Exploring Youth Entrepreneurs' Social Media Strategies for Venture Creation and Growth

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Publication Date:
2019

DOI:

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Exploring Youth Entrepreneurs' Social Media Strategies for

Venture Creation and Growth

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A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Business

UNSW Canberra

December 2019

THESIS DISSERTATION SHEET

Thesis/Dissertation Sheet

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Abbreviation for degree as give in the University calendar	:	PhD
Faculty	:	UNSW Canberra
School	:	School of Business
Thesis Title	:	Exploring youth entrepreneurs' social media strategies for venture creation and growth

Abstract 350 words maximum: (PLEASE TYPE)

Youth unemployment is a severe issue facing many nations with a global youth unemployment rate of 13% (United Nations, 2018). It is estimated to double by 2050, with 90% of the youth living in developing nations (Vogel, 2015a). Entrepreneurship has been suggested as a way to reduce youth unemployment (Burchell & Coutts, 2019). The spread of information communication technology (ICT) has led to the emergence of social media (SM), which is central to the entrepreneurs' work.

SM benefits business ventures, products, services, and brands by supporting entrepreneurs' resource acquisition; transforming consumer behaviour, and adding a method to generate revenue through ventures that use SM. However, to benefit from SM, it needs to be used strategically. The impact of the SM on ventures, when (especially youth) entrepreneurs strategically use SM to create and grow their ventures in developing nations is under-researched (Lokuge, Sedera, & Nanayakkara, 2018; Mumi et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Weerawardena, & McColl-Kennedy, 2013; Smith, Smith, & Shaw, 2017). Strategically using SM in developing nations is essential because youth entrepreneurs deal with restricted resources. The current study argues that, by using SM strategically, youth entrepreneurs strive to overcome the restrictions they face.

This research explores youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth in Sri Lanka. From the two-phases of 40 semi-structured interviews that provide data to this research, it was found that participants used SM to create awareness, acquire customers and to conduct marketing activities. Participants' use of SM for their venture creation and growth involved them frequently communicating, engaging in network expansion to include new contributors, showcasing shared values, establishing transparency and continuous learning. It was also found that five main strategies were adopted by the participants to use SM: managing content, engaging consumers, handling reviews, using technical details, and creating brands.

The value of SM was extended through this research by shedding light on some strategies that youth entrepreneurs develop and use to build successful and sustainable ventures, contributing to the literature on the strategic entrepreneurship and computer-mediated-communication.

Keywords: Youth Entrepreneurs, Strategies, Social Media, Developing Nation, Micro-level Ventures, Resource-restricted, Venture Creation and Growth

II

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DEDICATION

This thesis work is dedicated to my loving husband, Ahamed Fareed, who put his profession on hold so I could achieve my dream. I am truly blessed to have you in my life and thank you for your unconditional love, care, wisdom and constant support. This work is also dedicated to my son, Ayaan Fareed, who had been tolerant, understanding and patient throughout this journey with my busy schedules. As this thesis marks a milestone in my academic life, it is also dedicated in the memory of two special individuals without whom I wouldn't have been what I am today; my grandmother Lilian Jayasinghe Silva and my grandfather, Chandrasena Silva. Although both of you are no longer with me physically, you will forever be in my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is a culmination of my journey of PhD, which was like climbing a mountain one step at a time accompanied with encouragement, support, guidance, trust, hardships and frustrations. When I climbed to the top, experiencing the feeling of fulfilment, I realised though only my name appears at the top of the thesis, a great many people including my supervisors, family members, colleagues and friends have contributed to accomplishing this huge task.

At this moment of accomplishment, I am greatly indebted to my primary supervisors Dr Saskia de Klerk and Dr Fiona Buick. Dr Saskia de Klerk accepted me as her PhD student and offered me her mentorship with her vast knowledge in the area of entrepreneurship, guidance, motherly love, care and utmost understanding. This work would not have been possible without her guidance, involvement, encouragement and the enormous trust she placed on me. Thank you for believing in me from the start and guiding me until the end. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr Fiona Buick, for accepting me as her student in the mid of my PhD journey and basically revolutionising my thesis with her in-depth feedback, exceptional attention to detail, perfectionism, professionalism and the rare thought process which comprehends each and every word. Thank you, Dr Fiona, for being there for me at times of 'near depression', being my 'safety net' and uplifting me. I am ever more appreciative of the guidance you provided to me, the exceptional learning journey which made me rethink each and every word I wrote and this thesis definitely would not have been possible without your continuous support.

My sincere thank you goes to my co-supervisor Dr Katie Moon for her contribution towards different phases of the thesis. Her advice has always been valuable and 'spot on' to consider different perspectives, even in the latter stages of my PhD. Thank you, Dr Katie.

My thank you is also extended to Dr Joelle Vandermensbrugghe for her patience and understanding various versions of documents and being readily available to help out in need. Thank you, Dr Joelle, for all your support.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation for the support and encouragement of my family. For their love, support and prayers, I would like to thank my parents, siblings and their spouses. You are all amazing people who I cherish and appreciate so much. I am truly thankful for the unconditional support, encouragement and love you have always extended to me, although you hardly understood what I researched on.

I owe thanks to two very special individuals in my life, my husband and my son. I thank you both for the continued and unfailing love, sacrifices, support and understanding that made the completion of this thesis possible. Both of you were around at times when I thought it is impossible to continue and helped me to keep things in perspective. Words can never express how grateful I am to both of you. I consider myself blessed to have this love and support from both of you.

