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Research Article

Conceptualising Social Media Entrepreneurial Engagement from the Socio-Cognitive Theory

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Abstract

The increasing accessibility to digital technologies has impacted the scope and nature of entrepreneurship activities. Through the Internet and platforms like the social media, entrepreneurs have been empowered to reach larger markets across geographical boundaries with potential impacts on economic outcomes. Therefore, the need to clarify the underlying factors of individuals' engagement in digital entrepreneurial activities has become essential to deepen understanding of digital entrepreneurship's role in economic empowerment. Following the social cognitive theory, we conceptualise individuals' cognitive awareness and interaction with the social environment as determinants of social media entrepreneurial engagement. This study contributes to the literature by situating individuals within the context of their engagement in entrepreneurial activities.

Keywords: Digital Entrepreneurship, Social Media Engagement, Socio-Cognitive Theory

Introduction

Entrepreneurship plays a significant role in nations' economic development through the innovativeness of people in harnessing diverse resources for economic activities

(Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008). An entrepreneur is "someone who specialises in taking responsibility for and making judgmental decisions that affect the location, form, and the use of goods, resources or institutions" (Hebert and Link, 1989).

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Successful entrepreneurial engagement depends on innovation as a dynamic process of adapting to changes and uncertainties in the market. Through carefully crafted policy and intervention, the government plays a central role in minimising uncertainty and transactional costs, yet entrepreneurial agency is essential to harnessing the potential opportunities. The tension between human agency and institution is well articulated in the paradox of embedded agency (Seo and Creed, 2002). The institution could create an enabling environment for several actors to engage in diverse activities, but the respective outcomes are dependent on how individuals make use of the available platform. This has become more evident in the modern economy where people have leveraged the Internet and social media network for different outcomes.

The increasing accessibility to digital technologies like Internet smartphones, tablets, computers and the associated products and platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube has created a new trend in entrepreneurial activities (Ojo et al., 2019). Given the universality and collaborative platform of these technologies, the main assumptions of entrepreneurship uncertainty have been reversed. For example, entrepreneurial processes and outcomes have become less bounded, while the entrepreneurial agency's locus has moved beyond the individual to include several actors. The multiple possible combinations of technology and entrepreneurship have resulted in a diversity of phenomena with different characteristics and socio-economic impact. In Malaysia, for example, a range of public and private initiatives have been taken to enable the younger generations to harness their awareness and capability in digital technologies for entrepreneurial purposes. The #mydigitalmarker programme was introduced by the Malaysian Digital Economic Corporation (MDEC) and the Education Ministry to expose the youths to the business opportunities available via the digital technologies' platform (NST, 2018).

Nevertheless, a recent world bank report suggested that Malaysia should invest more in promoting digital entrepreneurship among the youth to spur economic growth and job creation (Worldbank, 2018).

Although there is a lack of generally acceptable definition of digital entrepreneurship, its significance in transforming the business landscape through the innovative use of digital technologies has been widely acknowledged (Nambisan, 2016). As Nambisan (2016) notes, further to its impact in extending the boundaries of entrepreneurship, digital technology has also altered individuals' underlying role in entrepreneurship. Digital entrepreneurship has facilitated interaction among multiple actors, thereby the context of individuals' engagement has become more central in the pursuit of entrepreneurial initiatives. Hence, the need to situate individuals within the context of their engagement with digital technology has become imperative (Fichman et al., 2014).

Previous studies on youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia have examined the adoption of ICT among younger entrepreneurs (Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2016), students' readiness for the implementation of entrepreneurship education (Othman et al., 2012) and perception of agro-based entrepreneurs on the application of mobile phone in agro-business (Shaffril et al., 2009; Ojo, 2017). However, the issue of youth engagement in digital entrepreneurship has been overlooked.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate how the cognitive and contextual factors shape the engagement of Malaysian youths in entrepreneurial activities on social media. The social cognitive theory (SCT) offers the appropriate theoretical basis for situating the individuals within their engagement context (Pincus, 2004). Specifically, individuals' behaviours are shaped by their attributes and their interaction with the social environment. Therefore, SCT is relevant in explaining

specific why individuals adopt certain behaviours (Bandura, 1986). In line with this, we posit that youth's engagement in entrepreneurial behaviour on social media is associated with differences in their cognitive state and social interaction.

