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Social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation: innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking in an emerging economy

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper investigates if and how entrepreneurs' social capital influences their individual entrepreneurial orientation attributes (innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking).

Design/methodology/approach – The research method adopted is an exploratory multiple case study. The case chosen is that of an emerging and under-examined entrepreneur, the religious entrepreneur. The study investigates 20 pastors responsible for small enterprise-churches in Brazil.

Findings – Social capital influences individual entrepreneurial orientation, being characterized by a relative paradox. The networks must be dense enough to stimulate entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation but not be so dense as to harm innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking. Further, data show that individual entrepreneurial orientation influences social capital.

Research limitations/implications – One limitation relates to the semi-structured interviews' restricted use. A second limitation is associated with the recognition of churches only as productive enterprises.

Practical implications – This article suggests the significance of incorporating both themes in entrepreneurial education and training programs. It also stresses the appropriateness of religious entrepreneurship as an empirical research field for business scholars.

Originality/value – The contributions are fivefold. First, the authors build exploratory theoretical propositions on the influence of social capital on individual entrepreneurial orientation. Second, they highlight the significance of dense networks for individual entrepreneurial orientation, expanding the literature that supports the relevance of cohesive networks solely to the construct's organizational dimension. Third, the authors suggest that a relative paradox may characterize individual entrepreneurial orientation. Fourth, the authors suggest the existence of recursion between both constructs. Finally, this study is one of the first to examine social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation, considering innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking, which represents a neglected field in benchmarking studies.

Keywords Social capital, Entrepreneurial orientation, Entrepreneurship, Emerging economy

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The literature on social capital (SC) has become prominent in recent decades (Hanifah *et al.*, 2019; Basuil and Datta, 2017; Madhavaram and Hunt, 2017; Mazzucchelli *et al.*, 2019; Subramony *et al.*, 2018), especially within entrepreneurship research (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2020; Tok and Kaminski, 2019; García-Villaverde *et al.*, 2018; Sahasranamam and Nandakumar, 2020). Some of these emerging inroads relate to the entrepreneurial orientation (EO) approach (Ali *et al.*, 2020; Masa'deh *et al.*, 2018; Basco *et al.*, 2020; Hunt, 2021; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Kollmann *et al.*, 2019). Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) asserted that social capital is essential to entrepreneurial orientation. Luu and Ngo (2019, p. 104) emphasized that "social ties may influence the effects of innovative, proactive, and risk-taking practices."

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Some notions have been outlined in the still-emerging literature. This article examines two of these notions manifested in a still contradictory way in current approaches. The first is that partially dense networks, formed by strong ties, cohesion, and trust, promote entrepreneurial orientation (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Kaasa, 2009; Luu and Ngo, 2019; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Trust among network actors, i.e. the belief that they will not act opportunistically (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), can increase entrepreneurs' tacit knowledge and information. The second notion is that too dense entrepreneurial networks could ultimately inhibit entrepreneurial orientation; they can "create redundancy information problems, myopia, inertia, and internal blocking" (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018, p. 203).

This reveals the paradox within the literature. To support entrepreneurial orientation, the networks must be dense enough to create resources from strong ties and trust. However, the networks must not be so cohesive as to diminish their primary attributes' manifestation (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Prior studies have investigated social capital's influence over entrepreneurial orientation from a macro-organizational perspective (Chakrabarti and Mondal, 2018; Ferreira *et al.*, 2017, 2020; Luu and Ngo, 2019; Mantok *et al.*, 2019; Santos *et al.*, 2020; Seo, 2020). From this perspective, entrepreneurial orientation is "defined as the strategic posture in which a firm exhibits innovative, proactive, and risk-taking behaviors" (Jiang *et al.*, 2018, p. 46).

However, entrepreneurial orientation as a "business unit construct neglects that, as an orientation, EO may manifest (and perhaps necessarily so) at other levels of analysis" (Covin *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). Recent studies have highlighted the significance of understanding entrepreneurial orientation's attributes as individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO) (Covin *et al.*, 2020; Fatima and Bilal, 2019; Kraus *et al.*, 2019; Martins and Perez, 2020; Santos *et al.*, 2018, 2020). Martins and Perez (2020, p. 774) emphasized that "EO can refer to either the firm or individual level." Therefore, entrepreneurial orientation can be defined as a tendency by firms or individuals towards innovative, proactive, and risk-taking behaviors (Bolton and Lane, 2012; Covin *et al.*, 2020; Kraus *et al.*, 2019; Martins and Perez, 2020). We use social capital, entrepreneurial orientation, and individual entrepreneurial orientation in an interchangeable way in this paper.

This paper links the social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation literature from a theoretical standpoint (Burt, 2008, 2009; Coleman, 1988; Covin *et al.*, 2020; Fatima and Bilal, 2019; Martins and Perez, 2020; Santos *et al.*, 2020). Empirically, this study investigates an emerging and under-researched type of entrepreneur in Brazil, the religious entrepreneur. We define an entrepreneur as anyone who creates a company, religious or not (Corrêa *et al.*, 2017; Ramoglou *et al.*, 2020). By investigating 20 neo-Pentecostal pastors responsible for creating and managing Brazilian "business-churches," this paper addresses several research gaps, seeking to fill them partially.

The first gap relates to individual entrepreneurial orientation. According to Santos *et al.* (2020, p. 191), "over the last 40 years, the concept of EO has served as the basis for a stable but developing body of cumulative knowledge. However, research is still scarce at the level of individuals." This gap is even more apparent when individual entrepreneurial orientation is associated with the social capital literature. In a Scopus search for such papers published between 2017 and 2020, only one article was found (Fatima and Bilal, 2019).