I thank the Almighty for giving me the strength and patience to work through all these years so that today I can stand proudly with my head held high.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ICT   Information Communication Technologies

SM   Social Media

SME   Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

VoIP   Voice over Internet Protocol

CMC   Computer-Mediated Communication

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Book Publications

1. Ranasinghe, G. (2020). Barriers and Drivers of SME's Internationalisation in Emerging Markets: Study of Sri Lankan Youth Entrepreneurs. In P. Jones, P. Haddoud, & A. Onjewu (Eds.), *10th Volume of the Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurial Research* (10th Editi, pp. 141–160). London: UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Journal Publications

2. Ranasinghe, G., & de Klerk, S. (2015). Exploring the Youth Entrepreneurial Risk Behaviour from a Cognitive Perspective. *Sri Lankan Journal of Management, 20* (3-4), 70-89.

Conference Publications

3. Ranasinghe, G., & de Klerk, S. (2018). Creation of Social Capital Using Digital Networks: Case of Micro-level Youth Entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka. Conference proceedings of the Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship Research. Brisbane, Australia.

4. Ranasinghe, G., & de Klerk, S. (2018). Understanding the Role of Social Media for Youth Entrepreneurial Ventures in Developing Nations. Conference proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management. Auckland, New Zealand.

5. Ranasinghe, G., & de Klerk, S. (2018). Digital Networks for Ventures: Case of Sri Lankan Micro-level Youth Entrepreneurs (Accepted Paper ID 435). Conference proceedings of Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Birmingham, United Kingdom.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

EXPLORING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS' SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES FOR VENTURE CREATION AND GROWTH

Youth unemployment is a severe issue facing many nations (Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Vogel, 2015b), with a global youth unemployment rate of 13% (67 million young people) in 2017 and estimated to remain at the same level in 2018 (International Labour Organisation, 2018; United Nations, 2018). Youth unemployment is estimated to double by 2050, with 90% of the youth living in developing nations (Pieters, 2013; Population Reference Bureau, 2013; United Nations, 2015; Vogel, 2015a). The increase in youth unemployment is caused by an increase in the youth population, neoliberal policies, privatisation, an economic slowdown and shrinking employment opportunities (Mayer, Moorti, & McCallum, 2018; Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2019).

Entrepreneurship has been suggested as a way to reduce youth unemployment (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Vogel, 2015b; World Economic Forum, 2018). It can create employment opportunities for the entrepreneurs themselves and others (Chigunta, Schnurr, James-Wilson, & Torres, 2005). It also provides economic growth and poverty reduction with youth creating ventures (Acs, 2006; Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Zeffane, 2012).

Recognising these benefits has led to some governments developing policies that encourage youth entrepreneurship which, by activating young people to be entrepreneurs, they become active and productive members of society (Heinen, Décieux, Willems, & Murdock, 2019). For example, in Denmark and Sweden, personal development policies are brought forth to activate young people while, in the UK and Ireland, early economic independence policies are sought to activate their youth (Heinen et al., 2019). Considering how empowering young people and capacity building is important, the concept of the entrepreneurial self has emerged as a way of doing so to promote young people's "individual resources, skills, creativity, and the ability for innovation" (Heinen et al., 2019, p. 168). This approach is suggested as an effective way to foster young people's ability to cope with these (new) challenges and requirements, especially during economic and societal change, when adaptation and flexibility are required (Heinen et al., 2019).

The spread of information communication technology (ICT) has led to the emergence of social media as central to the entrepreneurs' work (Mumi, Ciuchta, et al., 2018; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017). Using social media occurs globally, with 3.196 billion users worldwide in 2018; a figure that has grown by 13% each year since 2016 (Chaffey, 2018). Social media benefits business ventures, products, services, and brands (Drummond, McGrath, & O'Toole, 2018; Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011) by supporting entrepreneurs' resource acquisition (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Drummond et al., 2018; Felix et al., 2017; Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015); transforming consumer behaviour, and adding a method to generate revenue through ventures that use social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lipizzi et al., 2013; Olanrewaju, Whiteside, Hossain, & Mercieca, 2018). However, to benefit from social media, it needs to be used strategically. The impact of social media on ventures, when (especially youth) entrepreneurs strategically use social media to create and grow their ventures in developing nations is under-researched (Lokuge, Sedera, & Nanayakkara, 2018; Mumi, Ciuchta, et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Salunke, Weerawardena, & McColl-Kennedy, 2013; Smith, Smith, & Shaw, 2017). Strategically using social media in developing nations is essential because youth entrepreneurs deal with restricted resources. To be competitive and build sustainable ventures, micro-level ventures[1] and youth entrepreneurs need alternative ways to increase their capacity and to access resources. The current study argues that, by using social media strategically, youth entrepreneurs strive to overcome the restrictions they face.

Previous studies in entrepreneurship has examined the importance of strategies for entrepreneurial success (Ahmad, Ahmad, & Abu Bakar, 2018; Osborn, 1995), and examined social media-based marketing (Ahmad et al., 2018; Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015) and self-branding (Duffy & Hund, 2015). These studies, however, have been limited to either one particular social media platform or were restricted towards exploring particular functional areas of ventures (i.e. marketing). Few studies consider social media strategies for entrepreneurial success by considering a range of social media

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[1] Micro-level ventures are manufacturing and service sector ventures with an annual turnover of less than LKR15 million (approximately USD 100 000) or ventures with less than 10 employees (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015).

platforms and all functions (i.e. resource acquisition and production) of a venture. This study addresses this gap. Understanding how social media can be strategically used is essential as it could offer alternative pathways that enable ventures to become innovative, by creating new ideas and bringing them to the market, aiding organisational success through exploring and exploiting opportunities, building networks and facilitating strategic planning (Horst & Murschetz, 2019). These social media strategies provide the opportunity for youth entrepreneurs to overcome obstacles in their marketplace and allow them to build networks where they can obtain resources, information and the psychological support, at different stages of the venture creation and growth.

