Passing On the Good Vibes: Entrepreneurs’ Social Support

Mette Søgaard Nielsen
Assistant Professor
University of Southern Denmark
Universitetsparken 1, 6000 Kolding, DK
0045 6550 1479
E-mail: mesn@sam.sdu.dk

Abstract
This study investigates whether the emotional support individuals have available from their social network influences the likelihood that they in turn provide instrumental support to entrepreneurs they know: if they pass on the good vibes. Hypotheses are tested on a Danish dataset consisting of individuals who know a nascent entrepreneur (N=392). The paper demonstrates how emotional support made available to individuals from their social network impacts the likelihood of them providing entrepreneurs with instrumental support. Furthermore, findings show how the relation between available emotional support and the provision of instrumental support depends on culturally defined norms associated with various role-relationships and gender. The study contributes to existing theory by changing the perspective from focusing only on differences in characteristics between entrepreneurs to how the individuals in entrepreneurs’ social networks differ in characteristics and how this affects their social support to entrepreneurs. Furthermore, a significant contribution is the demonstration of how the provision of social support to entrepreneurs is contingent on different role-relationships.

Keywords
Social network, entrepreneurial network, social ties, social capital, nascent entrepreneur.
Introduction

Social support is understood as the resources that people obtain from their social relationships and use when they face difficulties (Kim, Longest and Aldrich, 2013). Prior research demonstrates how support obtained from social surroundings has behavioral consequences and affects individuals’ likelihood of entering the entrepreneurial process and performing during it (Stam and Elfring, 2014). However, not only consequences, but also antecedents of support, have been investigated in prior studies of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs’ access to resources and support through networks has been explained from various perspectives (Jenssen, 2001), including combinations of structural, relational, and individual ego-based explanations. Structural explanations focus on structural characteristics of the network such as network size and density (Jenssen, 2001; Klyver, Hunter and Watne, 2012), while relational explanations focus on dyadic characteristics of relationships, including tie strength (Acheampong, Narteh and Rand, 2017; Semrau and Werner, 2013) and role-relationships (Birley, 1986; Arregle et al., 2013). Finally, individual ego-based explanations focus on how characteristics of the entrepreneur explain access to resources and social support, for example entrepreneurs’ social skills (Jenssen, 2001; Sigmund, Semrau and Wegner 2015). These various kinds of network explanations all perceive entrepreneurial behavior primarily as a function of the entrepreneur and his or her environment.

This study builds on those previous findings by acknowledging the explanatory power of ego-centered characteristics, but further claims that entrepreneurs’ access to support is not only a function of the characteristics of individual entrepreneurs or the network, but also a function of the characteristics of other network members (Samter, 1994); those who actually provide support to entrepreneurs. Thus, entrepreneurs with similar characteristics and similar network structures might obtain various types and
levels of support from their networks depending on abilities, knowledge, and motivation of network members – their support providers. With theories of generalized exchange (Baker and Bulkley, 2014; Molm, Collett and Schaefer, 2007) and a specific focus on upstream reciprocity (Baker, 2014; Nowak and Roch, 2007), it is argued that individuals with high levels of available emotional support are more likely to provide instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs within their networks; individuals provide support because they feel good (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Moreover, by building on the argument of role alignment theory (Biddle, 1986; Kim et al., 2013) with its focus on how support depends on the expectations ascribed to different roles by individuals, the study discusses how this process of ‘passing on the good vibes’ depends on the culturally defined norms and expectations associated with various roles as well as gender.

The study makes three important contributions to entrepreneurship research. First, theoretically, the understanding of social support processes is extended from being only a function of entrepreneurs’ characteristics and their networks to also being a function of characteristics of support providers in the networks. Second, it is demonstrated how ‘passing on the good vibes’ depends on culturally defined norms and expectations associated with various roles and support providers’ gender. Third, focusing on support providers’ peers provides a unique opportunity to understand the importance of entrepreneurs’ indirect ties. The theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.
Figure 1

Theoretical Model

AVAILABLE SUPPORT
(to the support provider/
the Respondent)

POTENTIAL SUPPORT PROVIDER
(the Respondent)

ENTREPRENEUR
(recipient of the provided
support)

