

Early Internationalization Behaviour Dynamics: What Role Does the Entrepreneur's Personal Resources Play? (Case of Tunisia)

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Abstract— This paper aims to understand the dynamics of the internationalization behaviour of young firms by focusing on the role of the entrepreneur's personal resources. To achieve this objective and based on a relevant literature review on international entrepreneurship, a set of hypotheses has been developed and tested in the context of young Tunisian manufacturing SMEs involved in export activities. The results revealed that the entrepreneur's personal resources in terms of international vision, prior international experiences, social networks, international competencies and academic training, have a positive influence both on the international startup and on the speed of internationalization of young companies. In addition, the results showed that the speed of international expansion is linked with the internationalization behavior at the start-up so that proactive internationalization is associated with a rapid cadence of internationalization, and reactive internationalization is associated with a slow cadence of internationalization.

Keywords— International entrepreneurship, Dynamic behaviour, international start-up, Speed of internationalization, Young companies.

I. INTRODUCTION

As a new observable phenomenon, rapid and early Internationalization enterprises have aroused the interest of academics and practitioners since the beginning of the 90s ([43]). Indeed, the emergence of this increasing and significant proportion of companies that, very early in their existence, are rapidly developing internationally has been synonymous with the emergence of International Entrepreneurship ([41], [43], [48]-[49]) as a new academic field of study which positions as the intersecting area of business strategy, international management and entrepreneurship.

For years, work on the internationalization of companies has been significantly influenced by the "Process Model of Internationalization (PMI)" [29]. Reference [29] has developed an internationalization model that emphasizes the importance of progressiveness in firms' international expansion. This incremental development is mainly aimed at reducing or controlling the uncertainty specific to foreign markets. Indeed, for small and medium-sized companies with limited resources, progressive internationalization privileges

prudence and risk minimization in the selection and access to foreign markets. As a result, internationalization follows a step-by-step process that begins with the entry of SMEs into foreign markets with a short psychological distance. This gradual expansion is regarded as the key to the successful internationalization of SMEs ([29]-[30]).

However, during the 1990s, the business environment has changed, notably with an improvement in the flow of information from foreign markets, a reduction in transport and communication costs and a more widely disseminated experience of firms' internationalization ([2]). This evolution of environmental conditions in the world has led to the emergence of a significant number of young companies that are internationalizing around the world as from their inception, with the ability to develop more quickly abroad. All these changes in the international environment of firms have rendered the basic assumptions of the step-by-step models invalid and created the need to formalize an alternative model of internationalization.

Therefore, other more recent theoretical approaches to the internationalization of SMEs have defended the existence of non-progressive internationalization. In particular, it is the "International New Venture (INV)" model of [49] that emphasizes a more rapid internationalization process undertaken by young companies.

The confrontation between the "PMI" approach and the "INV" approach leads us to consider that several choices of internationalization coexist within SMEs. More specifically, it emerges from this confrontation that SMEs have the opportunity to develop internationally by favoring either a gradual approach or an accelerated, non-progressive and early approach. To better understand these two approaches and their determinants, it is necessary to introduce factors that are related to the temporality of the internationalization of SMEs. As recommended by [33], incorporating time as a major conceptual dimension is essential to understanding entrepreneurial internationalization. Placed in the context of the confrontation between the "PMI" model and the "INV" approach, age and the speed of internationalization appear to be the most differentiating factors.

In view of the above developments, the main objective of this paper is to identify the reasons that can lead SMEs to a rapid internationalization mode as described in the INV model and not to a step-by-step approach, as assumed in the PMI. More specifically, our research focuses on the internal determinants that influence the dynamics of the internationalization behavior of young companies. To respond to this, it is strongly suggested that the dynamics of internationalization behavior is considerably influenced by the resource and skills-based approach. Indeed, resources and skills of entrepreneur play a central role both in the upstream and downstream stages of the internationalization decision. Upstream, they act as internal antecedents of the company, acting either as motivating factors or as factors hindering the decision to internationalize. Downstream of the decision to internationalize, these resources and skills can also operate as barriers or stimuli, this time influencing the speed of internationalization.

For research purposes, this work is based on the definition of internationalization cited by [13]. Indeed, internationalization is the process by which firms both increase their awareness of the direct and indirect influence of international transactions on their future, and establish and conduct transactions with other countries. This definition conceptualizes internationalization as a dynamic and evolving process. It also offers a holistic interpretation of the concept of internationalization by including different forms of foreign relations. In this context, internationalization has two main forms: on the one hand, an inward form consisting essentially of importations and different cooperation strategies with foreign firms on the local market, and on the other hand, an outward form bringing the company outside its local market through various ways: exportations, investments, subsidiaries, etc., etc. In this work, we use the outward form of internationalization, more particularly the export form.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: In Section II, we examine the literature to develop a set of hypotheses that focus on the role of the entrepreneur's personal resources in the dynamics of the internationalization behaviour of young firms. Section III describes the research methodology by describing data collection and operationalization of variables. Section IV presents the results of the empirical analyses. In Section V, we conclude our work with a discussion of the findings and a presentation of some limitations and future research perspectives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

By rushing into the international arena, these new international companies, that did not have abundant resources, have not developed in stages and are challenging traditional theories of the internationalization process. This challenge was strongly reflected in the proposal of [49] in terms of "INV" theory in response to "Process Model of Internationalization (PMI)" advanced by [29].