Theoretical Background

Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a meta-theory, which has been employed across discipline to explain the dynamics of human behaviour (Kock, 2004). Studies have validated its relevance in the adoption of technological innovation (Compeau & Higgins, 1999; Ratten & Ratten, 2007), e-government application (Loo et al., 2009; Rana & Dwivedi, 2015), social media (Khang et al., 2014), Internet banking (Boateng et al., 2016) as well as Internet use and gratification (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Ojo and Raman, 2017)). The SCT posits that individual behaviour is shaped by expectation, as well as personal and external factors. These factors are expressed in terms of the triadic reciprocal interaction among individuals' attributes (i.e., abilities, knowledge and skills), external environment and actual behaviour (Bandura, 1989; Benight & Bandura, 2004). Such interaction is facilitated through human agency, wherein the individual exhibits the power of choice over outcome and leverage on awareness to continually regulate her / his behaviour in tandem with the desired outcome (Bandura, 2001). This regulatory influence is enacted through the belief in one's capability to choose and control actions. Beliefs depend on evaluating one's cognitive ability, motivation and the availability of the resources to complete the task (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

SCT associates human behaviour with reinforcement and observation concepts, which are evident through the cognitive processing of human interaction. Individuals learn to do something by observing and imitating those who are already involved in such activities. Unlike in the Western context, where individuals exhibit a preference for personal identities and individual

achievements, group commitment has proven to be salient to individual perception in the Eastern context (Hofstede, 1980). Social identity theory suggests that individuals strongly attached to their group identity are likely to develop social identity. This facilitates the alignment between their identity and the group norm, thereby enabling them to easily accept their group members' intentions and behaviours (Chatzisarantis et al., 2009; Jiang et al., 2016

Hypotheses Development

Drawing insight from the above, we posit that engagement in entrepreneurial activities on social media network is the individuals' outcome of choice. In line with this reasoning, individuals are expected to engage differently based on their beliefs and the perception of others' behaviour. The link between social identity and individual perception is rightly emphasised in the SCT. Individuals' learning process is enabled through the social context when one's behaviour is modelled by observing and interacting with other group members. Therefore, individual action could be shaped by the perception of the behaviour of those within one's social group (Bandura, 2001). In the following sections, we discuss the significance of personal beliefs in terms of self-efficacy and outcome expectations and the implications of social identity on such beliefs and behaviours.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a personal belief in the ability to attain a certain level of performance or desired outcome in a situation that affects one's life (Bandura, 1997). It is strongly associated with individual engagement and the differences in outcome when people with a comparable level of skills are engaged in a certain activity (Shane et al., 2003). As a salient factor of individual differences, self-efficacy reveals how belief in one's ability could account for behavioural difference. When faced with similar challenges, the former perceives opportunities for action,

while the latter perceives obstacles and risks, thereby justifying the lack of action. Self-efficacy could make people feel more competent to overcome perceived obstacles and achieve expected positive outcomes. Therefore, people high in self-efficacy are likely to persist when faced with challenges and uncertainty. Self-efficacy is relevant in differentiating the choice made by individuals in their engagement in entrepreneurial activities. An individual who perceives him or herself as being capable of using social media for entrepreneurial activity is more likely to demonstrate such behaviour by choosing to adopt the platform for entrepreneurial purposes.

H1. Self-efficacy positively influences the intention to engage in social media for entrepreneurial purposes.

Outcome Expectations

Lent et al. (1994) demonstrated the relevance of SCT in students' choice of an entrepreneurial career. The study suggests the interaction between students perceived self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Specifically, individuals who have confidence in their abilities to perform certain tasks would have a favourable expectation about the outcome (Bandura, 2001). Such expectation is a reflection of one's beliefs about the consequences of a particular choice of action. Therefore, outcome expectations are the behavioural incentives which determine engagement in a given task. When the entrepreneur perceives the social media network to be useful for attaining specific desirable outcome, he/she will develop the intention to engage in the activity.

H2. Outcome expectations positively influence the intention to engage in social media for entrepreneurial purposes.

Social Identity

Social identity suggests that an individual's awareness of his or her membership in a group and the extent of emotional

attachment to such group shapes their sense of social identity (Jiang et al., 2016). This influences personal identity and one's perception and behaviour (Haslam et al., 2009). By identifying with a particular group, an individual's behaviour will conform to other members of the group. In other words, individuals will behave according to their in-group members, but different from their out-group members. Such behaviour evolves through interaction with other members of a similar group. Through social interaction with others, individuals express their attachment to various groups, and they develop their own identity to conform to the group's image and reputation (Baker & White, 2010; Jiang et al., 2016). Therefore, members of groups that promote ing products on social media are likely to develop the intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities on social media networks.

H3. Membership of commerce-oriented social media group positively influences the intention to engage in social media for entrepreneurial purposes.

Entrepreneurial Capability

Entrepreneurial behaviour entails how an individual perceives innovative activity according to his/her level of autonomy and competitive aggressiveness. An important determinant of such behaviour is personal capability, reflecting the extent of an individual's innovativeness, proactive and risk-taking behaviour. Given that social media network is an innovative technology characterised by some level of complexity and uncertainty, individuals with high entrepreneurial capability are more likely to engage in the network for entrepreneurial purposes.