Gender

Family

Friends

Special person

Available emotional support

Provided instrumental support
Theory: Entrepreneurship and Social Support

While the conventional perspective on entrepreneurial networks has mainly focused on social structures (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Arregle et al., 2013), other research streams take into account the exchanges and co-creation within networks. Social exchange theory focuses on interpersonal exchanges and studies how actors in networks are interdependent (Cook, 1977; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994; Pellinen, 2014). Similarly, theories of co-creation deals with how things are created collectively in networks (Fisher, 2012). This supports the need for a perspective with focus on what is being exchanged among actors; the content and meaning attached to relationships (Neergaard et al., 2005). Brüderl and Preisendörfer (1998) show how both emotional and instrumental support from spouses increases the probability of survival and growth. Likewise, other studies show how entrepreneurs rely strongly on family, friends and other kinship relations for various types of support (2007; Arregle et al., 2013). However, many fail to address the support aspect in empirical analyses and instead focus on structural analyses of the network (Davidsson and Honig, 2003). This underlines the need for studies focusing more specifically on social support.

Various types of social support

This study follows Kim et al. (2013: 2) in understanding social support “… as resources people accrue from their social relations and employ when addressing difficult issues in their lives”, and applies the division between emotional and instrumental support from Pierce et al. (1996). Instrumental support is provision of help or service as well as information and advice. Emotional support, by contrast, is understood as individuals’ encouragement of others and expression of love and liking.
Furthermore, this study distinguishes between available and enacted social support (Tardy, 1985). While available support refers to the perceived quantity and quality of support the individual has access to, enacted support refers to the actual utilization and expression of support (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010; Tardy, 1985; Klyver and Schenkel, 2013). Depending on one’s perspective, enacted support can be either received or provided.

Because the literature on entrepreneurial networks has mainly investigated how information and help, operationalized as instrumental support, impact the startup process (Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Kim et al., 2013), this study investigates what motivates support providers to provide entrepreneurs with instrumental support. While the focus is on instrumental support provided to entrepreneurs, available emotional support from support providers will be used as a predictor, because the ‘passing on the good vibes’ phenomenon is essentially an emotional process, where ‘good vibes’ are emotional by nature.

**Hypothesis Development**

**Passing on the good vibes**

Compared to direct exchange, generalized exchange or generalized reciprocity (Baker and Bulkley, 2014) occurs when individuals repay favors to someone other than those they initially received favors from (Molm, Collett and Schaefer, 2007). This system of generalized exchanges is shown to enhance social solidarity more than direct exchanges in terms of bonding between persons and the groups they are part of (Molm et al., 2007) and to have significant influences in several future interactions through ripple effects (Fowler and Christakis, 2010) and a strengthened impact over time (Baker and Bulkley, 2014). Generalized exchange or reciprocity can take place in different ways, but for the purposes of this paper, focus is on upstream reciprocity (Baker, 2014). Upstream reciprocity describes the situation where
“an individual feels obliged to reciprocate another’s actions, not by directly rewarding his benefactor, but by benefitting another participant implicated in a social exchange situation with his benefactor and himself” (Ekeh, 1974: 48). According to Nowak and Roch (2007) upstream reciprocity is driven by positive emotions such as gratitude.

Emotions and affect can be viewed as “semantically similar terms for the general constellation of individuals’ feeling responses” (Barsäde and Gibson, 1998: 82). They impact the way the external world is perceived in that positive affect is more likely to be associated with individuals perceiving objects, other persons, and ideas as more favorable (Isen, 2002). Isen and Levin (1972) found that individuals who experience positive emotions are more likely to help others, while Fredrickson (2001) found that positive affect makes individuals interact with their environment and take part in activities they would otherwise have refrained from. This is also known as the ‘Feel-Good, Do-Good’ hypothesis arguing that individuals who experience positive affect, feelings, and happiness are more likely to help and be generous to others (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Studies in social psychology show that received emotional support is related to emotional well-being and positive affect (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). It can therefore be argued that individuals who receive emotional support are more likely to experience positive affect and emotional well-being, and are therefore more likely to help and support others because of upstream reciprocity and the ‘Feel-Good, Do-Good’ hypothesis (Baker, 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Nowak and Roch, 2007).