Although Fatima and Bilal (2019, p. 407) "empirically added active social networking strategies as an action characteristic that link IEO and SME performance," they did not investigate the impact of network/capital characteristics on individual entrepreneurial orientation's attributes. Studies investigating the impact of networks on entrepreneurial orientation consider this construct from the organizational-level macro-perspective. In contrast, studies associating networks and individual entrepreneurial orientation neglect the influence of network characteristics and resources on their constituent elements (Fatima and Bilal, 2019; Ferreira *et al.*, 2017; Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2020; Mustafa *et al.*, 2018; Rodrigo-

Alarcón *et al.*, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2020). In addition, from a benchmarking perspective, this is an unexplored topic. Thus, this article places itself at the heart of these reflections. It seeks to investigate if and how the entrepreneurs' social capital influences their individual entrepreneurial orientation attributes. The following research questions are posed:

RQ1. Does social capital also influence entrepreneurial orientation's individual dimension (IEO)?

RQ2. How does entrepreneurs' social capital influence their individual entrepreneurial orientation?

The second gap relates to the absence of studies on entrepreneurial orientation in a developing-country context. Chakrabarti and Mondal (2018) highlighted the lack of entrepreneurial orientation research in Brazil. Finally, the third gap is empirical, relating to the study of Brazil's religious entrepreneurship (Corrêa *et al.*, 2017). Corrêa and Vale (2017, p. 12) stressed how "there are large gaps in Brazil, especially in the study of churches as enterprises and pastors as entrepreneurs." New research that seeks to understand structural factors "able to influence religious agents' entrepreneurial orientation" is necessary (Corrêa *et al.*, 2017, p. 338).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical background, encompassing social capital, entrepreneurial orientation, and individual entrepreneurial orientation, as well as presenting some theoretical propositions derived from the literature. Section 3 deals with the methodology, followed by data operationalization and analysis in Section 4. We discuss the results in Section 5 and the implications in Section 6. Section 7 points out the limitations and research directions, followed by a research agenda in Section 8. Finally, Section 9 provides concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Social capital (SC)

The literature on social capital has been developing in recent years (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2020; Sahasranamam and Nandakumar, 2020). Nevertheless, a unified theoretical core is still absent (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2020; Lang and Fink, 2019). The very definition of the construct is not consensual among researchers (Afandi *et al.*, 2017; Lang and Fink, 2019). For this work, social capital refers to: "the networks and relationships that entrepreneurs can rely on for support" (Sahasranamam and Nandakumar, 2020, p. 105); and the resources embedded in and among networks that can be mobilized through social interactions (Lang and Fink, 2019). In other words, we adopt a comprehensive definition of the construct (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017), encompassing "both the networks of relationships and the resources found and available in these networks" (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2020, p. 3).

2.2 Entrepreneurial orientation (EO)

Entrepreneurial orientation "is the set of organizational processes, methods, and styles that firms use to act entrepreneurially" (Chakrabarti and Mondal, 2018, p. 76). It is a strategic orientation that provides the basis for entrepreneurial decisions, especially those regarding market opportunities (Song *et al.*, 2017; Palmer *et al.*, 2019). Several researchers have emphasized that entrepreneurial orientation is an essential focus for entrepreneurship research (Al-Dhaafri and Alosani, 2020; Chakrabarti and Mondal, 2018; Covin *et al.*, 2020; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Martins and Perez, 2020; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2018; Seo, 2020). The construct is defined as a set of distinct behaviors, though related to each other, comprising three primary elements: innovativeness; proactiveness; and risk-taking (Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018; Seo, 2020; Song *et al.*, 2017).

2.3 Individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO)

The origin of "IEO is based on EO itself" (Kraus *et al.*, 2019, p. 1248). Entrepreneurial orientation is originally a construct at the organizational level (Fatima and Bilal, 2019). However, organizations are the result of individuals' behavior (Martins and Perez, 2020; Santos *et al.*, 2018). Thus, entrepreneurial orientation could refer to either the firm (EO) or the individual level (IEO) (Martins and Perez, 2020; Santos *et al.*, 2020). According to Santos *et al.* (2020, p. 193), individual entrepreneurial orientation "is based on the idea that entrepreneurs can be an economic resource when they implement their entrepreneurial ability to recognise, seek and successfully exploit viable business opportunities." Bolton and Lane (2012) asserted that the construct comprises three behaviors (innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking), i.e. the same ones used at the organizational level (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017; Mustafa *et al.*, 2018).

In the individual entrepreneurial orientation context, innovativeness relates to "explorative activities dealing with something new and unknown" (Kraus *et al.*, 2019, p. 1252). Schumpeter (1982) was a pioneer in highlighting the role of the entrepreneur in creating innovations: "Everyone is an entrepreneur only when he actually 'carries out new combinations'" (Schumpeter, 1982, p. 78); the carrying out of "new combinations we call 'enterprise;' the individual whose function it is to carry them out we call 'entrepreneurs'" (Schumpeter, 1982, p. 74). Proactivity refers to identifying new opportunities and possibilities in advance (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017; Kraus *et al.*, 2019). According to Kraus *et al.* (2019, p. 1252), "proactive behavior refers to efforts by the individual to scan their environment for weak signals and peripheral information to detect new trends or emerging situations." Finally, risk-taking is the "willingness to undertake tasks with uncertain outcomes" (Covin *et al.*, 2020, p. 3).