A. International Entrepreneurship as a Dynamic Behavior

Reference [49] is pioneers in providing a specific theoretical framework for companies with rapid and early internationalization. They introduced the theory of International New Ventures (INV) which is commonly used in the literature on international entrepreneurship. The proposed definition is as follows: "*A business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries*" ([49]). It is a clear and precise definition, which underlines the strategic aspect of internationalization and shows that it is possible to be international both through the use of resources (material, human, financial, technological, etc.) and through the commercialization of products in several countries. Reference [47] proposed another definition to the INVs. They are "*firms that make observable foreign commitments (e. g., sales efforts, investments) within a conventionally accepted short period after formation*" ([47] p.92). They specify that this short period can be considered as less than 6 years by convention.

To better understand the behavioral dynamics of young international companies, we proceed to a simple confrontation with process models of internationalization (PMI), given that the two theories, PMI and INV, represent very different internationalization principles. In particular, the description of the start and speed of the development of international activities is not the same for very young and international companies and companies that are internationalizing according to the PMI model.

1) *Early international start-up*: From the inception phase, the theory of rapid and early internationalization is fundamentally different from the theory of step-by-step internationalization. The first difference found in the literature concerns the time between the company's formation and its internationalization. Although the literature review revealed disparities in the age limit below which a company can be considered as rapidly and early internationalized, most researchers in international entrepreneurship agree that INV are internationalizing much more quickly than traditional companies and often very early after their creation ([48], [49], [3], [36]- [40]). Indeed, from the INV perspective, the development of international activities is proactively achieved by seeking international opportunities for development and growth.

However, the step-by-step approach of internationalization describes an incremental process by which companies are being internationalized slowly and progressively. The fundamental assumption of this approach is that companies only start internationalization when they have obtained a solid knowledge base in their domestic market, i.e. at an advanced age. They tend to avoid uncertainty and thus delay the start of the internationalization process ([53]).

In addition, the number of countries targeted by new international companies at the start of the internationalization process differs from those that follow the step-by-step model. By definition, firms that adopt the INV model are engaged, from the beginning of their formation, in a much larger

number of countries than firms that adopt the PMI model ([49], [40]).

Another specificity of the internationalization behaviour of young companies resides in their cultural diversity when selecting the countries they penetrate. Thus, in contrast to companies following the step-by-step models, whose markets are chosen according to their psychological distance from the local market, INVs target countries that are very distant psychologically from the start-up phase. In these companies, the choice of markets is based on international opportunities and their development potential, and is not influenced by the psychological distance as assumed by the PMI model.

Therefore, while the step-by-step models recognize that psychological distance plays a very important role in the firm's internationalization process, for INV the concept of psychological distance from foreign markets loses its relevance. INV have thus a more extensive cultural and geographical diversity than firms following the step-by-step models. INV also have a combination of distinct strategies that enable them to succeed, building on intangible resources ([35]). Aware of their resource constraints, they emphasize hybrid governance structures, including alliances as a means of entry ([49]).

2) *The speed of internationalization:* The internationalization process can be described in a temporal sequence in which internationalization movements are occurring ([33]). The temporality of internationalization is defined in terms of the speed, regularity and history of firms' entry into the various foreign markets. In order to take into account this temporality of internationalization, it is therefore necessary to analyze the speed of international development over time ([33]).

In this regard, [48], in their model of the forces influencing the speed of internationalization, define the speed of internationalization through dimensions related to initial entry into the foreign market, the speed of penetration of targeted countries and the speed of engagement. They suggested that the internationalization of INVs is associated with a rapid speed of internationalization.

In the context of the confrontation between the step-by-step model and the INV approach, the speed of internationalization appears to be a differentiating factor. Compared to traditional companies whose speed of the internationalization process depends on the path dependency phenomenon, INVs do not follow a predetermined sequential progression for international expansion and development and they proceed more quickly with their international engagement. Thus, the phenomenon of path dependency is undermined in the case of INVs.

As a result, for the PMI model, engagement decisions are very slow because there is a need to integrate the knowledge generated by market experience with the company's experience. There is therefore a sequential progression of the internationalization process allowing SMEs to slowly move towards foreign markets. On the other hand, for INVs, rather than following a slow speed of internationalization resulting from a long learning process as described in the step-by-step

model, they tend to build their own strategy of rapid internationalization by engaging in foreign markets more quickly in the early phases of international expansion, and this by leveraging different resources and knowledge, thus providing competitive advantages, indispensable in accelerating the speed of internationalization.

B. Impact of the Entrepreneur's Personal Resources on Internationalization Behavior

The literature review on international entrepreneurship emphasizes that the entrepreneur's personal resources are one of the major determinants influencing the internationalization behavior of SMEs ([18], [28], [32], [45], [46]-[55]). First, many researchers agree that the international vision of leaders is important in conducting the rapid and early internationalization of start-ups. Reference [56] shows that one of the main characteristics of the entrepreneur of a young international company is his global vision, through which he will seek opportunities beyond national borders. This vision is characterized by an international orientation from the very inception of the company and by a proactive attitude of the manager towards risk taking when building relationships abroad [32]. Moreover, the fact that the company is very strongly oriented internationally allows the entrepreneur to depend not only on his domestic market and thus to avoid the phenomenon of "path-dependency" in relation to the domestic market. The international vision of the entrepreneur then appears as the preferred starting point for several researchers in international entrepreneurship to analyze the phenomenon of early and rapid internationalization. It is therefore due to his personality, his motivations turned towards the international and his awareness of cultural diversity that the entrepreneur will build an international vision and an upstream reflection for internationalization. This vision, which is partly supported by the positive attitude and professional experience of the entrepreneur, also promotes rapid and proactive internationalization to psychologically distant countries ([1], [28], [47], [48], 49, [55]). We can therefore formulate the first hypothesis as follows:

H1. The international vision of the entrepreneur affects the dynamics of internationalization behavior of young companies.

