness, few studies recognise the significant role ethnic ties can play in facilitating the complex process of embeddedness through interaction and connection with the broader local context. Further research is needed into the mechanism through which ethnic ties facilitate embeddedness, such as intercultural communication where social capital greatly impacts immigrant's intercultural development (Lee, 2014). Specifically, regarding challenges, researchers can delve into how immigrant entrepreneurs navigate conflicting cultural norms and expectations within both their ethnic community and the broader local context (Njaramba et al., 2018; Collins, 2003).

Exploring the research subjects themselves at a personal level, immigrant entrepreneurs exhibit significant diversity, yet the literature review identified that few studies consider comparative variables such as gender, personal background and values. These variables should be further explored in future studies, as they shape how they develop and use ethnic ties and resources, select business strategies and potentially influence their integration into the mixed environment of both the local and ethnic communities.

Moreover, concerning types of ethnic ties, informal ethnic ties have been extensively studied (Zonta, 2012; Sommer and Gamper, 2021), while formal ties, particularly formal strong ties, have received less attention. Future research could explore the role of ethnicbased organisations, such as chambers of commerce or professional associations, in providing resources, information and supports. Simultaneously, potential challenges and negative aspects mentioned in the literature, like resource limitation, intra-ethnic competitions and exploitation of co-ethnic employees that may arise mainly from reliance on informal ethnic ties, remain underexplored. Formal ethnic ties may also play an important role in addressing those negative aspects, by collaborating with local government, representing and aiding immigrant groups in overcoming barriers, defending legal rights and securing institutional support (Shinnar et al., 2011 Brzozowski and Cucculelli, 2020). Accordingly, drawing from our findings, we proposed a conceptual model to guide future research (Figure 5) to serve as a potential starting point to bridge the gap in understanding the underexplored role of ethnic ties in the immigrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. This model considers ethnic ties in the mixed-embeddedness environment, mapping the entrepreneurial business cycles and their interconnectedness with the local context, immigrant entrepreneurs' personal levels and ethnic enclave.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 5. The conceptual model for the study of ethnic ties in the context of immigrant entrepreneurship

In the dimension of the broader local context, there are two intertwined factors: institutional and cultural, and both factors can offer valuable social support and pose barriers to immigrant business development (Churchill, 2017). Policies significantly impact entrepreneurs' ability to embed within the local context. For instance, restrictive immigration policies can act as barriers (Njaramba et al., 2018), whereas immigrant-friendly policies can facilitate the process. Meanwhile, conflicts emerging from cultural mismatches (Collins, 2003) can also impede the process of embeddedness in local context and consequently hinder the performance and growth of ethnic businesses. In this sense, intercultural communication between ethnic groups and the local society becomes increasingly significant to potentially tackle conflicts such as linguistic and cultural differences (Yuengert, 1995). As intercultural development closely relates to social capital (Lee, 2014), immigrants' social ties could be a promising factor to be investigated in the future. Additionally, discrimination and stereotypes are barriers crucial to understanding perceptions tied to ethnic identity (Chung et al., 2020), as they can hinder business success by creating obstacles such as limited access to financing, markets and networks, based on ethnicity or race (Njaramba et al., 2018). These factors are closely linked to the social lives of immigrant entrepreneurs in the host country, as well as the strategies they use to overcome barriers and use available support via the ethnic ties.

The personal level dimension may influence the development and utilisation of ethnic ties, including the immigrant entrepreneurs' personal and cultural backgrounds (e.g. country of origin, religious affiliation and gender) (Njaramba et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2015). For instance, Chinese immigrants influenced by Confucian culture are more likely to employ ethnic resources when doing business compared with those from other cultural backgrounds (Jiang et al., 2016). Immigrants' entrepreneurial orientation may also play a role in how they use their ethnic ties, such as through risk-taking propensity, innovativeness and proactivity (Chung et al., 2020). In this vein, leadership theory variables can shed light on how immigrant entrepreneurs leverage their ethnic ties in business activities. Besides, a strong cultural or ethnic identity can have a positive impact on the perception of ethnic products and services, helping to preserve traditions and cultural authenticity (Chung et al., 2020). In the dimension of the ethnic enclave, although not much has been explored, network diversity may be related to the level of heterogeneity within an individual's social network (Chen et al., 2015). This diversity can facilitate access to a broader range of resources and perspectives, contributing to increased innovation and creativity, influencing the entrepreneur's business breakout strategy beyond the ethnic community and helping to avoid intra-group competition and tensions due to limited ethnic resources. This can be achieved by ties recreation of the existing ethnic ties via introducing contacts of the local market (Yasin and Hafeez, 2022). However, due to intra-group competition and conflicts (Wu and Liu, 2014), this may not always occur. In such cases, special attention should be given to the role of formal strong ethnic ties, which are deemed to offer greater control and stability in business endeavours. Besides, the disadvantaged situations faced by ethnic workers are