2.4 Social capital (SC) and entrepreneurial orientation (EO)

Dense networks' significance to entrepreneurship is not a new idea; it can be traced back to authors such as Coleman (1988), according to whom, the intricate relationships between individuals can provide several benefits. The first relates to obligations and reliability: "Individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time have more social capital on which they can draw" (Coleman, 1988, p. 103). Feelings of trust and the likelihood that obligations will be created and met over time will be stronger the more cohesive the network is: "We may say that [networks] closure creates trustworthiness in a social structure" (Coleman, 1988, p. 108). Another dense network benefit is the easy access to embedded resources; Coleman (1988, p. 104) exemplified how information can be acquired is through "the cohesive social relationships maintained for other purposes."

When associated with entrepreneurial orientation, several authors have emphasized how social structures' closure allows essential benefits (Covin *et al.*, 2020; Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017; Jiang *et al.*, 2018; Kaasa, 2009; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018): "The literature establishes that dense networks of strong ties allow for the transmission of tacit knowledge and identification of further opportunities" (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018, p. 196). Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) and Stam *et al.* (2014), for instance, highlighted how social cohesion stimulates trust between actors in a network. In turn, this trust can promote a company's entrepreneurial orientation (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018).

For example, networks and trust promote innovativeness: "SC can be considered a factor in innovation" (Kaasa, 2009, p. 219). The greater the network confidence, the higher the chances of entrepreneurs "investing more time and finances in other purposes," which include innovative activity (Kaasa, 2009, p. 9). Simultaneously, the higher the trust between the actors, the greater the probability of accessing tacit and valuable information. Dense networks can promote rapid information flows (mostly tacit) and enable more opportunities to be identified compared to isolated entrepreneurs (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). When coupled with entrepreneurs' knowledge, such information can promote their proactivity (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Finally, social capital improves the likelihood "of taking risky actions ahead of competitors" (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018, p. 198). Table 1 summarizes these propositions.

However, excessive network density can harm entrepreneurial orientation attributes (Bucholtz, 2019; Smith *et al.*, 2017). Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018, p. 3) emphasized that "locating in networks with greater density and strength in their connections" negatively influences their development, with greater structural cohesion creating "redundancy information problems, myopia, inertia, and internal blocking resulting from the firm's situation in a dense network with strong ties" (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018, p. 203). Furthermore, extreme structural cohesion could generate other little-explored related effects, such as decreased objectivity (García-Villaverde *et al.*, 2018), rising transaction costs (Smith *et al.*, 2017), inertia and stiffness (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018), and restricting entrepreneurial initiatives.

Regarding the entrepreneurial orientation attributes specifically, Afandi *et al.* (2017) and Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) asserted that excessively dense networks limit innovation activities, restricting the launching of new products or services. Further, redundancy information problems, myopia, inertia, and internal blocking can reduce both proactivity and new opportunities (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Finally, dense networks influence "firms to commit themselves to known technology and to the demands and preferences of their current customers, which again discourages the development of risk-taking behavior" (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018, p. 197). Table 2 summarizes these reflections.

2.5 Exploring theoretical propositions

These reflections suggest the existence of an apparent paradox, in which entrepreneurial orientation seems linked to a hitherto little-explored necessity for networks' relative equilibrium. The same could theoretically be the case when considering individual entrepreneurial orientation. Similar to the evidence for social capital and entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial networks theoretically must be dense to create resources in the individual entrepreneurial orientation context, but not so cohesive as to harm their

Dimension	Attribute	Proposition	Author(s)
Social capital (SC)	Dense networks...	...help in entrepreneurial orientation generation and manifestation	Hernández-Carrión *et al.* (2017), Kaasa (2009), and Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		...enable obligations and reliability and easy access to embedded resources	Coleman (1988)
		...promote speedy flows of information, mostly of the tacit type, and enable the identification of opportunities	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		...stimulate trust between actors. This trust can promote entrepreneurial orientation	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) and Stam *et al.* (2014)
		...impact innovative activity	Kaasa (2009)
		...boost proactivity when combined with the entrepreneurs' knowledge	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		...improve the likelihood of taking risky actions	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)

Table 1.
Dense networks' influence on entrepreneurial orientation

Dimension	Attribute	Proposition	Author(s)
Social capital (SC)	Excessively dense networks. . .	. . .restrict entrepreneurial initiatives	Afandi *et al.* (2017)
		. . .negatively influence the development of entrepreneurial orientation	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		. . .create redundancy information problems, myopia, inertia, and internal blocking	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		. . .limit innovation activities, restricting the launching of new products or services	Afandi *et al.* (2017) and Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		. . .can reduce both proactivity and new opportunities	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		. . .discourage the development of risk-taking behavior	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
		. . .decrease the likelihood of contact with people not included in them	Bucholtz (2019)

Table 2. Excessively dense networks' impact on entrepreneurial orientation

fundamental attributes (innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking). These reflections suggest the following research propositions:

P1. Cohesive networks stimulate individual entrepreneurial orientation.

P2. Excessively cohesive networks harm individual entrepreneurial orientation.

This highlights the negative consequences of excessive relational occlusion, which Afandi *et al.* (2017) called the "dark side" of trust. Another type of social capital gains prominence in this context, unrelate to dense networks' resources. Burt's (2009) central proposition is that actors with weak ties in dense and separate groups are in an advantageous position. Given that actors constitute the only route through which resources flow between networks, they could predict the "structural hole" (Burt, 2009), a term that illustrates situations in which gaps separate contacts embedded within groups with mutually added resources (Burt, 2008, 2009). Such "structural holes" are gaps that inhibit people's information flow. According to Burt (2009), social capital comprises resources derived from disconnected people's interaction. It refers to the opportunities obtained by entrepreneurs through their location and intermediation function, which leads to the following proposition:

P3. Intermediation through weak ties between people embedded in dense and separate networks provide entrepreneurs with valuable resources.