H1a. The international vision of the entrepreneur affects the internationalization behavior at international startup.

H1b. The international vision of the entrepreneur affects the speed of internationalization.

The past international experience of the entrepreneur is another central individual variable in explaining the development of young companies in foreign markets. In order to situate its impact on internationalization behavior, several authors have examined this relationship ([4], [41], [42], [48], [9], [10], [49], [12], [53], [60], [56]-[11]). Indeed, entrepreneurs can succeed in a rapid and early internationalization process of their young company through their past international experiences. Based on their experience, entrepreneurs will have a higher degree of

knowledge that will lead companies to start internationalizing from the very beginning. Previous experience is a factor that reduces uncertainty because of a good knowledge of the foreign market and the risk factors that can hinder the company's development [38]. The entrepreneur is then able to perceive and exploit opportunities in foreign markets that others do not perceive. Reference [4] showed that new companies run by managers with experience abroad were able to internationalize their businesses more quickly and successfully. For [20], companies whose management teams already have international experience can avoid some intermediate steps. Reference [10] stipulate that companies with managers who have received training in foreign countries are significantly more likely to become international than those whose managers have trained only in their own country. In addition, [54] argue that the higher the level of entrepreneurial experience, the more important it is to overcome the constraints of the "foreignness" factor and consequently ensure better international results for the company. Similarly, [42] added that international work experience and experience in the same industry increases the emergence of young international companies. Similarly, [60] and [39] reveals that the entrepreneur's prior experience, particularly internationally, promotes the early internationalization of start-ups. References [11], [18] and [25] also show the importance of the company's pre-existing knowledge, crystallized by the entrepreneur's past international experience, among other things, in the internationalization process. The field of research on international entrepreneurship clearly shows that the entrepreneur's experience, which can be seen as the sum of the knowledge accumulated and learning over the years, represents the foundation on which the orientations of the new company are based ([50], [51]). Their past international experience allows them to develop the international contacts necessary for the start-up and international development of the young company. Their past international experience enables to develop the international contacts necessary for the start-up and international development of the young company. We can therefore develop the second hypothesis as follows:

H2. The past international experience of the entrepreneur affects the dynamics of internationalization behavior of young companies.

H2a. The past international experience of entrepreneur affects the internationalization behavior at international startup.

H2b. The past international experience of entrepreneur affects the speed of internationalization.

The network theory is also mobilized to understand the rapid and early internationalization of young companies ([43]). Several contributions suggest specific roles that social networks can play in the internationalization process ([5], [7], [23], [26], [49], [13], [34], [37], [44], [56]). Indeed, social networks play an informational role by providing reliable information, which makes it possible to promote rapid learning and lead to more informed decision-making. By

integrating into these social networks, entrepreneurs obtain free information, necessary for identifying opportunities, building the vision and reducing market uncertainty and ambiguity ([16], [37]). Social networks also have a moderating effect and are a trigger for the process of international expansion resulting from the information made available and the sharing of experiences ([43], [48]). Finally, networks have a leverage effect on both tangible and intangible resources of the SME ([16], [58]) by promoting their development, which makes it possible to influence the start and speed of internationalization. In order to gain intangible resources such as customer credibility or trust in new markets with new products, entrepreneurs use networks. This attention given by the literature to the entrepreneur's social networks shows that they are very crucial in the early stages of internationalization where the company does not yet have a solid foundation in new markets. They can overcome psychological distance and increase the speed of penetration of foreign markets ([44], [49]). Based on the developments above, we then present this hypothesis:

H3. The social networks of the entrepreneur affect the dynamics of internationalization behavior of young companies.

H3a. The social networks of entrepreneur affect the internationalization behavior at international startup.

H3b. The social networks of entrepreneur affect the speed of internationalization.

To explain the dynamics of the rapid internationalization of start-ups, various studies suggest that entrepreneurs need to develop various knowledge and competencies to orient their companies internationally ([18], [27], [55]). These competencies can be described as strategic or fundamental in the sense of [6]. They are specific to the firm and difficult to imitate, thus constituting one of the key determinants of competitive advantage. In addition to the traditional skills available to local entrepreneurs, managers of young international companies have specific skills and capacities related to international development. According to [56], these entrepreneurs have unique skills that allow them to perceive and identify opportunities that others do not see. Reference [45] argues that human capital influences internationalization in SMEs. Indeed, entrepreneurial leaders who adopt international strategies are more often able to master multiple languages, manage risks, adapt to change and show tolerance towards other cultures by internationalizing to psychologically distant countries. Networking skills are also a resource for entrepreneurs who want to orient their business internationally. Thus, the studies of [15] and [32] show that the ability of managers to establish contacts was an explanation of their firm's propensity to internationalize. Consequently, the entrepreneur's distinctive competence must be examined in relation to his ability to integrate into and enrich networks ([34], ([44])). Dynamic networking skills combined with entrepreneurial opportunity seeking behaviour then reduce the risk associated with decisions to enter foreign markets. Reference [35] also demonstrates the advantage of international marketing skills in the development of rapidly

and early internationalizing companies. In this regard, we will test the following hypotheses:

H4. The international competencies of the entrepreneur affect the dynamics of internationalization behavior of young companies.