Therefore, it is expected that individuals with high levels of available emotional support are more likely to provide instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs within their network, because the available emotional support triggers upstream reciprocity.
Hypothesis 1: Individuals with high levels of available emotional support are more likely to provide instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs.

Role-relation contingencies

The question however remains as to whether this is a universal effect or if there are contingencies. Specifically, building on recently developed role alignment theory (Kim et al., 2013), this effect is expected to be dependent on culturally defined expectations and norms associated with various roles.

Role alignment theory builds on traditional ways of studying roles and networks (Biddle, 1986) by combining the identification of different roles with what is expected in terms of support from these specific roles; if support is aligned with the support expectations (Kim et al., 2013). To understand how emotional support from different role-relations influences individuals, it is necessary to extend the role-alignment argument, because emotional support functions differently than more task-related types of support, such as help and advice, which were the focus of the study by Kim et al. (2013). Emotional support can be provided by everyone and is not dependent on whether someone has the ability to support. Therefore, it is expected that the influence from emotional support is different than task-related types of support. We know from previous studies that receiving a gift from someone unexpected, a sign of emotional support, has a greater effect of creating positive feelings than receiving a gift from someone when it was expected (Kurtz, Wilson and Gilbert, 2007), and similarly that reward structures do not work when they are expected (Fliessbach et al., 2007). Therefore, unlike task-related types of support, it is argued that emotional support will have a larger effect when it is unexpected; when it is not role-aligned.
This study focuses on emotional support from three role-relationships: family, friends, and a special person, and arguments for the influence of each role will be provided in the following sections.

The family role is often argued to be supportive (Arregle et al., 2013) and to have a ‘long-term generalized reciprocity’ (Stewart, 2003), implying that family members are expected to be unconditionally supportive of other family members’ actions (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Furthermore, family members provide a sense of belonging and entrepreneurs are often dependent on family members (Anderson et al., 2005). In summary, emotional support from family members is unconditionally expected.

On the other hand, friends are expected to cooperate, but not to provide unconditional support. In contrast to business people, who are expected to maximize utility and be highly motivated by instrumental concerns, true friends are not expected to be instrumentally motivated (Grayson, 2007). Instead, they are expected to interact voluntarily rather than in an instrumental manner and are expected to share problems and concerns. Interactions among friends are often intrinsically oriented, such that the relationship is maintained because it is valuable in its own right (Grayson, 2007). Therefore, there are expectations of support in a friend relationship, but not to the same degree and not unconditionally, as in a family relationship.

While these features are affiliated with the friend role, they are even more prevalent for a special person. ‘Special person’ is understood as “…a close friend whose good opinion or advice you value so highly you would go to some effort to seek his or her views” (Nelson, 1989: 11). Thus, a special person is ‘a best friend’ with whom you are especially strongly connected and share extraordinary trust compared to your other good friends.
Accordingly, it is argued that emotional support available from family is less likely to be associated with individuals providing instrumental support to entrepreneurs in their network compared to emotional support available from friends or a special person. The reason for this is that support from family is unconditionally expected and therefore does not have the same effect of upstream reciprocity, where the triggering of positive affect and emotions leads to providing support to someone else, compared to support from friends or a special person, which is expected to a lesser degree and thus triggers positive affect and emotions more.

_Hypotheses 2ab: The effects of individuals’ available emotional support on the likelihood to provide instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs is a) larger when available emotional support comes from friends than from family and b) larger when available emotional support comes from a special person than from family_

**Gender moderation**

Apart from the role-alignment moderation on the impact of available emotional support on support providers’ likelihood to provide instrumental support, it is also suggested that support provider’s gender moderates the relationship between available emotional support and provided instrumental support. In other words, it is expected that the mechanism of upstream reciprocity (Baker, 2014) will play out differently between genders.