This research explores youth entrepreneurs' use of social media for their micro-level venture creation and growth in a developing nation, that is, Sri Lanka. From the two-phases of 40 semi-structured interviews that provide data to this research, it was found that youth entrepreneurs in this study used social media to create awareness, acquire customers and to conduct marketing activities. Participants' use of SM for their venture creation and growth involved them frequently communicating, engaging in network expansion to include new contributors, showcasing shared values, establishing transparency and continuous learning. It was also found that five main strategies were adopted by the youth entrepreneurs to use social media: managing content, engaging the audience, handling reviews, using technical details, and creating brands.

This study extends the literature on strategic entrepreneurship (i.e. strategic choices) by integrating it with computer mediated-communications literature by considering how social media can be strategically used. This study contributes to understanding how social media can be valuable in resources-restricted environments and how youth entrepreneurs use social media to build successful and sustainable ventures, which would not be possible through traditional media. This study thus contributes to theory by exploring under-researched areas: youth entrepreneurs, micro-level ventures, social media strategies and developing nations. This study contributes to practice by suggesting that the emergence of the novel business models and new types of entrepreneurs, for example, media and digital entrepreneurs, bloggers and vloggers. It also essentially explains how social media platforms are chosen for ventures. This research clarifies how strong networking can help

resource restricted entrepreneurs to overcome institutional barriers and thus enable them to manage their customers, suppliers and other organisations more effectively to develop sustainable ventures.

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INTRODUCTION: YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEVELOPING NATIONS

1.1 Youth Entrepreneurs and Social Media

Unemployment is a global issue, particularly for the youth population (International Labour Organization, 2015; United Nations, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2018). According to Vogel (2015c) and Youth Business International (2015), half of the world's youth is either unemployed or underemployed. In 2017, the global youth unemployment rate was 13% (67 million young people) and was predicted to remain at the same level in 2018 (International Labour Organization, 2018; United Nations, 2018). This Figure for youth is triple the adult unemployment rates (4.3%) in many nations (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Vogel, 2013, 2015a; World Economic Forum, 2018; Youth Employment Decade, 2018). The severity of youth unemployment has led to some describing it as an "epidemic" (Vogel, 2015b, p.2) and a "wicked policy issue" for governments (Burchell & Coutts, 2019, p. 147).

The importance of addressing youth unemployment has been highlighted by many individuals and organisations (International Labour Organization, 2018; Kieselbach, 2003; Vogel, 2015b). Of particular note is the statement by Commonwealth Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland:

> Without action to promote young people's empowerment, boosting opportunities for employment and opening up spaces for political dialogue, countries will be squandering their most precious resource and storing up problems for the future (cited in Henley, 2016, p.2).

This statement emphasises the importance of addressing youth unemployment, particularly since the youth population Figure is estimated to double by 2050 where 90% of the youth population will live in developing countries (Pieters, 2013; Population Reference Bureau, 2013; United Nations, 2015; Vogel, 2015a).

Entrepreneurship is considered the key to overcoming unemployment, especially for this increasing youth population, to meet the projected need for jobs (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Chigunta, 2002; Vogel, 2015a; World Economic Forum, 2018). Entrepreneurship describes the interaction between entrepreneurial individuals motivated by either lucrative opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000, Brown, Davidsson, & Wiklund, 2001; Oseifuah, 2010) or necessity (Kobia & Sikalieh, 2010). This study defines entrepreneurship as the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of future goods and services (Venkataraman, 2019). Entrepreneurs exploit opportunities through venture creation (Gathungu

& Mwangi, 2014; Shook, Priem, & McGee, 2003; Tracey & Phillips, 2011; Zahra, 2005). To lessen unemployment and under-employment globally, this literature has focused on factors related to entrepreneurial behaviour, intention and education that increase entrepreneurial activities (Acs & Virgill, 2010; Audretsch & Keilbach, 2007; Eckhardt & Shane, 2003a; Hofstede, Noorderhaven, Thurik, Uhlaner, Wennekers, & Wildeman, 2004; Simón-Moya, Revuelto-Taboada, & Guerrero, 2014; Van Praag & Versloot, 2007). However, these studies focus primarily on adult entrepreneurs (i.e. age 29 and older) (Fisher, 2012; Newbert, Tornikoski, & Quigley, 2013; Sarasvathy, 2004; Welter, 2011). Distinguishing youth from adult (general) entrepreneurship is needed (Thornton, Ribeiro-Soriano, & Urbano, 2011; Gathunga & Mwangi, 2014) since each category differs regarding their experience, financial status, commitment and level of expectation (Shepherd, Wiklund, & Haynie, 2009; Vogel, 2015a).