In reflections aside from individual entrepreneurial orientation, other authors have drawn attention to the need for network equilibrium. In a clothing industry study, Uzzi (1997) emphasized the existence of two types of ties: arm's-length ties (characterized as impersonal and cold, and by atomicity), seen in market relations in which "self-interest motivates actions" (Uzzi, 1997, p. 36); and embedded ties (expressing close relationships). Uzzi (1997) argued for the importance of maintaining equilibrium between both ties. Close ties provide time savings, trust, transfer of refined information, and agreements for joint problem-solving. However, beyond a certain point, these positive effects can lead to disadvantages (Uzzi, 1997). The abundance of close ties can make companies' performance impractical by isolating them from the information beyond their relationships' network (Uzzi, 1997). Uzzi (1997, p. 57) highlighted how "this question suggests a paradox of theoretical significance. The same processes by which embeddedness creates a requisite fit with the environment can paradoxically reduce an organization's ability to adapt." While arm' s-length ties "prevent the complete isolation of a network from market demands and new possibilities," embedded ties "enrich the network" (Uzzi, 1997, p. 59). These discussions lead to the following propositions:

P4. The benefits of networks extend to a given cohesion limit, after which networks begin to create disadvantages.

P5. The intermediation between dense and separate networks can help to prevent the excessive occlusion of entrepreneurs' networks.

P6. A combination of arm's-length ties and strong ties is optimal in entrepreneurial networks.

P7. Networks are characterized by a paradox. They must be dense enough to provide valuable resources and have arm 's-length ties to prevent the complete isolation of a network from market demands and new possibilities.

3. Methodological approach

3.1 Design

Qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher aims to understand in-depth an empirical phenomenon (Yin, 2015). This in-depth understanding is part of the methodological focus of this study. The case concerns evangelical neo-Pentecostal pastors responsible for creating and leading churches in Brazil (the neo-Pentecostal Church's growth is a growing phenomenon). The research method is a multiple case study, "one of the most powerful researchers' methods to realize both practical and theoretical aims" (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018, p. 10). Researchers have widely used this approach, "particularly in building new theory" (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018, p. 1). This article aims, in an exploratory way, to shed new light on under-researched influence of social capital on individual entrepreneurial orientation.

Two elements form the empirical analysis units. The first is the neo-Pentecostal pastor himself. Yin (2015b) pointed out that the individual is the primary analysis unit when a person is a case. Information about the individual is collected, and several of those individuals or cases could be included in a multiple case study. The second empirical unit of analysis is the social structure of the pastors' churches, i.e. the network and the Church's resources in which the pastor is embedded.

3.2 Case selection

The evangelical community has grown in Brazil, with 30 million people becoming evangelical between 1991 and 2010. Currently, 25% of the Brazilian population considers themselves evangelical (42 million people; about twice the population of New York). Among evangelicals, the number neo-Pentecostals has grown the most. Neo-Pentecostalism appeared in Brazil in the late 1970s and is considered the most important event in Christianity in the last century in Brazil (Mariano, 2013). Different authors have highlighted religious entrepreneurship's growth in a representative part of this community (Mariano, 2013; Pierucci, 2008).

This religious entrepreneurship is manifested in neo-Pentecostal pastors responsible for "enterprise churches" (Mariano, 2013), churches whose pastors adopt, in the religious context, competitive and business practices usually seen in other market segments to convert and retain the faithful. The present research includes evidence from 20 neo-Pentecostal pastors. The sample chosen was based on two fundamental criteria: pastors should handle the creation and management of neo-Pentecostal churches; and the snowball technique. The replication was literal, and the number of cases was based on theoretical saturation (Yin, 2015). Table 3 presents the pastors' characteristics (names have been changed for confidentiality).

3.3 Instruments

The data-collection instrument was an in-depth interview, one of the "most important for the case study" (Yin, 2015, p. 114). The interview script was revisited and improved throughout the data-collection process (Yin, 2015). Table 4 presents the interview script. The questions were based on the measures proposed by Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) and adapted to the religious entrepreneurial context.

4. Data operationalization

The general strategy was based on the theoretical propositions concerning social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation. The base-literature served as a reference through which empirical data were analyzed (Yin, 2015). The data categorization was considered as thematic units (Yin, 2015). Each sentence was distributed to non-exclusive records formed by the combination of the two theoretical categories of interest: social capital (dense networks) and innovativeness or proactiveness or risk-taking; and social capital (excessively dense network). Regarding the case report, "all in all, there is no specific way to report case study research which is accepted by all researchers" (Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018, p. 6). This study follows Yin's (2015) suggestion for multiple case study reports, in which there is a purely descriptive analysis between cases without exposing information about individual cases.