Studies show that women and men build different types of networks over time. Women are more likely to seek emotional closeness and thereby build relations with people to whom they feel closely and emotionally attached (Liebler and Sandefur, 2002). This often results in women having more family
members in their networks compared to men (Moore, 1990; Agneessens et al., 2006). Accordingly, women allocate attention to and emphasize support from different parts of their networks. Specifically, women allocate more attention to support obtained from family members compared to their counterparts (Klyver, 2011). They are also more affected by negative emotions coming from family in that if they experience strain from family (Schuster et al., 1990), their moods are negatively affected (Walen and Lachman, 2000), and therefore their feeling of upstream reciprocity will be negatively affected. In general, women seem to be more emotionally affected by the problems of network members than men (Rook, Dooley and Catalano, 1991). Thus, because of women’s increased reliance, emotional attachment to, and emphasis on family support, they are more likely to pass on the good vibes they receive from family members compared to men. Thus, it is expected that the effect of available emotional support from family on the likelihood to provide instrumental support is stronger for women than for men.

Hypothesis 3a: The effect of available emotional support from family on individuals’ likelihood of providing instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs in their networks is stronger for women than for men.

With regard to gender differences concerning interactions with friends, men tend to be in larger groups, whereas women are in smaller groups with dyadic relationships (Vigil, 2007) as well as intimate relationships (Umberson et al., 1996). In general, men are more likely to be part of groups with dominance hierarchies between group members, whereas women more often engage themselves in dyadic relationships of equality (Baumeister and Sommer, 1997; Benenson, Apostoleris, and Parnass, 1997). An explanation for this may be found in the argument that, in childhood socialization processes,
girls are encouraged to express emotions more than boys, which may lead to increased intimacy and stronger relationship building, whereas boys are encouraged to be competitive (Umberson et al., 1996). Vigil (2007: 155) specifically concluded that “men preferred more friends at a cost of lower intimacy […] and women preferred higher intimacy at a cost of fewer friends.” Because men socialize in larger groups, this is where their feelings of mutuality will reside, and they allocate more attention and rely more heavily on support from their group of friends. Women, on the other hand, do not similarly rely on the feeling of mutuality from a group of friends, but identify more with a dyadic relation with one special person and rely more heavily on emotional support from that special person.

Therefore, the association between individuals’ available emotional support from friends and their likelihood of providing instrumental support to entrepreneurs within their networks is expected to be stronger for men. This is because men traditionally rely more heavily on the support from their group of friends, and the mechanism of upstream reciprocity is therefore stronger when men are supported by friends. Likewise, the association between individuals’ available emotional support from a special person and their likelihood of providing instrumental support to entrepreneurs in their networks is expected to be stronger for women, because women, compared to men, allocate more attention and rely more heavily on support from a special person, and therefore their feeling of reciprocity is greater.

_Hypothesis 3b_: The effect of available emotional support from friends on individuals’ likelihood of providing instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs within their networks is weaker for women than for men.
Hypothesis 3c: The effect of available emotional support from a special person on individuals’ likelihood of providing instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs within their networks is stronger for women than for men.

Methodology

Data: Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurship

The dataset, Danish Alter Study of Entrepreneurship (DASE), consists of a representative sample of adults between 18 and 64 years. Stratified randomly based on age, gender, and region, a sampling frame of households in Denmark was contacted.

In total, 15,151 landlines and mobile phones were called, and contact was made with 1,742 individuals (response rate 11.5%). Respondents were asked two screening questions: “Do you personally know someone in the process of starting a business?” and “Do you personally know someone who recently started a business?” These screening questions were adapted from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project and have successfully been applied in previous studies (Kwon and Arenius, 2010). Among the contacted respondents, 151 knew someone in the process of starting a business and 357 knew someone who had started a business recently adding up to 508 individuals who know a nascent entrepreneur (29 % of the 1,742 individuals who were asked the screening questions). Due to missing values, 392 respondents were useable for analysis. A missing data analysis indicates that there are no variables with more than 5% missing values indicating that there is no pattern in the missing values (Schafer, 1999).

This is a representative sample of potential support providers, and by screening them rather than entrepreneurs, as in traditional surveys on entrepreneurship (e.g. Davidsson and Gordon, 2011), the
access to information on ‘who provides entrepreneurs with social support’ is increased. Support providers know more about themselves than do the entrepreneurs to whom they provide support. Thus, this generates an opportunity to obtain much more sophisticated answers to the question of who provides entrepreneurs with support.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable Provided Instrumental Support (House, 1981) was measured using one item. Respondents were asked: “Have you provided specific advice to the person while starting up his or her business?” Answer categories were ‘Yes’ (1) or ‘No’ (0). Logistic regression models with two other types of separate support items (Provided Financial Support and Willingness to Support), were used as robustness tests, and stable results were obtained in support of the model.