The need for youth entrepreneurial studies has intensified, with many countries struggling with increasing youth unemployment rates (Amarasuriya, Gündüz, & Mayer, 2009; Vogel, 2015b; Xenos, Kabamalan, & Westley, 1999). In Sri Lanka, youth unemployment is extremely high among those who are educated to university graduate level (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a; Ranaraja, 2013), so that Sri Lanka's social, cultural, political and economic activities struggle with this challenge. The focus on Sri Lanka differs because youth entrepreneurs have higher expectations since they are well-educated but struggle from a lack of formal or informal support to embark upon 'start-ups' (Amarasuriya, Gündüz, & Mayer, 2009; Gunatilaka, Mayer, & Vodopivec, 2010). This deficiency motivates them to use resources that are available (i.e. social media) to create strategies to support their 'start-up' activities. Studies related to youth entrepreneurship will ultimately be important for governments as it helps to grow the economy and reduce poverty (Acs, 2006; Bruton, Ahlstrom, & Obloj, 2008; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Zeffane, 2012). Understanding the need and benefits of youth entrepreneurship has led to many nations devising policies and plans to support youth entrepreneurship (Australian Family and Community Services, 2003; Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Chigunta, 2002; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017; Vogel, 2013; Zeffane, 2012).

Entrepreneurship aims to create ventures by which entrepreneurs exploit opportunities and social needs (Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Shook et al., 2003; Tracey & Phillips, 2011; Zahra, 2005). As such, venture creation involves planning, organising and establishing new organisations (Edelman & Yli-Renko, 2010; Gartner, 1985; Gathunga & Mwangi, 2014; Morse, 2000; Shook et al., 2003; Tracey & Phillips, 2011; Zahra, 2005). The majority of research into entrepreneurial ventures focus on those of small and medium-scale (Aragón-Sánchez & Sánchez-Marín, 2005; Falkena, Levitsky, & Jacod, 2010; Jayaram, Dixit, & Motwani, 2014; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Stockdale, Ahmed, & Scheepers, 2012; Thrikawala, 2011;

Wickremasinghe, 2011), with only limited research into micro-level ventures (Odhiambo, 2013; Okurut & Ama, 2013; Oseifuah, 2010; Otieno, Lumumba, Nyabwanga, Ojera, & Alphonce, 2011; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018). Although micro-level ventures[1] are under-researched, youth entrepreneurs tended to prefer this type of venture because of its scale which enabled them to test their ideas cost-effectively (Chigunta, Schnurr, James-Wilson, & Torres, 2005; Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Friar & Meyer, 2003; Harms, Kraus, & Reschke, 2007; Odhiambo, 2013; Okurut & Ama, 2013; Oseifuah, 2010; Otieno et al., 2011; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018).

For entrepreneurial ventures to be successful, they require new ideas, new products and services and new organising methods. However, in developing countries in Asia, the key to entrepreneurial success means improving existing ideas and practices (Lokuge, Sedera, & Nanayakkara, 2018) and using digital technology, which has enabled entrepreneurs to realise innovations that were not possible in the past. The success of organisations such as Uber, Airbnb and Alibaba.com, which started as micro or small-scale ventures, grew over time through the use of digital technology. Digital technology provides scaling, growth and expansion in foreign markets and establishes its business in the market within a short time. Such technology has provided these online businesses with many opportunities to create new business ideas, models and ventures (Hsieh & Wu, 2019; Nambisan, 2018; Sussan & Acs, 2017; Zamberi, Ahmad, Rahim, & Bakar, 2018). Digital technology is thus central to both modern and future marketplaces for youth entrepreneurs.

Social media (SM) is a digital technology used extensively by the youth population. In 2019, 90.4% of young people in the United States used social media (Mohsin, 2019), compared with 65.2% of their counterparts in Sri Lanka (who use, notably, Facebook) (NapoleonCat, 2019). SM is a platform supported by the Web 2.0 backbone, which guides individuals' social behaviour through interactivity, collaboration and sharing (Giones & Brem, 2017; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Obar & Wildman, 2015; Ryan, 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Young people tend to use SM extensively because they are exposed to it during their early life and they are comfortable with it (Chaffey, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2013; Smith & Anderson, 2018). The literature shows that SM is essential in connecting users personally and organisationally to the extent that it has changed how users interact, participate and collaborate (Abed, Dwivedi, & Williams, 2015; Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; McCann & Barlow, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). For entrepreneurs, SM allows them to identify new opportunities, generate revenue through aiding branding and advertising, and transform

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[1] Micro-level ventures are manufacturing and service sector ventures with an annual turnover of less than Rs.15 million (approximately 0.10M. USD) or ventures with less than ten employees (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015).

traditional customer behaviour (Felix et al., 2017; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Lipizzi et al., 2013; Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). SM benefits small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that may not have the financial backing or technical expertise required for conventional technical solutions by providing a quick and cost-effective method to connect customers (Abed et al., 2015; McCann & Barlow, 2015; Shabbir, Ghazi, & Mehmood, 2016).

Entrepreneurs "must" engage with SM or risk losing the opportunities that it provides (Durkin, McGowan, & McKeown, 2013). To gain such benefit, entrepreneurs should use SM strategically, by comprehensively planning and continually investing to gain economic value and business benefits (i.e. a competitive advantage) (McCann & Barlow, 2015; Nair, 2011; Stockdale et al., 2012; Zamberi et al., 2018). For example, Shabbir, Ghazi, and Mehmood (2016) explain how SM campaigns may fail because they do not follow an essential strategic direction. Likewise, only using SM will not benefit entrepreneurs; it needs to be part of an overall strategy. Such a strategic approach consisting of strategic choices for creating and growing ventures is important (Abed et al., 2015). This study addresses this gap.