apparent, characterised by long hours, low salaries and unfavourable working conditions (Wu and Liu, 2014). These conditions often result in the exploitation of employees and foster toxic relationships between employers and workers. The well-being of these underprivileged co-ethnic workers warrants further exploration. Future research could delve into the relationships among co-ethnic stakeholders. By examining immigrant entrepreneurs' social networks, resource diversity, expansion strategies and stakeholder relationships, future studies can offer a comprehensive understanding of ethnic networking ties, encompassing both positive and negative aspects.

5. Conclusions, implications and limitations

This study represents a first attempt to synthesise literature on the roles of ethnic ties in immigrant entrepreneurship research, categorising their varied influences in diverse conditions – both positive and negative. Our findings report the significant research gap of studies on ethnic ties with limited academic publications and collaborations and highlight the underexplored dynamic roles of ethnic ties, often overlooked due to the singular focus of many studies when examining this topic. Another important conclusion lies in identifying and categorising the advantages and drawbacks of ethnic ties throughout the immigrant entrepreneurial process. These dual characteristics acknowledged that ethnic ties perform distinctively, with different limitations such as lack of trust, closeness, homogeneity and resources limitation, as well as functions vary at different stages of the business such as access to information, resources and partners and alliances, showing their dynamic roles in each stage of the business.

Therefore, the proposed conceptual model holds theoretical implications for immigrant entrepreneurship research. It outlines four interconnected dimensions for future studies, which contribute to theory development by exploring the complex context of mixed embeddedness within which immigrant ethnic ties unfold. Future scholars can advance research by exploring the interconnected dimensions within the model using underexplored theoretical lenses, such as intercultural communication theory to examine the local context dimension, leadership theory to explore the entrepreneur's personal level dimension or employee well-being theories to investigate the ethnic enclave dimension.

In terms of practical and social implications, our findings provide policymakers and stakeholders in the host society with a thorough comprehension of immigrant communities and their business systems. This knowledge can assist policymakers in facilitating immigrants' adaptation to the complex context of the host country throughout various business phases (Rodgers et al., 2019; Abd Hamid and Everett, 2022). Tailoring policy responses to specific groups of immigrant entrepreneurs and their unique circumstances, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach based on singular factors, can ultimately improve business performance, and contribute to the local economy. This may include specific policies to build healthier relationships between immigrant entrepreneurs and their stakeholders, both ethnic and local. Local governments could design professional training programs for underprivileged ethnic employees to reduce their heavy reliance on ethnic networks for job opportunities. These programs could be coupled with informational campaigns promoting transparency about their duties and rights, aiming to diminish exploitation. Considering that formal ethnic ties play a vital role in providing stability and reliability, local governments could develop a more structured collaboration program with co-ethnic associations and communities to connect them with local stakeholders.

Moreover, this study offers valuable insights to immigrant entrepreneurs themselves on efficiently leveraging resources derived from these ties for achieving business success. Nevertheless, immigrants must recognise that, although ethnic ties may offer numerous advantages, they are not omnipotent. It is recommendable to judiciously use formal and informal ethnic ties and ethnic resources, avoiding over-reliance on them.

However, this study has some limitations to consider. Firstly, as a literature review, our search was confined to articles in English on the well-established scientific database WoS, potentially resulting in a limited sample size. Future studies could improve inclusivity by broadening the search scope to include databases and sources beyond WoS, thus diversifying the article sample. Secondly, due to the small final sample size, we did not differentiate between various types of immigrants, such as second-generation, refugees, female and returnee entrepreneurs. These distinct groups may leverage ethnic ties in varied ways, influenced by their

unique personal and business background. Subsequent studies could explore specific immigrant entrepreneur types, contributing a more nuanced analysis of how ethnic ties might shape business practices and strategy adoption within different ethnic groups.

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