H4. Entrepreneurial capability positively influences the intention to engage in social media for entrepreneurial purposes.

Contextual Factors

Individuals' engagement in entrepreneurial activities can be shaped through the contextual factors of the business and societal environments. Studies have confirmed the significant impact of educational background, perceived support and role model on individuals' decision to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Cooper and Park, 2008; Tran and Korflesch, 2016).

Therefore, these contextual factors are also proposed as potential determinants of the intention to engage in entrepreneurial activities on social media.

H5. Contextual factors (perceived support, educational background and role model) will positively influence the intention to engage in social media for entrepreneurial purposes.

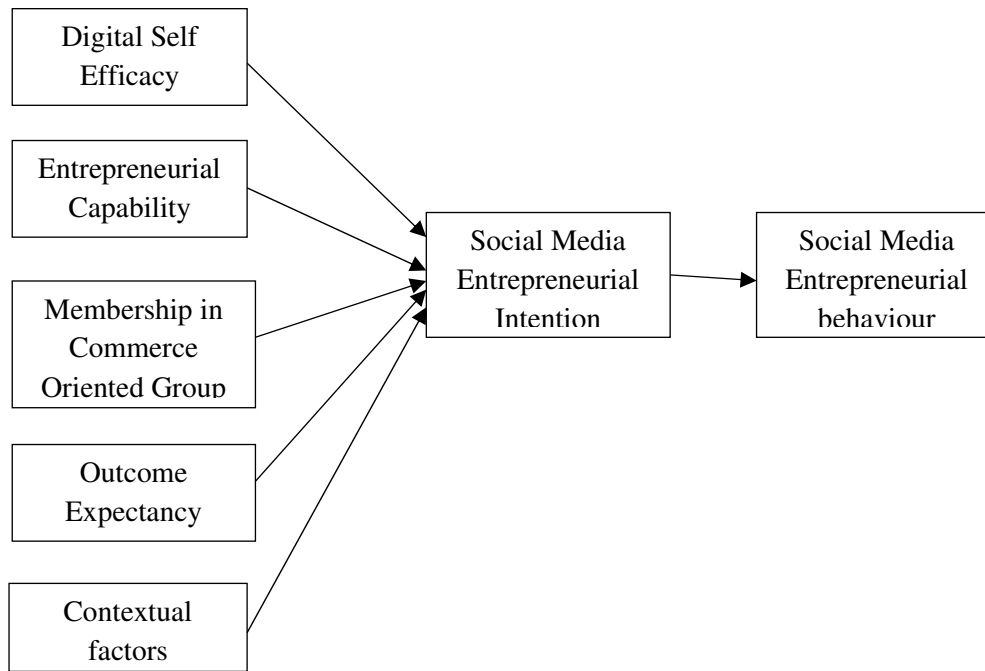


Fig 1. Theoretical Model

Proposed Methodology

This proposed study will employ a survey method in the collection of data to test the hypothesised relationships. The data will be collected from individuals across the Klang Valley area. This is the most prosperous, developed and urbanised metropolitan area in Malaysia, thereby the youth populations are expected to be more exposed to digital technology (Ojo et al., 2019). Based on the recently passed bill in the Malaysian parliament, a youth is between 15 and 30

years (Zainuddin and Kaur, 2019). Therefore, the respondents for this study will be from the above age groups. The questionnaire will be self-administered following the intercept survey technique. This technique is relatively easy to implement and most appropriate for enhancing respondents' response rate from diverse backgrounds (Boateng et al., 2016; Ojo et al., 2019). In implementing the intercept technique, two research assistants will be recruited and instructed to randomly administer the questionnaires to respondents in public places like train

stations, malls, etc. The collected data will be analysed using the partial least square structural equation modelling method to test the hypothesised relationships.

Discussion

This study contributes to the entrepreneurship literature by drawing on the SCT to propose a conceptual model explaining the social and cognitive factors of youth engagement in entrepreneurial activities through the social media platform. In essence, the present study situates individuals within the context of their engagement in entrepreneurial activities. Beyond the personal attributes, we proposed the social and contextual factors that could shape personal intention and behaviour towards digital entrepreneurial activities. As a result, our study addresses the need for further research on the implications of social and situational factors on human behaviour towards digital technologies (Fichman et al., 2014).

This study's expected findings will contribute to the national initiatives on encouraging digital entrepreneurship among youths, thereby offering insights on policy development for job creation and economic growth. The results will also enhance youths' quality of life in Malaysia by identifying the factors essential to cultivating a digital entrepreneurial mindset.

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