Although extensively using SM is widely accepted, how it contributes to venture creation, growth and sustenance in entrepreneurship is less explored (Durkin et al., 2013; Mumi, Ciuchta, & Yang, 2018a; Nambisan, 2018; Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020; Smith, Smith, & Shaw, 2017). Using SM in entrepreneurship is an essential yet under-researched topic in the entrepreneurship and information systems disciplines (Lokuge et al., 2018; Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Salunke, Weerawardena, & McColl-Kennedy, 2013; Smith et al., 2017). For example, limited studies have examined how youth entrepreneurs' use SM to create and grow their ventures in developing nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Such a focus is essential, as organisations operating in developing nations are commonly challenged by weak and unstable economic institutions, heterogeneous economic structures, few resources, restrictive government legislation and political instability (Asian Development Bank, 2015; Department of census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018a; Naudé, 2010; Naudé, Szirmai, & Goedhuys, 2011; Zamberi et al., 2018). Given these challenges and the importance of entrepreneurship in developing countries, understanding how SM can be used strategically (based on strategic choices) is important to those concerned with developing nations' perspectives about creating and growing ventures. This thesis focuses on the topic.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

This research aims to explore why and how youth entrepreneurs' use SM for their micro-level ventures in the developing nation, Sri Lanka. The following research questions speak to that purpose.

- Main RQ: Why and how do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

To address this primary research question, two sub-questions were posed:

- Sub RQ 1: Why do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?
- Sub RQ 2: How do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

1.3 Research Approach

This study explores youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for venture creation and growth. This research follows critical realism (Durdella, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which assumes that reality exists but can be never be understood perfectly. This ideology holds that reality, as it applies to youth entrepreneurs cannot be realistically understood because they work according to different views of the world to the extent that they use SM in different ways. However, an individual's experiences can be critically examined to understand their different knowledge and perspectives. Therefore, even though reality exists, it can never be perfectly understood without critically examining the individual differences and preferences that exist among SM users. To understand the differences the similarities need to be acknowledged (Durdella, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014). In this study, it was important that the researcher interacted with multiple participants to discover their diverse views. This was important for understanding how different youth entrepreneurs' use of SM was constructed by their meaning (i.e. different pathways and individual narratives), particularly as how they engage and understand their world relates to their cultural, historical and social perspectives. Thus, meaning/knowledge arises from their interactions with others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014). Therefore, this research was underpinned by a social constructivist approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Recognising the importance of interactions for this study, an interpretive method of analysis was selected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Durdella, 2018). To understand the lived experience, phenomenology is used. It explores the meaning that individuals (i.e. youth entrepreneurs) attribute to experiences (i.e. their intentions in using SM) in their world (in their ventures) or make sense of interactions in social settings (Durdella, 2018).

This study's primary data source was semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases. Such data collection is central to phenomenological methodology (Durdella, 2018) because it enables consistency among the interviews because participants are asked the same broad questions and allow sufficient flexibility to describe extensive matters that they regard to be important

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). This consistency and flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to interact with participants to ascertain their experience and adapt the interview questions accordingly. In this study, data was also collected through document analysis and network modelling.

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select participants for this study because answering the research questions required the researcher to find information-rich participants who met a particular selection criteria (Patton, 2002). These criteria apply to youth entrepreneurs within a specific age bracket (aged 15-29 years), who owned micro-level ventures (annual turnover of less than LKR 15 million (approximately USD 100 000 in May, 2018 or with less than ten employees), within the Western Province of Sri Lanka (commercial hub where the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are located), and who used SM for professional purposes. From the purposive sampling, 10 participants were identified. Subsequently, this study used the snowball sampling technique to identify further participants. In total, 40 youth entrepreneurs who were involved in 37 micro-level youth entrepreneurial ventures were included in the study.

1.4 The Contribution of the Study

In keeping with the purpose of this study, this study contributes to theory and practice in four distinct ways. First, it contributes to the entrepreneurial literature by examining youth entrepreneurs, which is an under-researched area (Gathunga & Mwangi, 2014; Manolova, Edelman, Shirokova, & Tsukanova, 2019; Thornton et al., 2011). Research in this area is essential because youth unemployment is a global issue that has become more prevalent due to neoliberal policies, privatisation, economic slowdowns, and shrinking employment opportunities (Mayer, Moorti, & McCallum, 2018; Salamońska & Czeranowska, 2019).

Second, this study contributes to the entrepreneurial literature by adding to the under-explored research area of micro-level ventures (Davidsson & Wiklund, 2007; Salk, 2005). Micro-level ventures suffer from resource restrictions because of their size; this is referred to the 'liability of smallness'(Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Bruneel et al., 2012; Kale & Arditi, 1998; Krackhardt, 1996; Steffens, Senyard, & Baker, 2009). The size of micro-level ventures means that few financial resources are available for the venture, such as from creditors. Smallness does not allow firms to buffer themselves when the market contracts (Aldrich & Auster, 1986), which makes them more vulnerable and highlights the need for entrepreneurs to use their few resources strategically. However, despite recognising the challenges faced by micro-level ventures, most entrepreneurial studies focus on SMEs and neglect micro-level ventures (Aragón-Sánchez & Sánchez-Marín, 2005; Falkena, Levitsky, & Jacod, 2010; Jayaram et al.,

2014; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Stockdale et al., 2012; Thrikawala, 2011; Wickremasinghe, 2011). As explained in this chapter, this study addresses this gap.