H4a. The international competencies of entrepreneur affect the internationalization behavior at international startup.

H4b. The international competencies of entrepreneur affect the speed of internationalization.

The training of the entrepreneur is also mentioned in the literature as one of the reasons for the early and rapid internationalization of young companies. There is a positive relationship between entrepreneur training and positive attitudes towards rapid and proactive international expansion. The trained owner-manager is more likely to pursue an internationalization strategy than the less trained one, as training is generally associated with more entrepreneurial behaviour. Reference [18] shows the importance of entrepreneurial education as a dimension of the human capital needed for the internationalization of SMEs. We then assume that:

H5. The academic training of the entrepreneur affects the dynamics of internationalization behavior of young companies.

H5a. The academic training of entrepreneur affects the internationalization behavior at international startup.

H5b. The academic training of entrepreneur affects the speed of internationalization.

It appears from the above that research conducted in the field of international entrepreneurship agrees that the dynamic resources of the entrepreneur are real factors influencing the internationalization of young companies. Based on this observation, it was concluded that the international vision, previous international experiences, social networks, international competencies and academic training of entrepreneur are key factors in differentiating between companies with rapid and early internationalization and companies that follow a gradual process of internationalization as assumed in the PMI model.

In this paper, we also try to test the hypothesis relating to the relationship between the behavior at the international start-up and the speed of internationalization. To develop this last hypothesis, we refer to the internationalization theories "INV" and "PMI". The literature on internationalization from an entrepreneurial perspective shows that companies with rapid and early internationalization are characterized by an early orientation, even from the beginning, to internationalization and by rapid growth. This is validated with regard to the evidence from the review of research in the field of international entrepreneurship. Alternatively, the literature on internationalization according to a traditional and procedural perspective suggests that SMEs respond reactively to international opportunities by starting the internationalization process late after gaining experience in the local market. These step-by-step models are the result of a very long learning process and a highly valued perception of

psychological distance (geographical and cultural). Supporters of this procedural perspective corroborate the late and reactive internationalization of the firm at a slow speed to increase international engagement, due to the absolute and determined progressiveness of the internationalization process. In this article, we wish to extend the scope of these findings and make the following synthesis hypothesis:

H6: The speed of the company's internationalization differs according to the behavior at the international startup. In other words, proactive internationalization is associated with a rapid cadence of internationalization, and internationalization with reactive behavior is associated with a slow cadence of internationalization.

In order to highlight the articulation between the variables of our research, Figure 1 illustrates our conceptual model.

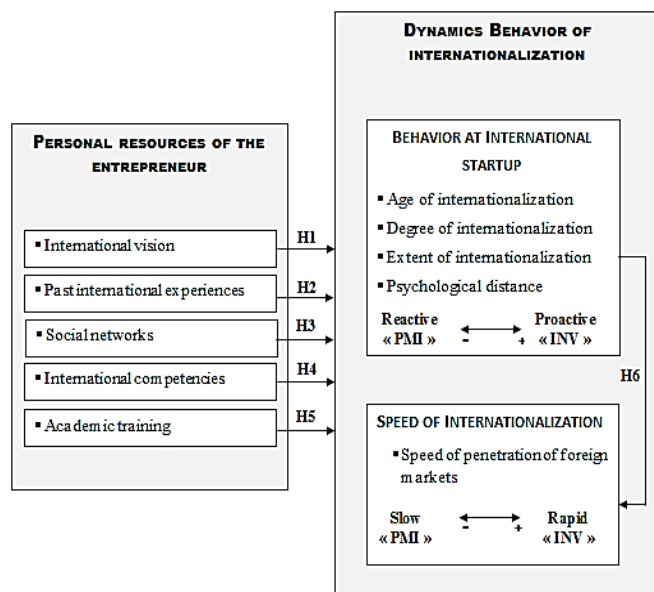


Fig 1. Conceptual Model

The theoretical framework used to develop the conceptual model is the resources and competencies approach, and more particularly the dynamic resources stream. According to our model, dynamic internationalization behaviour appears to be the result of a combination of different resources and skills. According to the dynamic resources approach, the presence of certain personal resources of the entrepreneur explains the behavioral difference and international commitment of companies, by proactively internationalizing from the outset as postulated by the INV approach or reactively in steps as described by the PMI model.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Sample and Data Collection

The most appropriate methodology to answer the research question and statistically verify our hypotheses is a quantitative method. To obtain a homogeneous sample, we paid attention to several criteria. First of all, we chose as a study unit a young Tunisian company totally or partially

exporting, commercializing directly or indirectly finished or semi-finished products. It is agreed that the manufacturing sector is the most relevant and appropriate for this research, given that the industrial sector is the most dynamic sector in terms of exports in Tunisia. We also limited our analysis to companies with fewer than 200 employees. This choice avoids comparing SMEs with large companies. In addition, to analyze the evolution of international activity and thus judge the speed of penetration of foreign markets, it will be more relevant to consider a minimum period of three years for an international presence. Finally, and due to the reluctance of some executives and managers, our final sample includes 56 companies, 20 of which are totally exporting and 36 partially exporting. These companies are distributed over the different industrial sectors in Tunisia (Food, mechanical and metallurgical, Building materials, ceramics and glass, electronic, chemistry, leather and shoes and various industries).