4.1 Results and analysis

Field data suggest that neo-Pentecostal churches' pastors and faithful operate in a dense social structure formed by strong affective-religious ties. Abreu stresses that this union is "one of the evangelical people characteristics. They unite with each other." Hilton highlights that the relationship between pastors and faithful resembles "urban tribes, whose members interact with each other." Nevertheless, it is clearer in the Church because it lasts a lifetime. According to Hilton, "a faith brother is considered more than a relative. Faithful do more for a

Pseudonym	Age (years)	Gender	Interview duration (in minutes)
Abreu	46	Male	116
Bernardo	37	Male	99
Carlos	42	Male	72
David	40	Male	101
Edson	52	Male	141
Fabricio	34	Male	103
Gustavo	49	Male	70
Hilton	58	Male	194
Hugo	39	Male	145
João	39	Male	177
Klayton	41	Male	196
Lafaiete	50	Male	45
Leandro	49	Male	142
Mateus	58	Male	136
Otávio	51	Male	100
Renato	39	Male	82
Silvio	52	Male	75
Tulio	63	Male	305
Vinícius	47	Male	72
Zélia	61	Female	45

Table 3. Characteristics of interviewed entrepreneurs

Dimension	Attribute	Open question (OQ)
Social capital (SC)	Dense networks	*OQ1*: How is your relationship with the Church's faithful and between the faithful themselves? *OQ2*: Do you help each other? How does this mutual aid occur?
	Excessively dense network	*OQ3*: What do you do to grow your Church? *OQ4*: How is your relationship and that of your faithful with other churches' pastors and members?
Individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO)	Innovativeness	*OQ5:* How many new religious products/services have you created in the past five years? *OQ6*: Have you made any changes to the products/services in the past five years?
	Proactiveness	*OQ7*: Have you ever taken any action or created a product/service that was later copied by other pastors? *OQ8*: How do you identify/create opportunities?
	Risk-taking	*OQ9*: What could be considered a risky attitude? *OQ10*: When you need to decide aspects that involve some degree of uncertainty, how do you usually react?
Social capital (SC) and individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO)	–	*OQ11:* How do your faithful influence your behavior?
	Innovativeness	*OQ12*: How do your relationships influence the creation of new products/services?
	Proactiveness	*OQ13*: Do you follow the needs/demands of your faithful and that of other churches? How does this follow-up occur?
	Risk-taking	*OQ14*: How do your relationships influence your decisions that involve some degree of uncertainty?

Table 4.
Interview script

brother of faith than for a relative." For Klayton, these same Church members "end up creating a family bond." For Bernardo, the Church is only sustainable through "well-established relationships."

Two distinct dimensions characterize faithful–pastor relationships. The first relates to their voluntary nature. Evangelicals mobilize a wide range of resources to help people. They do this "often without asking what is going on" (Hilton). The faithful "do what they have to do" (Carlos). The second dimension relates to members of the public who have access to limited mutual aid; it occurs spontaneously only between two groups of people. The first group is among the faithful themselves: "If a believer needs help, where does she go? She goes to Church" (Carlos). It is through the churches that "the faithful can supply any necessity" (Abreu). The second group is between pastors and their faithful (Abreu; Leandro; Mateus; Silvio): the faithful "help me, and I help them" (Leandro); while David stresses how the faithful may require help ("Tomorrow, the situation may be reversed. Life is a Ferris wheel").

Field data further suggest that this dense network encourages pastors to engage in initiatives representing their individual entrepreneurial orientation: "Do not think that the religious institution is different from any other institution. I can tell you that a Church is like any other private institution. There is no difference" (Hilton). An innovative religious example is prayers over the phone, called Tele-Prayer, Phono-Visit, or Tele-Blessing (Bernardo; João; Silvio). The service implies supplying divine aid at a distance: "We pray by phone" (Hugo). Pastors would be unlikely to offer this service were it not for the trusting relationship they have with their faithful. A second initiative refers to the services that pastors create to satisfy their faithful's various non-religious needs. That is why the faithful must be at the Church on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday (Gustavo; Silvio; Hugo).

"The audience we serve, our customers, are members of the Church" (Gustavo). Services include: marital counseling ["Did you fight with your wife? Then, I say: oh! Brother! You need advice. We encourage the couple to love each other" (Silvio)]; financial guidance ["There are people who need to be financially oriented" (Ulysses)]; job offers (Gustavo stresses how the Church has "three employment agencies to enjoy Church membership"); professional courses ["The Church offers courses in painting, cooking, and several others. Many believers have already certified" (Edson)]; entrepreneurial support ["The Church works with the business community, supporting the entrepreneur. Now, there is strong consultancy within our Church" (Gustavo)]; and medical assistance ["We offer ourselves to faithful speech therapists, nutritionists, general practitioners, among other specialties" (Silvio)].

The cohesive social structure also allows pastors access to valuable tacit information: "My missionary comes and says, that person from another Church needs it! She has already asked for it in her Church, and they did not pronounce out about it" (Zélia). Alternatively, someone "from the Church speaks, pastor! There is a problem with the guy's house. He asked if you can talk there" (Vinícius). This type of information encourages pastors' proactiveness. In part through these occurrences, pastors, anticipating competing churches, seek their institutions' growth: "We end up helping members of other churches. It happens a lot here, and it provides the Church's growth" (Zélia). According to Hilton, this kind of practice happens because of a "matter of opportunity." When pastors know through their churches' faithful about other churches' evangelicals needs, they invite them to their own institutions: "Are you not satisfied there? Come over here! How are you going to serve God with sorrow in your heart?" (Hilton).

Finally, occlusion from social structures encourages pastors to "take risky actions," e.g. when pastors elicit assistant pastors' help. Titular pastors choose assistant pastors based on their trust and strong-tie relationship. Auxiliary pastors support the churches' development as they meet the faithful's needs. However, they are also among the main reasons for them closing. Fights between titular and auxiliary pastors are among the main reasons for Church divisions (Edson; Fabricio; Hilton; Mateus; Renato; Tulio; Zélia): "I have seen many cases like that. Some people go with the dissident pastor, and the rest stay with the title pastor" (Edson); "I know a pastor where his assistant left the Church and took all the members with him" (Zélia). Pastors inevitably face a dilemma; they either delegate power to an auxiliary pastor at the risk of seeing their churches divided or assume all Church responsibilities at the risk of not growing them. Risks are inherent in both situations.