Third, by integrating entrepreneurship literature, specifically strategic entrepreneurial literature (i.e. strategic choices in this research) with computer-mediated communication literature (i.e. SM in this study), this study combines two areas which are much required. This mix is required as the entrepreneurial ecosystem[2] has changed with the use of SM (Horst & Murschetz, 2019; Hsieh & Wu, 2019; Steininger, 2019). The strength of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is that it allows different entities (i.e. customers and competitor) to share their resources, knowledge and learning opportunities (Muldoon, Bauman, & Lucy, 2018). SM has changed the social network dynamics (i.e. the way that entrepreneurs conduct businesses and engage with stakeholders), essential for entrepreneurs by shifting a few networks to a virtual context (Horst & Murschetz, 2019; Hsieh & Wu, 2019; Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017; Wahyuningtyas, Hanoteau, & Vial, 2018). For youth entrepreneurs to benefit, SM also need to be used strategically (see Shabbir et al., 2016). By considering the strategies and the strategic choices that youth entrepreneurs make, this study contributes to the literature on strategic entrepreneurship.

Finally, many entrepreneurial studies have focused on developed nations, with few on developing nations. This study addresses this gap by taking a developing nation's perspective. Research focusing on developing nations is much needed as they struggle with youth unemployment, resources constraints and poverty. Understanding the unique context of developing nations could add a new dimension to the literature. Sri Lanka, as a developing nation, is characterised by a low level of economic development and immature legal, political and financial institutions, which have lead consequently to vague and uncertain business contexts (Singh & Gaur, 2018). These unpredictable conditions act to constrain entrepreneurship and innovation (Vuong, Napier, Do, & Vuong, 2016), although there is a serious need for opportunities for entrepreneurship within this environment (Singh & Gaur, 2018). Ongoing calls for studies in developing nations (Bayrón, 2013; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Naudé, 2010; Naudé et al., 2011) suggest a need to support entrepreneurial activities in these nations and that there is a lack of research in developing countries.

1.5 Overview of the Study

This thesis contains eight chapters. This chapter described the broad need, rationale and justification for this research. It outlined the need for youth entrepreneurship in developing

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[2] A set of entrepreneurial actors with their attitudes, abilities and entrepreneurial processes, that dynamically interact with each other formally and informally to drive performance of innovative ventures (Muldoon et al., 2018, p. 160).

nations to overcome youth unemployment issues. Youth entrepreneurship can help to solve youth unemployment because it alleviates poverty and grows the economy of developing nations. The proliferation of technology means SM has been used extensively by individuals, including entrepreneurs. This chapter established the need to study youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for their venture creation and growth. This research addresses this gap by using youth entrepreneurs who own micro-level ventures in Sri Lanka.

To identify gaps in the literature, Chapter 2 reviews the literature on entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial venture creation, resources required for entrepreneurship, and developing nations and their use of SM. It identifies different types of entrepreneurs which have emerged as a consequence of environmental changes. It then goes on to examine the venture creation process, considering the importance of venture creation for entrepreneurship. This is followed by a review of the literature on resources that are vital for venture creation and growth. Resources such as bricolage, networks, social capital, financial capital and human capital are then discussed. The chapter also reviews developing nations and their use of SM.

Chapter 3 overviews the context of the research, Sri Lanka, a developing nation with a high youth unemployment rate. As entrepreneurship can help solve youth unemployment, Chapter 3 outlines the perspectives related to entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka, overviews SMEs in Sri Lanka and discusses the government policies relating to them (policies relating to micro-level ventures are not available).

Chapter 4, the research methodology, discusses the methods chosen to conduct this research and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpinned it. It outlines how data are collected through semi-structured interviews, document inspections, and network modelling. Chapter 4 describes the sampling strategy used and how the data were analysed. It also identifies study limitations.

The study findings are presented in Chapter 5 and 6. Chapter 5 explores participants' use of SM, the reasons for it, and how the use of SM has altered the traditional venture creation and growth. This chapter also examines networks as a way to acquire resources in SM platforms. The findings in Chapter 6 explains how participants use of SM involved frequently communicating, expanding the network, showcasing shared values, establishing transparency and continuous learning.

Chapter 7, the discussion Chapter, synthesises the findings. As a result of this syntheses, the study describes five SM strategies that youth entrepreneurs adopt: managing content, engagement, handling reviews, understanding and using technical details and functionality, and creating brands. This chapter also explains how youth entrepreneurs use SM in a strategic way

(i.e. making strategic choices) to create the success of their ventures in developing nations where resources are restricted.

The final chapter, Conclusion, identifies the contributions and implications of the study's findings for theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL MEDIA (SM)

2.1 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter outlined the rationale for this study. It argued that youth unemployment and underemployment is a severe issue in developing nations. Entrepreneurship has been positioned as one of the solutions to address this. The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on entrepreneurship, venture creation, resources and SM to identify gaps in the literature.

It begins by examining entrepreneurship and identifying different types of entrepreneurs which have emerged as a consequence of environmental changes. It then will go on to examine the venture creation process, considering the importance of venture creation for entrepreneurship. This is followed by a review of the literature on resources that are vital for venture creation and growth. Resources such as bricolage, networks, social capital, financial capital and human capital are then discussed. The chapter also reviews developing nations and their use of SM. Finally, the literature on strategic entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship and SM is reviewed to identify areas that are under-researched.