Independent and moderating variables

Although prior research suggests that multiplexity in roles influences entrepreneurs’ access to resources from their peers (Rooks et al., 2016), most people have a dominating role towards most peers, justifying a uniplex approach to roles.

For the independent variable, Zimet et al.’s (1988) 12-item scale was used to measure support providers’ Available Emotional Support from family, friends, and special person. These are general categories and not specific persons, but functional role theory states that different roles are associated with different social positions and expectations (Biddle, 1986), and thus people expect certain things from family because of cultural expectations. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging
from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The Cronbach Alphas are .84, .88, and .82 for family, friends, and special person, respectively.

The category of ‘a special person’ is less clear compared with the categories of ‘family’ and ‘friends.’ To validate the operationalization of a special person, additional empirical data was collected on how people perceive a special person in a Danish context. A sample of 84 students was asked to list three keywords that they associate with ‘a special person.’ This resulted in 246 keywords, which were content-analyzed and coded into first level categories. The three most frequent first level categories describing a special person are supportive (25 %), trusting (18 %), and security (16 %). This is similar to Nelson’s (1989) definition of a special person as “…a close friend whose good opinion or advice you value so highly you would go to some effort to seek his or her views” (p. 11). In Danish, the categories of ‘a special person’ and ‘friends’ are clearly distinguishable, where ‘a special person’ refers to one specific identifiable individual with whom the respondent feels a particularly close relation, whereas ‘friends’ is a broader category and covers a group of friends that are not necessarily identified.

The moderating variable Support Provider Gender was coded 0 for male and 1 for female.

Control variables

Controls were added for entrepreneurs’ and support providers’ age measured as exact age. Because men and women are not normally equally likely to receive support (Agneessens et al., 2006), a control variable was included for Entrepreneur Gender with male (0) and female (1). Since Family Relations often play an important role during the startup process (Klyver, 2007), a control for whether the role-relation was a family member (1) or not (0) was added. Two controls for tie strength (Granovetter, 1973) were included, as tie strength potentially explains what is being exchanged among individuals
(Agneessens et al., 2006). In the variable *Strength: Frequency*, respondents are asked how often they meet or are in contact with the entrepreneur with ‘daily’ (1), ‘several times a week’ (2), ‘once a week’ (3), ‘monthly’ (4), ‘less’ (5). *Strength: Emotional Attachment* measures how close the respondent feels to the entrepreneur with ‘distanced’ (1), ‘something in between’ (2) and ‘close’ (3). To control for differences in the socio-economic status, *Household Income* (annual gross income before taxes) and *Employment Status* are also included as control variables.

**Findings**

Table 1 provides the Spearman correlations and shows that the dependent variable *Provided Instrumental Support* is positively correlated with *Family Relation* (r=.128; p<0.05), *Strength: Frequency* (r=.338; p<0.01), *Strength: Emotional Attachment* (r=.147; p<0.01), and *Employment Status* (r=.148; p<0.01). None of the other variables were significantly correlated with *Provided Instrumental Support*. The highest correlation among the variables is .615 between *Strength: Frequency* and *Strength: Emotional Attachment*, suggesting that multicollinearity is not a serious concern.
Table 1