Other risky initiatives aim to prevent faithful loss: "A pastor's greatest fear is losing faithful" (Hilton); "If I lose faithful, the Church's income, tithing, offering, and revenue will fall" (Gustavo). To avoid the faithful's loss, pastors use the strong relationship with their faithful, exercising controlling behavior over them. Pastors feel like shepherds: "You must talk to me about which place you are going. You have to talk to me about what you are doing" (Carlos). Some pastors forbid their faithful to visit other churches: "You are not going! You are under a curse" (David). Although some believers obey, pastors are in danger of losing them to competing churches: "A large number of people are going astray because of this" (Carlos); "Sometimes, one member leaves, the other did not like what the pastor said, and leaves too" (Fabricio).

Field data suggest that structures' excessive cohesion limit pastors' individual entrepreneurial orientation. David exemplifies how there are Church members who "do not mix with anyone. They are closed, private groups." According to Hilton, "they do not even look at you." For Klayton, "you come across a person, and he does not greet with the Lord's peace. Some people did not greet me." Adventist Church members "do not mix. They are not ecumenical. Believers from the Jehovah's Witnesses can only marry other members of the same Church. They stay in that select group of people. They do not relate to other evangelical churches" (David). "Many churches think that their group is more important than others, causing social stratification and impeding the growth of the churches themselves" (Hilton). According to Carlos, the more closed churches' pastors retaliate when he tries to approach: "They do not mix; they do not get involved, because they have other customs, other thoughts." David stresses how "there are churches in a closed world, teaching the same thing. They end up not growing;" in his words, "an evangelical Church that does not open today to the market, the modern way the market is, does not grow."

The pastors criticize cohesive churches. They recognize the harms of excessive density intuitively. To avoid this, they undertake various actions, one of which is called "preaching points," "cell work," or "mini-church" (Hilton). A mini-church is like opening "a branch, what is called a franchise" (Hilton). Regarding preaching points, pastors choose leaders from among their Church's faithful. Abreu stresses how "no one grows without delegating responsibility." The choice of the faithful depends on the trust the pastor has in him/her. These "leaders invite neighbors to attend religious meetings organized by the faithful in their homes" (Abreu). According to Lafaiete, there is "more freedom for people who are not evangelical. The action is less restrictive than going directly to a Church." In these meetings, the leaders "teach the guests the word of God. There is praise; in the end, there is a snack. It is a whole welcoming movement" (Abreu). "Our target is people who have not yet converted to the Lord Jesus" (Otávio).

The mini-church aims to facilitate a transition process: "A person who has never been to an evangelical Church seems to have greater difficulty;" thus, "when he/she visits a religious meeting promoted by the neighbor, he/she gets to know the structure up close" (Lafaiete). David stresses how "mini-church work is a barn to gain a soul." For Hilton, "you start a mini-church with a family, a couple. In a little while, the group has eight or nine people gathering. Those people come, baptize, and become members." Thus, the cycle is restarted. The leader of the mini-church cannot perform certain activities; only the senior pastor can conduct them in the central Church. This represents an opportunity for faithful to give tithes to the pastor. Pastors speak to the faithful: "Take an envelope to your home. You collect the money. On supper day, you bring it." (Hilton). Another initiative that helps to prevent the closure of the network is the "couples to meeting", which is aimed "at non-believers" (Otávio): "We put on a slow song and invite people to dance. There, the two know each other" (Klayton); "I say to my Church: invite your neighbors" (Vinícius).

5. Discussion

Field evidence corroborates and expands on earlier reflections. Coleman (1988) emphasized that cohesive networks enable obligations and reliability and easy access to embedded resources. Evidence shows that pastors and the faithful share a dense mutual-aid structure. Mutual help occurs only at the limit of the Church itself: "If a believer needs help, where does she go? She goes to Church" (Carlos). Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018) highlighted how dense networks support rapid information flows (mostly tacit) and enable the identification of opportunities. This study presents evidence in this direction. It is through the strong relationship with the faithful that pastors obtain privileged information: "My missionary comes and says, that person from another Church needs it!" (Zélia). From this information, pastors find growth opportunities for their churches: it is a "matter of opportunity" (Hilton); "Are you not satisfied there? Come over here!" (Hilton).

Different authors have also highlighted how dense networks facilitate entrepreneurial orientation (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017; Kaasa, 2009; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Dense networks: stimulate trust between actors, which promotes entrepreneurial orientation (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018; Stam *et al.*, 2014); affect innovative activity (Kaasa, 2009); and boost proactivity, increasing the likelihood of taking risky actions (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018). Note that these authors were considering the influence of social capital on entrepreneurial orientation at the organizational level. These reflections prompted the creation of an exploratory theoretical proposition that cohesive networks also stimulate individual entrepreneurial orientation attributes (P1). Field evidence supports P1 (see Table 5 for details).

Several authors have also emphasized how excessive cohesion can: restrict entrepreneurial initiatives (Afandi *et al.*, 2017); negatively influence the development of entrepreneurial orientation (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018); create redundancy information problems, myopia, inertia, and internal blocking (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018); limit innovation activities, restricting the launching new products or services (Afandi *et al.*, 2017; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018); reduce both proactivity and new opportunities (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018); discourage the development of risk-taking behavior (Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018); and limit potential contacts with those not included in the network (Bucholtz, 2019). Such reflections, associated with social capital's influence on entrepreneurial orientation at the organizational level, led to the second theoretical proposition (P2) regarding excessively cohesive networks harming individual entrepreneurial orientation attributes.