2.2 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been defined in multiple ways (Clark & Harrison, 2019; Cuevas, 1994; Kabir, 2019; Kloepfer & Castrogiovanni, 2018; Kobia & Sikalieh, 2010; Peverelli & Song, 2012; Ribeiro-Soriano & Zeng, 2018; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Definitions tend to focus on different aspects of entrepreneurship. Some consider the interrelationship between the entrepreneurial individuals (as agents) and lucrative opportunities, suggesting the actions of the agent (Ardichvili, Cardozo, & Ray, 2003; Eckhardt & Shane, 2003a; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000), whereas others consider the emergence of new economic, social, institutional, demography and cultural environments, through the actions of an individual or group of individuals (Liang, Wang, & Lazear, 2018; Peverelli & Song, 2012; Rindova et al., 2009). Finally, other definitions focus on the behavioural aspects related to entrepreneurship, such as risk-taking (Block, Fisch, & van Praag, 2017; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000; Palich & Bagby, 1995; Zeffane, 2012). The range of definitions means that there is a lack of definitional consensus regarding entrepreneurship.

The lack of consensus has been attributed to the nature of entrepreneurship, which is a field characterised by competing concepts, research practices and priorities (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Kloepfer & Castrogiovanni, 2018; Venkataraman, 2019). For example, Peneder (2009) argues that entrepreneurship is a modular concept consisting of behavioural, functional and occupational dimensions. Sociologists want to know how entrepreneurial behaviour is embedded socially and organisationally, and psychologists identify the thinking process of entrepreneurs (Peneder, 2009). Taking advantage of its openness to such varied inputs, in recent decades entrepreneurship research has emerged as an independent branch of academic inquiry, being multidisciplinary but mostly associated with a management focus. Management academics focus on how entrepreneurs manage their ventures and examine how ventures are created to derive value (Gibson, 2017; Hunt & Ortiz-Hunt, 2017; Mahrous & Genedy, 2019; Marinova & Østergaard, 2018; Mitchell et al., 2002; van den Heever & Venter, 2019).

The definition of entrepreneurship adopted in this study is located in the field of management (Ferreira, Fernandes, & Kraus, 2019). Following Venkataraman (2019), this study defines entrepreneurship as the discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of future goods and services. This definition acknowledges three important perspectives in entrepreneurship. First, it acknowledges the creation of goods or services for the future economies; second, it acknowledges the economical, psychological and social consequences with future goods and services; and, finally, it specifies that opportunities are discovered and exploited by the entrepreneurs (Venkataraman, 2019), which motivates entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs are motivated by opportunities (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003b; Shane, 2003; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000) and necessities (Reynolds, Camp, Bygrave, Autio, & Hay, 2001; Bosma & Harding, 2006; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010; Kobia & Sikalieh, 2010). There are two distinct views regarding the roots of opportunities, with key proponents being Schumpeter (1934) and Kirzner (1973). Schumpeter (1934) argued that new information created opportunities by disrupting the existing market (Schumpeter, 1934; Shane, 2003), whereas Kirzner (1973) argued that differential access to existing information created opportunities by reinforcing established ways of doing things and trying to fill the gaps in the existing market (Kirzner, 1973; Shane, 2003). From this, it is evident that different views on opportunities exist, whether the introduction of new information created opportunities (Schumpeter, 1934; Shane, 2003) or differential access to existing information created opportunities (Kirzner, 1973; Shane, 2003). Although most researchers tended to adopt either of these perspectives, the current belief is that both forms of opportunities existed within an economy at the same time (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003b; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

Another core motivation in entrepreneurship was necessity. Necessity-based entrepreneurship was introduced in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Reynolds, Camp, Bygrave, Autio, & Hay, 2001) and referred to when individuals were pushed into entrepreneurship because all other options for work were either absent or unsatisfactory (Bosma & Harding, 2006; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010). The main elements of necessity-based entrepreneurship are: (1) self-realisation, where people become entrepreneurs because they realise that their life-style would be better by becoming an entrepreneur (compared with being in wage-employment) or they have the desire to be an entrepreneur; (2) independence, where people become entrepreneurs due to their desire to work independently (i.e. not for someone else); and (3) displacement, where people become entrepreneurs because life circumstances (i.e. hardships) have pushed them to do so, such as poverty, difficulty in finding jobs, and unemployment making them think of entrepreneurship as a survival option (Bosma & Harding, 2006; Dencker, Bacq, Gruber, & Haas, 2019; Fairlie & Fossen, 2018; Hughes, 2006; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010; Kobia & Sikalieh, 2010).

Necessity-based entrepreneurship seemed particularly relevant to the youth population of developing nations. Today's youth population is growing, and is the largest the world has ever seen, with estimates that it will double by 2050, with many living in developing nations (Gunatilaka, Mayer, & Vodopivec, 2010; Pieters, 2013; Vogel, 2015c). However, globally, the youth population is facing significant unemployment (Pieters, 2013; Vogel, 2015c), especially in developing nations (Doran, McCarthy, & O'Connor, 2018; Pieters, 2013). This is particularly problematic in the Middle East and Northern and Southern Africa, with high levels of youth unemployment in these countries attributed to a slowdown in public sector employment growth (Hess, Petersen, & Mortimer, 1994; Pieters, 2013).

Youth unemployment has a significant economic and social impact on countries (Bjarnason & Sigurdardottir, 2003; Kieselbach, 2003). Recognition of the economic and social impact of the youth unemployment has led to the active pursuit of solutions (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Vogel, 2015c; Xenos et al., 1999), including entrepreneurship (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Kieselbach, 2003; Visaria, 1998; Vogel, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; Xenos et al., 1999). This is evident because many nations have established policies and plans to support youth entrepreneurship, such as school-based entrepreneurship education programmes aimed at introducing young people to entrepreneurship in the United Kingdom, the US, Canada and South Africa; and, in France, entrepreneurship awareness programs are carried out at the national level (i.e. Enterprises Cadettes and Graines d'Entreoreneurs ('Seeds of Entrepreneurship') (Australian Family and Community Services, 2003; Chigunta, 2002; Khanna, 2015; Vogel, 2013; Zeffane, 2012). The viability of entrepreneurship as a solution to

youth unemployment may be due to its impact on the economic growth and development of a nation.