The measuring instrument for this research is the questionnaire. We chose the face-to-face questionnaire as the administration method to optimize the return rate. In terms of questionnaire architecture, we were careful to formulate the questions unambiguously so that they were easily understood by respondents. Different scales of measurements were used. Thus, nominal or categorical scales, ordinal scales and Likert-type interval scales were the most commonly used in the questionnaire. The following sections describe in detail the operationalization of the different search variables.

B. Operationalization of Dependent Variables

To measure internationalization behavior, we use in this paper a dynamic perspective by including temporal variables. To reflect this dynamic, we then propose two dependent variables: the internationalization behavior at the international starting and the internationalization speed.

1) *Internationalization Behavior at Startup*: Concerning the first dependent variable related to internationalization behavior at the international startup, we use a multidimensional approach and base the analysis on several relevant criteria found in the literature. Thus, the measurement of internationalization behavior is carried out through four dimensions: the age of internationalization, the degree of internationalization, the extent of internationalization and the perception of psychological distance.

- The age of internationalization is defined in the literature as the time interval between the inception of the company and the initiation of international operations ([48], [53], [57]). We therefore measure this dimension by the number of years elapsed between the inception of the company and the first international operation.
- The degree of internationalization indicates the extent of international sales in relation to the company's sales ([57]). It is also the share of international sales in relation to total sales ([48]). For the purposes of this

research, we therefore used the percentage of export sales divided by the company's total sales in the first year of export as a measure of the degree of internationalization at the international startup.

- The extent of internationalization refers to the number of countries in which the company operates ([48], [57]). For our work, the international extent of the company is then measured from the number of targeted countries.
- Psychological distance is defined as all factors influencing the flow of information between the firm and foreign markets. These factors may include language differences, cultural or business practice differences, or the level of industrial development between the destination country and origin country ([29], [30], [31]). For the purposes of this research, and in the absence of a scale measuring psychological distance in the literature, we opt for an ordinal measurement scale with 5 points ranging from (1) "Countries very similar psychologically" to (5) "Countries very distant psychologically".

2) *The Speed of Internationalization*: The second dependent variable concerns the speed of internationalization. We opt for a one-dimensional measure and consider it by the speed of penetration of foreign target countries ([48]). Specifically, we measure the speed of internationalization by the ratio: total number of countries penetrated since the first international operation divided by the number of years since the company's first international expansion. The higher the ratio, the higher the speed of internationalization.

C. Operationalization of Independent Variables

The independent variables refer to the entrepreneur's personal resources in terms of international vision, past international experiences, social networks, international competencies and academic training.

1) *Strategic Vision*: The strategic vision was identified through the following three dimensions:

- Strong intention to develop business abroad and to be a truly international firm;
- Strategic approach to long-term internationalization
- Planning of activities abroad and pursuit of clear objectives abroad mobilized by an internationalization project from the inception.

These dimensions are identified according to the perception of the leaders, using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree".

2) *Past International Experiences*: According to the literature review, entrepreneurs can gain international experience in two ways: first, by residing abroad for educational or professional reasons; and second, by working for an international company. Two main sources of experience are therefore defined in the study, namely a generic experience and a specific experience. To these two dimensions, which constitute points of consensus in the

literature, we considered it relevant to add the diversity of entrepreneurs' experiences as a determinant of internationalization. We have therefore retained these three dimensions in order to characterize the entrepreneur's international experiences at the time of the international start-up. Each component is measured as follows:

- Generic international experience is represented by the number of months spent abroad by the entrepreneur. This consists of summing up all travels abroad for business and/or personal reasons. This dimension was measured with a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from (1) "less than three months" to (5) "more than 12 months".
- Specific international experience is measured by the number of years of professional experience related to international activities. This dimension was measured with a five-point ordinal scale ranging from (1) "no international professional experience" to (5) "more than 6 years".
- The diversity of experiences is measured in the survey using a 5-point ordinal scale ranging from (1) "very limited" to (5) "very extensive".

3) *Social Networks*: The entrepreneur's social networks were measured through four characteristics identified from the literature review ([17], [48]), referring respectively to the size, duration, strength and density and variety of the network.

- The size of the social network: it is indicated by the number of actors activating in the network. This dimension was measured with a five-point scale ranging from (1) "fewer" to (5) "very many".
- The duration of the relationship: it is indicated by the length of the relationship of the actors and the time spent together. This dimension was measured with a five-point scale ranging from (1) "less sustainable" to (5) "very sustainable".
- The strength of the relationship: it is indicated by the frequency of contacts between the actors, intimacy, trust and mutual services. This variable was measured with a five-point scale ranging from (1) "Very low" to (5) "Very high".
- Density and variety: it is indicated by the diversity of the connections that are the channels of circulation between the actors. This dimension was measured with a five-point scale ranging from (1) "Very Low" to (5) "Very High".

4) *International Skills*: International skills were measured through a set of skills provided in the international entrepreneurship literature that refer to language skills; ability to take risks; ability to tolerate psychological distance; ability to set international goals; ability to establish a network and to negotiate; and international marketing skills. A 5-point ordinal scale, ranging from (1) "Minimum Required Skills" to (5) "Excellent Skills", is used to measure each of these skills.

5) *Academic Training*: The academic training of the entrepreneur reflects the level of education achieved. Indeed,

the last year of studies obtained by the entrepreneur determines the level of education. As a result, a 5-point scale has been designed to operationalize this explicative variable, ranging from (1) "primary or secondary study" to (5) "master's or doctoral degree at university".