	Innovativeness	Proactiveness	Risk-taking
P1. Cohesive networks stimulate individual entrepreneurial orientation	*Phono-visit* "We pray by phone." (Hugo) *Non-religious and innovative services in the religious context* *Marital counseling* "We encourage the couple to love each other." (Silvio) *Financial guidance* "There are people who need to be financially oriented" (Ulysses) *Job offers* The Church has "three employment agencies to enjoy Church membership." (Gustavo) *Professional courses* "The Church offers courses in painting, cooking, and several others." (Edson) *Entrepreneurial support* "There is strong consultancy within our Church" (Gustavo) *Medical aid* "We offer ourselves to faithful speech therapists, nutritionists, among others." (Silvio)	"My missionary comes and says, that person from another Church needs it! She has already asked for it in her Church, and they did not pronounce out about it." (Zélia) "We end up helping members of other churches. It happens a lot here, and it provides the Church's growth." (Zélia) "Are you not satisfied there? Come over here! How are you going to serve God with sorrow in your heart?" (Hilton)	*Auxiliary pastors* "I have seen many cases like that. Some people go with the dissident pastor, and the rest stay with the title pastor." (Edson) "I know a pastor where his assistant left the Church and took all the members with him." (Zélia) *To prevent the loss of believers* "You must talk to me about which place you are going. You have to talk to me about what you are doing." (Cristiano)

Table 5. Evidence related to innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking

Field data validate P2. Excessively strong social ties limit entrepreneurial initiatives (Afandi *et al.*, 2017). David emphasizes that "there are churches in a closed world . . . They end up not growing." Due to their narrow focus, pastors do not explore opportunities in the religious market, nor do they employ innovative and proactive behavior: "Many churches think that their group is more important than others, causing social stratification and impeding the growth of the churches themselves" (Hilton). The faithful and pastors of occluded churches do not establish contact with people outside their congregational structures. There are Church members who "do not mix with anyone" (David). This corroborates Bucholtz's (2019) reflections and also confirms P4. The benefits of networks extend to a given cohesion limit, after which networks presents disadvantages. According to David, "an evangelical Church that does not open today to the market, the modern way the market is, does not grow."

To grow, pastors connect people embedded in multiple networks. Two central actions enable this connection: "preaching points," "cell work," or "mini-church" (Hilton); and helping couples to meet. Through both, pastors obtain essential benefits. Initially, they gain new believers, increasing the number of believers and their income (P3): "Take an envelope to your home. You collect the money" (Hilton). In turn, by gaining new believers, pastors prevent their Church from excessive occlusion (P5). Evidence suggests that the development should be more significant as more arm's-length and strong ties are formed by the business-churches (P6 and P7). Figure 1 illustrates these reflections.

As shown in Figure 1, dense networks (R1) foster pastors' individual entrepreneurial orientation (R2). In turn, the pastors' individual entrepreneurial orientation (R2) enables new faithful to be found (R3). These new faithful (R3) prevent excessive occlusion and provide benefits derived from the intermediation between networks (R4). While seeking to enjoy benefits from the intermediation, pastors also explore benefits obtained from relational densification. For instance, Bernardo emphasizes that the Church is only sustainable through "well-established relationships": it is with strong "relationships between the faithful that the Church grows with stability." This highlights both how social capital influences individual entrepreneurial orientation and how individual entrepreneurial orientation also influences social capital, suggesting important theoretical implications.

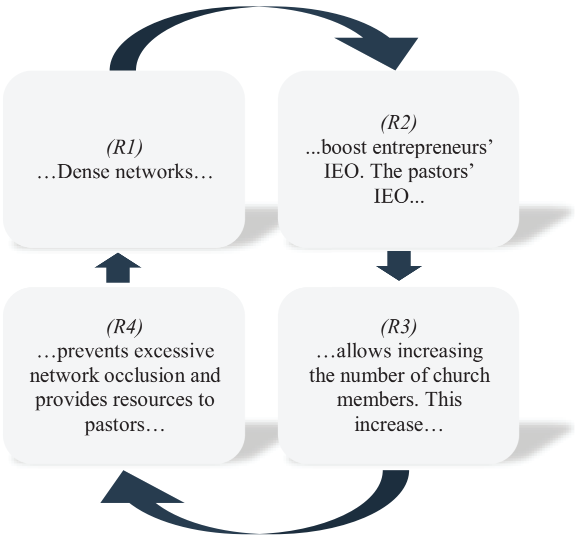

Figure 1.
Recursivity between social capital (SC) and individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO)

6. Implications

6.1 Theoretical implications

Theoretical implications are fourfold. First, this paper builds exploratory theoretical propositions on the influence of social capital on individual entrepreneurial orientation. These propositions can be explored and expanded in several entrepreneurial contexts given the lack of studies examining social capital's influence on individual entrepreneurial orientation from a benchmarking perspective. Second, this article highlights the significance of dense networks for individual entrepreneurial orientation creation and manifestation, thus expanding the literature beyond cohesive networks' relevance only to the construct's organizational dimension (entrepreneurial orientation). Moreover, by identifying how dense networks influence individual entrepreneurial orientation's dimensions in the religious entrepreneurship context, this paper responds to recent papers emphasizing the importance of understanding each dimension in isolation (Fatima and Bilal, 2019; Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.*, 2018).