Spearman Correlations

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<th>10.</th>
<th>11.</th>
<th>12.</th>
<th>13.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Provided instrumental support (0 = No 1= Yes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Entrepreneur gender (0=Male, 1=Female)</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Entrepreneur age</td>
<td>0.026</td>
<td>.102*</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Support provider gender (0=Male, 1=Female)</td>
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<td>.207**</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Support provider age</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>.513**</td>
<td>.145**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<td>6. Family relation</td>
<td>.128*</td>
<td>.115*</td>
<td>.210**</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<td>7. Strength: frequency</td>
<td>.338**</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>-0.096</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>.364**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Strength: emotional attachment</td>
<td>.147**</td>
<td>0.080</td>
<td>0.057</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.070</td>
<td>.333**</td>
<td>.615**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Income</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>-0.062</td>
<td>.213**</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>.363**</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Employment status</td>
<td>-.148**</td>
<td>-0.068</td>
<td>-.199**</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>-.203**</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.070</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>-.377**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Available emotional support: family</td>
<td>-0.061</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>.189**</td>
<td>0.095</td>
<td>-0.040</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>.105*</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Available emotional support: friends</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
<td>-0.020</td>
<td>.136**</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>.198**</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>.432**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Available emotional support: special person</td>
<td>-0.043</td>
<td>.134**</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>.261**</td>
<td>-0.041</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>.102*</td>
<td>0.094</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>.450**</td>
<td>.428**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01 (two-tailed)
Studies relying solely on self-reported measures run a risk of common method bias. Due to criticism against the usefulness of post hoc tests (Conway and Lance, 2010), this study has taken proactive precautions in the design of the questionnaire to avoid common method bias. Conway and Lance recommend (2010) four different steps to proactively reduce the risk of common method bias. First, the use of self-reported measures is appropriate for this study, as studies show that perception of social support influences individuals more than actual support (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010; Klyver, Honig and Steffens, forthcoming). Focus in this paper is not whether the entrepreneur feels supported, but instead whether the support provider believes her or he has supported the entrepreneur. Second, to strengthen construct validity, an established measure by Zimet et al. (1988) was used to measure the independent variable Available Emotional Support, and the three different categories of family, friends and a special person all had strong Cronbach Alphas of .84, .88 and .82. Third, high correlations can be an indication of overlap between items. As our independent variable Available Emotional Support is a well-established measure, this is not considered to be a problem, and the observed correlations are regarded as naturally occurring and not due to overlap between constructs. Fourth, different anchors for the scales were used, some scales were reverse coded, identical scales were spread out in the questionnaire, and the anonymity of respondents was protected.

Multivariate Statistics

Binary logistic regressions were completed with 5 models predicting the level of Provided Instrumental Support (Table 2). Model 1 shows the results of the control variables. They reveal that Strength: Frequency (β=.81; p<0.01) is significantly and positively related to Provided Instrumental Support.
In hypothesis 1, it was argued that individuals with high levels of available emotional support are more likely to provide instrumental support to entrepreneurs. In model 2, the three independent variables were included. The model partially supports hypothesis 1, because receiving emotional support from friends has a positive effect on support providers’ propensity to provide instrumental support to entrepreneurs in their networks as expected (β=.44; p<0.05). However, receiving emotional support from a special person does not have a significant effect on the provision of instrumental support. Surprisingly, with regard to emotional support from family, a significant negative effect on support providers’ likelihood of providing instrumental support (β= -.27; p<0.1) was found.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables</th>
<th>Model 1 Beta</th>
<th>Model 2 Beta</th>
<th>Model 3 Beta</th>
<th>Model 4 Beta (Men)</th>
<th>Model 5 Beta (Women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur gender (0=Male, 1=Female)</td>
<td>.266</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.89*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur age</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>-.009</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support provider gender (0=Male, 1=Female)</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support provider age</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relation</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength: frequency</td>
<td>.81***</td>
<td>.83***</td>
<td>.86***</td>
<td>.83***</td>
<td>.96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength: emotional attachment</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-.43</td>
<td>-.49</td>
<td>-.48</td>
<td>-.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household income</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>-.09*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment status</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: family</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>-.56</td>
<td>-.40*</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: friends</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.21**</td>
<td>-.50*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: special person</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>-.66**</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interaction effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: family * Support provider gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: friends * Support provider gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.61***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available emotional support: special person * Support provider gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N Respondents</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R Square</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01. Significant levels for control variables are two-tailed; For independent variables and interaction effects significant levels are one-tailed.
To test the moderation hypotheses 2a and 2b regarding role-relations and available emotional support, z-tests of the coefficients in the logistic regression model (Table 2) were utilized to establish the extent to which, if at all, the coefficients are significantly different for family, friends, and special persons (see Table 3). Because of the nature of the data, traditional interaction would be insufficient for testing moderation, and therefore z-tests were utilized. Specifically, for hypothesis 2a, it was tested whether the difference in coefficients of available emotional support from friends (Table 2, Model 2: $\beta=.44$) compared to available emotional support from family (Table 2, Model 2: $\beta=-.27$) is statistically different. A similar technique was used to investigate if the coefficients are different for available emotional support from a special person (Table 2, Model 2: $\beta=-.26$) compared to that of family. It was found, as hypothesized, that the coefficient of available emotional support from friends ($\Delta\beta=.71; p<0.05$) is statistically higher than the coefficient for available emotional support from family. This supports the hypothesis that the effects of individuals’ available emotional support on the likelihood to provide instrumental support to nascent entrepreneurs is larger when available emotional support comes from friends rather than from family (hypothesis 2a), whereas hypothesis 2b anticipating that available emotional support from a special person would be larger than from family could not be supported.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hypothesis 2a</th>
<th>Hypothesis 2b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Available support</td>
<td>$.71^*$</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*$ p < .05$
To test the gender moderation hypotheses, the interaction term of the three sources of emotional support and gender were added in Model 3 (see Table 2). Hypothesis 3a is rejected, as there is no significant interaction effect of available emotional support from family and gender on provided instrumental support. In support of hypothesis 3b, the test revealed a significantly weaker effect of available emotional support from friends on provided instrumental support for women ($\beta = -1.61; p<0.01$) compared to men. Finally, in support of hypothesis 3c, the test shows a significantly stronger effect of available emotional support from a special person on provided instrumental support for women ($\beta = 1.26; p<0.05$) compared to men. In Model 4 and Model 5, the results of split samples of male and female support providers are reported, confirming that the impact of available emotional support from friends is most prevalent among male support providers (Men: $\beta = 1.21; p<0.05$; Women: $\beta = -0.50; p<0.1$). Model 4 and Model 5 also show that the impact of available emotional support from a special person from Model 3 is driven by a negative impact for male support providers (Men: $\beta = -0.66; p<0.05$; Women: $\beta = 0.46; n.s.$), and that male support providers are also negatively impacted by available emotional support from family (Men: $\beta = -0.40; p<0.10$; Women: $\beta = -0.15; n.s.$),