IV. RESULTS

To analyze the dynamics of the internationalization behavior of young companies, we use different statistical techniques. First, we carried out a Principal Component Analysis and a Reliability Analysis of the measurement scales. Then, we proceeded to a Discriminant Analysis to verify hypotheses about the impact of the entrepreneur's personal resources on the dynamics of internationalization behavior. Finally, we carried out a Chi-Square Analysis to test the last hypothesis.

A. Results of Principal Component Analysis and Reliability

For all multi-item variables, we first performed principal component analyses with "Varimax" rotation and using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion and the *Bartlett Sphericity Test*. Then, we performed a reliability analysis based on the *Cronbach alpha* study (α). In sum, we present the results obtained in Table I. This table shows that the results of the factor analyses for all variables are all acceptable with respect to the significance of the *KMO* and *Bartlett sphericity* indices and the significance of the variances explained. In addition, the reliability of the measurement scales has been validated by the *Cronbach alpha* indices, which range from 0,879 to 0,944.

TABLE I
 FACTORIAL ANALYSIS AND RELIABILITY

Variables Analyzed	Extracted factors	KMO Indices	Total Var. Exp.	Cronbach's Alpha
Behavior of internationalization at startup (4items)	[BEHAV]	0.701 (0,000)*	74.60	0.879
International Vision (3items)	[VISION]	0.692 (0,000)*	85.479	0.915
Past International Experiences (3items)	[EXPER]	0,729 (0,000)*	83.370	0.895
Social Networks (4items)	[NETW]	0,807 (0,000)*	85.862	0.944
International Competences (6items)	[COMP]	0.878 (0,000)*	70.886	0.910

* *Bartlett sphericity test (Sig)*

B. Results of the Discriminant Analysis and Hypotheses Verification

The purpose of discriminant analysis is to study the relationships between a qualitative variable and a set of quantitative explanatory variables. Discriminant analysis examines data from groups that are known a priori. As a result, we first divided the companies in the sample into two

groups according to their internationalization behaviour at the international startup to study the first sub-hypotheses (H1a/H2a/H3a/H4a/H5a), and according to their speed of internationalization to study the second sub-hypotheses (H1b/H2b/H3b/H4b/H5b).

In the first instance and according to the "BEHAV" factor, which reflects the four dimensions (Age, degree, extent and psychological distance), two groups of companies were identified: proactive internationalization versus reactive internationalization. This is the first dependent variable related to the internationalization behavior at startup.

In a second step and depending on the speed of penetration of foreign markets, we highlighted two groups of companies: companies with a rapid internationalization speed and companies with a slow internationalization speed. This binary variable is our second variable to explain.

The results of the discriminant analysis associated with these two dependent variables are presented in the Table II.

TABLE II
 TEST OF EQUALITY OF GROUP MEANS

	Behaviour at International Start-up			Speed of Internationalization		
	Wilks' Lambda	F	Sig.	Wilks' Lambda	F	Sig.
International vision	0.396	82.499	0.000	0.394	83.080	0.000
International past experiences	0.417	75.582	0.000	0.418	75.182	0.000
Social networks	0.472	60.342	0.000	0.422	73.964	0.000
International competencies	0.540	45.940	0.000	0.337	106.051	0.000
Academic Training	0.813	12.387	0.001	0.919	4.743	0.034

The analyses of the tests of equality of group means verify the existence of significant differences between the two groups of companies. In the table II, the Wilks' Lambda coefficient corresponds to the proportion of variance not explained by group affiliation. The smaller the Wilks's Lambda, the more important the independent variable to the discriminant function.

The tests of equality of group means indicate that the international vision variable has the most significant influence on behavior at the international startup. Indeed, Wilks' lambda is equal to 0.396, moreover the F test confirms that this international vision is the most discriminating (F = 82.499; p = 0.000). In addition, the results indicate that this variable significantly influences the speed of penetration of foreign markets. The Wilks lambda is equal to 0.394, and the F test is significant (F = 83.080; p = 0.000) when it is about the speed of internationalization as a dependent variable. These results justify the works of [32], [49], [55] and [56] which demonstrate that the leader's vision and perception of the international environment is one of the decisive factors for adopting a rapid and early international development approach. We can therefore confirm our first hypothesis (H1)

which stipulates that the entrepreneur's vision towards the international affects positively the dynamics of the internationalization behaviour of the young company.

The empirical results visualized in the table II also show that the entrepreneur's international experience determines the behavioral nature of the company's internationalization. Indeed, the statistics of Fisher (F = 75.582, p = 0.000) and Wilks' Lambda (0.417) largely validate that experience is a determining factor in internationalization behavior at the startup. The results show also that the entrepreneur's experience influences the speed of the company's internationalization. Indeed, the statistics of Fisher (F = 75.182, p = 0.000) and Wilks' Lambda (0.418) allow us to verify the significance of the variable in question. These results are in line with various studies that have shown that new companies with managers having experience abroad were able to internationalize their businesses more quickly and with more active behavior than those whose managers lack previous knowledge and experience and who are rather reactively engaged abroad ([4], [9], [25], [39], [47], [48]-[56]). It follows from this that the second hypothesis group (H2a and H2b) is validated.