Third, this article suggests that a relative paradox may characterize individual entrepreneurial orientation. The manifestation of individual entrepreneurial orientation attributes is related to the entrepreneur's social structure. Entrepreneurs' networks must be dense enough to stimulate innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking, but not so cohesive as to harm their essential attributes. Effective network adjustment is therefore necessary for individual entrepreneurial orientation, related to entrepreneurs' ability to combine resources both from network closure and the structural hole (social capital) SC (P7). Considering Uzzi's (1997) embeddedness paradox analogy, we suggest a relational equilibrium paradox. The effects of the closure of the individual entrepreneurial orientation tend to be positive up to a given occlusion limit. Finally, this paper suggests the existence of recursion between social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation. Dense networks influence individual entrepreneurial orientation, while individual entrepreneurial orientation affects the social structure of pastoral entrepreneurs.

6.2 Practical implications

This article has the following practical/managerial implications. First, we provide important findings that managers and practitioners should consider regarding the interplay between social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation to identify the best practices regarding organizational management. In this context, we suggest the significance of incorporating social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation themes in entrepreneurial education and training programs. Second, this article suggests that entrepreneurs should consider the characteristics and resources of the networks in which they are embedded to improve entrepreneurial performance. Field data indicates the network's importance for entrepreneurial orientation attributes. Religious entrepreneurs, and possibly those in other emerging contexts, must immerse themselves in dense networks, but not so cohesive as to impair their innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking. Third, data suggest that entrepreneurial performance is the positive result of the combination of social capital and entrepreneurial orientation. In this sense, religious entrepreneurs, or others, should focus on the combination of both constructs. Fourth, as evidenced in this research, social capital influences the individual dimension of entrepreneurial orientation, and vice versa. Thus, entrepreneurs must pay attention both to the different aspects that impact this mutual influence and to their combined results. A good practice that would allow entrepreneurs to perform better in their businesses would be to identify those associated with entrepreneurial orientation's dimensions, associating them with their influence on relationships, and vice versa. Entrepreneurs could also investigate what activities densify or increase their social structure, investigating how they interfere in entrepreneurial practices (innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking). Fifth, this article expands the knowledge of the religious entrepreneurial context in Brazil, stressing religious entrepreneurship's suitability as an empirical research field for business scholars; such studies remain scarce. Thus, our paper provides practitioners with a deeper understating and various practices related to innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking, considering social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation in an emerging representative economy.

7. Limitations and direction for future research

The main limitations of this work are as follows. The main limitation is related to the cases investigated. The research did not incorporate evidence from pastors of fully occluded churches. Pastors of such churches have not authorized the collection of evidence about their entrepreneurial behavior. The impact of excessive density on individual entrepreneurial orientation was found based on other pastors' interpretations. Another limitation refers to the semi-structured interviews' restricted use. It was not possible to triangulate other findings obtained. A third limitation refers to the restriction of data to pastors only. The study could be improved through triangulation with data obtained from the faithful. A fourth limitation relates to the recognition of churches only as productive enterprises. Although neo-Pentecostal churches have entrepreneurial characteristics, they also have other ethical, religious, and doctrinal aspects not explored here.

Future studies could address such limitations and expand our conclusions. Such studies could investigate: the influence of social capital on entrepreneurial orientation in different contexts; occluded ventures (religious or not), specifically examining the impacts of excessive obstruction on entrepreneurial orientation, and vice-versa; the recursion between social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation longitudinally; the impact of social capital/individual entrepreneurial orientation on entrepreneurial performance, analyzing how the relationship between social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation influences entrepreneurial results; the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and individual entrepreneurial orientation while researching the associated impact of social capital on both; and entrepreneurs' emotional aspects (Karia, 2020).

8. Proposed research agenda

This article provides theoretical propositions and suggestions for new research. Further, it proposes a theoretical research agenda. Table 6 presents the theoretical approach, the dimensions, several research opportunities, and suggestions for related literature.

9. Concluding remarks

This article has sought to investigate if and how entrepreneurs' social capital influences their innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking. Field evidence reveals the following. First, social capital influences individual entrepreneurial orientation (social capital impacts each of individual entrepreneurial orientation's dimensions). Second, a relative paradox characterizes social capitals' impact on individual entrepreneurial orientation. Networks must be dense enough to stimulate religious entrepreneurs' individual entrepreneurial orientation but not so dense as to harm innovativeness, proactivity, and risk-taking; relative social network equilibrium is necessary. Third, individual entrepreneurial orientation influences social capital; there is evidence of recursion between social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation. Finally, this study is one of the first to examine social capital and individual entrepreneurial orientation, considering innovativeness, proactivity and risk-taking, which represents a neglected field by benchmarking studies. This paper also

Approach	Dimension	Open question (OQ)	Related literature
Social capital (SC)/ individual entrepreneurial orientation (IEO)	Networks on IEO	*OQ1:* How does excessive occlusion affect entrepreneurs' innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk-taking?	Bucholtz (2019), García-Villaverde *et al.* (2018), Seo (2020), and Smith *et al.* (2017)
		OQ2: How do family ties affect the EO and IEO of family businesses and entrepreneurs, respectively?	Chakrabarti and Mondal (2018)
	IEO on networks	*OQ3*: How does each dimension of IEO affect the densification of the entrepreneurial network?	Rodrigo-Alarcón *et al.* (2018)
	SC/IEO on results	*OQ4*: How do SC and IEO impact entrepreneurial results?	Chakrabarti and Mondal (2018) and Seo (2020)

Table 6.
Proposed research agenda

highlights future research opportunities for scholars and practitioners to investigate in-depth other elements related to this relationship and identify best practices considering processes and performance from the organizational management perspective.

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