**Discussion & Conclusion**

By approaching social support from a support provider’s perspective and drawing from theories of generalized exchange, the purpose of this study was to argue how individuals pass on their good vibes in an entrepreneurship context. Specifically, it was argued that individuals pass on good vibes to entrepreneurs within their networks as a consequence of upstream reciprocity and the Feel-Good, Do-
Good mechanism (Baker, 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). More specifically, they pass on good vibes because they are experiencing positive affect triggered by available emotional support (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002), which makes them likely to help and support others (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Thus, good vibes are provided to entrepreneurs because people within their networks feel good – a feeling ignited by the support provider’s network. This is also consistent with social exchange theory, which argues that social exchange is about approval between actors and that self-interested actors in networks become interdependent of the need for approval (Cook, 1977; Emirbayer and Goodwin, 1994).

Empirically, some support for these ideas was obtained. It was found that emotional support from friends certainly makes individuals more likely to provide instrumental support to entrepreneurs within their network. An impact was also found with regard to having emotional support available from a special person, but only a negative influence for men. Surprisingly though, a negative impact on individuals’ likelihood to provide instrumental support to entrepreneurs was found in having emotional support available from family. It could be that those individuals who receive a lot of emotional support from family are more introverted and isolated people who therefore do not interact with many people outside their family.

The ideas about passing on good vibes by introducing role alignment theory (Biddle, 1986; Kim et al., 2013) were extended. Due to the nature of emotional support, it was argued that the impact of emotional support on individuals’ likelihood of providing instrumental support depends on how expected this support is. Emotional support obtained from social positions where emotional support is more expected has a smaller impact than when emotional support is less expected (Fliessbach et al., 2007). Empirically, the idea of role-alignment associated with culturally defined norms for role-relationships in
the form of family, friends, and a special person was tested, and support was found. The impact of having available emotional support from friends and a special person, respectively, has a stronger impact on providing support than having emotional support available from family, because emotional support from family is expected due to the societal developed norms about the family role. Thus, the empirical results regarding the contingencies of role-relationships show that available emotional support has a stronger impact when it is culturally less expected.