We also postulated that entrepreneur's social networks influence the way SMEs internationalize. The results of the tests for equality of group means show that a relatively low Wilks' Lambda value of 0.472 and a relatively high F value of 60.342 with a p = 0.000. These analyses indicate that the social network variable influences the internationalization behavior of SMEs when they start up internationally. In this sense, the more social networks managers and entrepreneurs have, the more proactively foreign markets will be approached. Concerning the speed of internationalization, analyses show that social networks significantly influence the speed of market penetration (Wilks' Lambda = 0.422 and F = 73.964 with a p= 0.000). These results are in line with social capital theory and the network approach to internationalization ([5], [13], [16], [17], [42]-[44]) and reflect the fact that entrepreneurs' relational resources play a decisive role in the internationalization of SMEs. All these findings allow us to confirm the third hypothesis (H3).

In addition, statistical tests very significantly conclude that the international competencies possessed by entrepreneurs influence both the internationalization behavior at the startup and the speed of internationalization. These results are in line with the literature review ([16], [28]- [55]) which states that the international skills of the management team determine the model of internationalization behaviour so that companies lead by managers with skills in international business are more active and faster to act internationally than managers without such skills. These results make it possible to accept the fourth hypothesis (H4) so that international skills positively affect the early and rapid internationalization of young companies.

Finally, the results show that entrepreneur academic training seems to have an influence on the internationalization behavior at the startup of young companies (Wilks' Lambda =0.813 and F = 12.387; p = 0.001) and also on the

internationalization speed in terms of Wilks' Lambda value (0.919) and the Fisher test ($F = 4.743$; $p = 0.034$). These results are in line with the conclusion of [18] showing that entrepreneur training is a key dimension of human capital and determinant of dynamics of internationalization behavior both in terms of proactivity at the start and in terms of the speed of the internationalization after the start. These results support the fifth hypothesis (H5).

In this paper, we also choose to present the relevance of predictive variables related to the entrepreneur's personal resources in the analysis of the dynamics of young companies' internationalization behavior. The Tables III and IV present respectively the quality of the classification according to startup behavior and the speed of internationalization.

TABLE III
 CLASSIFICATION RESULTS ^(a)

Internationalization behavior at start-up		Predicted Group Membership			Total
		Reactive	Proactive		
Original	Count	Reactive	27	3	30
		Proactive	1	25	26
	%	Reactive	90.0	10.0	100.0
		Proactive	3.8	96.2	100.0

a. 92.9% of original grouped cases correctly classified

TABLE IV
 CLASSIFICATION RESULTS ^(a)

Internationalization Speed		Predicted Group Membership		Total	
		Slow	Rapid		
Original	Count	Slow	33	0	33
		Rapid	2	21	23
	%	Slow	100.0	0.0	100.0
		Rapid	8.7	91.3	100.0

a. 91.3% of original grouped cases correctly classified

Regarding international startup behavior as a differentiating variable between the two groups, the classification results shows that 92.9% of companies are correctly classified. The rate of incorrect rankings is very low (7.1%). More specifically, 27 companies in the "reactive behavior" group were well reclassified with a percentage of 90% (27/30) and three cases were misclassified, with a percentage of misclassified as 10% (3/30). Similarly, for the group of companies with proactive internationalization, only one company was incorrectly classified (3.8%) and 25 well classified (96.2%).

With respect to the speed of internationalization as a differentiation variable, the analysis of the classification results in Table IV shows that, overall, 96.4% of companies are correctly classified. This percentage is the sum of the elements of the table diagonal divided by the sample size $(33 + 21) / 56$. The rate of incorrect rankings is very low at around 3.6% (2/56). More specifically, the companies in the "Slow speed of internationalization" group have been 100% well reclassified. No case in this group has been

misclassified. With regard to the group of companies with "Rapid internationalization speed" only two cases were misclassified with a percentage of 8.7%. The rest of the group's companies, i.e. the 21 entities, were well ranked. The percentage of well classified is in the order of (91.3%).

In summary, the results of the tests of equality of means and the results of the classification verification clearly show the validity of the discriminant analysis. Therefore, the importance of the variables introduced into the analysis that succeeded in establishing perfect discrimination between groups.

Turning now to the examination of the relationship between internationalization behavior and internationalization speed. To analyze this relationship, we use a cross tabulation analysis and a Chi-Square analysis. Crosstabulation is a basic technique for examining the relationship between two categorical variables. Concerning our study and according to the Crosstabulation (Table V), 93.9% of companies with reactive behaviour are in favor of a slow speed of internationalization. At the same time, 80.8% of companies with proactive startup behavior are in favor of a rapid speed of internationalization in terms of penetration of foreign countries.

We push again the analysis by performing a Chi-Square Test of Independence to be able to verify our last hypothesis. It should be recalled that the Chi-square test is used to determine if there is a significant relationship between two categorical variables. It can also be said that this test verifies the independence hypothesis of these variables. To perform this test, two assumptions must be advanced:

- The null hypothesis: The null hypothesis assumes that there is no association between the two variables. In our case, there is no link between internationalization behavior at startup and internationalization speed.
- The alternative hypothesis: The alternative hypothesis assumes that there is an association between the two variables. In our case, it shows that "internationalization behavior at startup" and "internationalization speed" are dependent.

Based on Table VI, we observe that the Chi-square statistic had a value of 31.601. In order to determine whether this evidence is sufficient to reject the independence hypothesis, the expected distribution is observed, which is given at the bottom of the table. Since this value is lower (10.68), we can then reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level and deduce that the variables are related. Thus, the behavior of young companies in international startup and the speed of internationalization are dependent and linked. We can therefore affirm that there are significant differences between companies with proactive startup behavior and those with reactive behavior with regard to the speed of internationalization. More specifically, proactive internationalization is associated with a rapid cadence of internationalization, and internationalization with reactive behavior at startup is associated with a slow cadence of internationalization. All this enables us to validate our last hypothesis (H6).

TABLE V
 INTERNATIONALIZATION BEHAVIOR AT START-UP * INTERNATIONALIZATION SPEED CROSSTABULATION

		Internationalisation Speed		Total	
		Slow speed	Rapid speed		
Internationalization behavior at start-up	Reactive	Count	28	2	30
		% within Internationalization Behavior at Start-up	93.3%	6.7%	100.0%
	Proactive	Count	5	21	26
		% within Internationalization Behavior at Start-up	19.2%	80.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	23	56

TABLE VI
 CHI-SQUARE TESTS

	Value	ddl	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Significance (1-sided)	Signification exacte (unilatérale)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.601 ^a	1	.000	.000	.000
Continuity Correction ^b	28.614	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	35.685	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test					
Linear-by-Linear Association	31.037	1	.000		
N. of Valid Cases	56				

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.68

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to focus on the role of the entrepreneur's personal resources in the dynamics of the internationalization behavior of young Tunisian manufacturing companies. Our proposal was to explain the internationalization behavior of young companies through the mobilization of the resource and competency-based approach. This choice is supported by the arguments arguing that the resources and skills possessed by the young company are likely to reduce the obstacles related to its small size and its beginner nature, which prevent it from an entrepreneurial internationalization. In this perspective, our research aims to enrich existing work by focusing on the behavioral dynamics of young companies during internationalization. As a result, we have incorporated temporal variables to assess internationalization behavior. By the results that it presents, our study shows the importance of the entrepreneur's personal resources in the early start-up and the rapid speed of international expansion. More specifically:

To engage proactively internationally, it appears that the entrepreneur-manager needs an international orientation to identify and exploit market opportunities. Thus, the entrepreneur, as the main actor in the decision to internationalize, must have a clear vision with a favorable attitude towards internationalization in order to be able to orient his activities internationally. In addition, it has been concluded that past experience abroad is a very important prerequisite for rapid and early internationalization. Entrepreneurs who were then involved in international

business before they started their own companies adopt a proactive and entrepreneurial internationalization behavior by targeting several geographically and culturally distant countries in the first year of inception. The entrepreneur's social networks are also critical in explaining the dynamics of the internationalization behaviour of Tunisian companies. In fact, available relational capital is an important catalyst for early internationalization decisions and an important accelerator of subsequent engagement speed, notwithstanding psychological distance. Moreover, the behaviour of rapid and early internationalization is largely dependent on the skills and dynamic capacities of entrepreneurs. Indeed, these skills refer to the ability to take risks, the ability to define international objectives, the ability to tolerate psychological distance, language skills, networking skills and international marketing skills. These skills play a central role in discriminating against firms with early internationalization who are proactive in their behavior and against firms with late internationalization who are reactive in their behavior. In fact, without a considerable level of these strategic skills, it is difficult for the entrepreneur to conduct his business in foreign markets, or even to fail. The entrepreneur's ability to develop rapid and early international behavior is also the result of his academic training. However, although the link between the entrepreneur's level of education and international entrepreneurial behavior is positive, the empirical study clearly shows that this relationship is much less significant compared to the other variables both in startup behavior and for subsequent engagement in terms of the speed of foreign market penetration. If we refer to the

statistical analyses, the training variable is the last one in the discrimination of the two groups of companies with different behaviors (proactive vs. reactive) and different internationalization speeds (fast vs. slow).

The study finally synthesized that the companies whose behaviour is proactive in international startup are, themselves, the companies whose speed of internationalization is rapid; and consequently the companies with reactive internationalization in startup are, themselves, the companies with slow internationalization speed. Thus, the study shows that companies that engage quickly, even from the outset, and proactively in foreign markets, continue to venture internationally at such a rapid pace, as a result of international entrepreneurial behavior.

In summary, our empirical study supports the proposal of INV theorists, who admit that entrepreneurs, as "opportunity seekers", are the real drivers of internationalization, drawing on the resources and dynamic skills at their disposal.

It is important to note that our results should only be understood in relation to the limitations of the research. On the theoretical level, we referred only to internal factors related to the entrepreneur's resources to explain the dynamic behaviour of companies' internationalization. Our research model does not take into account other internal factors, which also provide competitive advantages for companies with rapid and early internationalization, such as, advantages related to the use of technology, product advantages, advantages related to marketing activities, etc. Our model also does not take into consideration the factors related to the company's external environment. Another limitation to be highlighted is the one-dimensional nature of the speed of internationalization. Indeed, the study conceptualizes this concept only by the number of countries served internationally and did not take into account other dimensions of subsequent international engagement such as growth in international sales and increased modes of penetration of foreign markets, etc. The sample size of the study can be also considered small and does not represent Tunisian manufacturing industry.

Thus, to exceed the limits presented above, we recommend proposing more complex models including internal and external variables and tested on a larger sample. In addition, we recommend new avenues of research. We suggest examining the impact of internationalization behavior on business performance through an advanced analysis approach based on a categorization of internationalization processes. Four processes can be identified through a crossover of the two dimensions: age and internationalization speed (Young age / Slow speed; Young age / Rapid speed; Adult age / Slow speed; Adult age / Rapid speed). We advise to test their respective impacts on the international performance of companies. Therefore, studying the impact of these processes on performance provides a new perspective on the relationship between internationalization and performance by including time variables such as age and speed of internationalization.

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