Finally, it was argued that the ‘passing on the good vibes’ phenomenon is contingent on the support provider’s gender. Men and women rely on different persons in their networks. Women are more likely to rely on family members compared to men, and men rely on groups of friends while women rely on a special person. Consequently, it was expected that the impact of available support from family and a special person would be stronger for women and the impact of available support from group of friends would be stronger for men. Empirically, the results were most clear for men and supported that men rely more heavily on a group of friends (Vigil, 2007) instead of a special person, while significant support could not be found for women relying more heavily on a special person compared to men. Support was not found for differences in how much men and women rely on family members. Thus, overall the empirical results support that ‘passing on the good vibes’ is gender sensitive and contingent on the support provider’s gender.

Contributions

The study makes three important contributions to existing theory. First, it introduces the idea of upstream reciprocity and the Feel-Good, Do-Good hypothesis to an entrepreneurship context as a mechanism to show how good vibes are passed on (Baker, 2014; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Nowak and Roch, 2007).
In this way, attention and focus move away from explaining how networks provide entrepreneurs with access to resources and support from the perspective of the entrepreneur (Davidsson and Honig 2003; Kim et al., 2013; Sigmund, Semrau and Wegner 2015) to the perspective of the support provider. It was shown that support providers are not homogenous actors acting identically but individuals motivated in heterogeneous ways, and therefore understanding the background, motivation, and characteristics of support providers is crucial for understanding the social support exchange. Social support processes are not unidirectional, but rather bidirectional in nature and involve both a provider and receiver (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Shakespeare-Finch and Obst, 2011). Second, it was illustrated how social support processes have contingencies. Specifically, it was shown that social support processes are embedded in various socially constructed roles that guide what is expected and what is not expected (Biddle, 1986; Kim et al., 2013). These various roles influence the function and impact of social support processes. Kim et al.’s (2013) role alignment theory, focusing on support in the form of help and advice, was extended with a focus on emotional support. Finally, the support provider perspective provided new insight into the role of indirect ties. Prior knowledge about how a referrer (or common direct tie) can provide legitimacy and increase the chances of resource exchange between an indirect tie and an entrepreneur was extended. This study has provided new insight into how entrepreneurs’ ties behave depending on their peers and in this way extended the range of entrepreneurs’ network to include their ties’ ties. This enables the understanding of the effects of networks not only as being driven by direct ties but also as being impacted by indirect ties that may not even interact with the entrepreneur.
Practical Implications

This study has practical implications for several constituents. ‘Passing on the good vibes’ is consistent with the idea of how happiness is spread in networks (Fowler and Christakis, 2008) and follows ideas of positive psychology. Thus, positive people around you potentially impact you in positive ways. To entrepreneurs, this means that selecting environments with positive vibes and happiness might potentially help them achieve entrepreneurial success. In such environments, they are more likely to experience positive affect and obtain instrumental support. There are also implications for managers in commercial organizations or managers of incubators. As social surroundings are important for the existence and spread of positive vibes, the working environment becomes important. Creating an encouraging and positive organizational culture not only makes going to work more pleasant, it also increases the likelihood that employees or entrepreneurs in incubators will help and support each other.

Limitations and further research

With the current study, the unit of analysis was changed from entrepreneurs – support receivers – to the people in entrepreneurs’ networks – support providers. This represents a first step away from an ego-biased understanding of social support processes to a bidirectional view. However, this is also an inherent limitation, as the entrepreneurs receiving support are not included in this study. Future research should take the full step into the bidirectional view by including information from both provider and receiver to fully grasp the complex cognitive social support process. An interesting result, although not the direct focus of the study, was that household income negatively influences women’s provision of support. This might indicate that women with higher income develop masculine behavioral characteristics making
them support less (Klyver and Terjesen, 2007). Finally, future research should continue looking into the contingencies and various mechanisms that explain how and why support and role alignment play together.
References


Klyver K, Honig B, Steffens P (forthcoming) Social support timing and persistence in nascent entrepreneurship: exploring when instrumental and emotional support is most effective. *Small Business Economics*: forthcoming