Entrepreneurship is a crucial factor in the economic growth and development of a nation (Aparicio, Urbano, & Audretsch, 2016; Doran et al., 2018; Urbano & Aparicio, 2016). It is crucial because it provides a means for capitalising on opportunities presented by societal changes including economic fluctuations (i.e. wage rates, inflation rates and interest rates), demographical changes (i.e. incomes, education, geographic regions and ages) and technological disruptions (i.e. artificial intelligence, big data and data mining) (Hitt, Ireland, Sirmon, & Trahms, 2012; Toma, Grigore, & Marinescu, 2014; Urbano & Aparicio, 2016). Entrepreneurship enables knowledge spillover by transferring knowledge from one point to other ventures and individuals, which creates a knowledge-based environment with more entrepreneurial opportunities (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2007). Collectively, these factors benefit the economy through enhancing the GDP of a nation (Urbano & Aparicio, 2016; van Stel, Carree, & Thurik, 2005), which is particularly important in developing nations' economic growth intentions (Asian Development Bank, 2015; Naudé, 2009; Naudé et al., 2011).

Entrepreneurship also enables diversification of enterprises. For example, changes in technology and the environment have seen the emergence of new types of entrepreneurs, including techno-entrepreneurs, eco-entrepreneurs and social entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs develop new kinds of ventures to solve new problems and create new products and services (Kloepfer & Castrogiovanni, 2018; Nambisan, 2018; Toma et al., 2014; van Stel et al., 2005). The emergence of these new types of entrepreneurs is necessary for embracing the changing environmental conditions and for innovating within that environment. The different types of entrepreneurs and the types of ventures they establish are discussed in the following section.

2.3 Different Types of Entrepreneurs in Response to the Changing Environment

Entrepreneurship evolves based on the changing environment. Entrepreneurs have been commonly categorised into a number of areas based on the entrepreneurs' ages (i.e. youth entrepreneurs and adult/general entrepreneurs); their use of technology (i.e. media and digital entrepreneurs); their venture type (i.e. social and green entrepreneurs); the entrepreneurial activity (i.e. novice serial and strategic entrepreneurs); and other entrepreneurs' attributes (i.e. women and artisan entrepreneurs) (Bhasin, 2019; Hewitt & Golden, 2014). These new types of entrepreneurs have also brought forth new approaches to businesses (Yilmaz, 2012). This section discusses the most commonly-found categories of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, which have emerged based on individuals' responses to the changing environment. Whilst not exhaustive, these categories provide an overview of leading trends in the literature on the

changes in entrepreneurship. The importance of these different types of entrepreneurship is that they emerged as a way of responding to the environment with new approaches to business.

2.3.1 Youth Entrepreneurship

The focus of many extant entrepreneurial studies has been on adult entrepreneurs (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Newbert, Tornikoski, & Quigley, 2013; Welter, 2011) with some researchers arguing that more attention needs to be devoted to youth entrepreneurs (Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Thornton et al., 2011). This is because youth entrepreneurs have different experiences, financial statuses, commitments, and level of expectations than adult entrepreneurs (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Shepherd, Wiklund, & Haynie, 2009; Vogel, 2015c). However, extant youth entrepreneurial studies have tended to focus on student samples (Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Lin & Chiou, 2010), rather than samples of actual youth entrepreneurs. This study addresses this gap by focusing on youth entrepreneurs.

Youth entrepreneurship is defined as the action of youth, who recognise and act on the opportunity or necessity to form a new entity and add value (Gartner, 1985; Oseifuah, 2010; Shook et al., 2003; Simon, Houghton, & Aquino, 2000). The definition of 'youth' represents individuals aged 15-29 years, who are in the transition period from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood (UNESCO, 2017)[3]. The transition period for youth entrepreneurs has been categorised into three stages. First, the pre-entrepreneurs (15-19 years) where the youth leaves home and starts identifying themselves as an individual while developing entrepreneurial ideas; second, budding entrepreneurs (20-25 years) where they attempt to start and run a small ventures and gain the practical know-how; and third, emergent entrepreneurs (26-29 years) where they have gained experience and realise how they need to manage a venture (Juneja, 2019). Youth entrepreneurship is an important response to youth unemployment (discussed in Chapter 1) and is a way that marginalised youth can be empowered by providing them with self-employment opportunities (Hess et al., 1994; Juneja, 2019). Due to most of the research being focused on adult entrepreneurs, with little known about youth entrepreneurs, this literature review focused on entrepreneurs broadly, with studies pertaining to youth entrepreneurs overtly specified.

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[3] It is acknowledged that this definition may vary depending on depending on the average age a community expects individuals to be an adult, average education completion rates and legal factors (UNESCO, 2017; Vogel, 2015c). However, for the purpose and context of this study because individuals aged 15-29 years is considered adults, this definition is appropriate. This definition also abides by recent studies on young people of low and middle-income nations (Burchell & Coutts, 2019).

2.3.2 Media Entrepreneurship

Media entrepreneurship has been defined as small enterprises or ventures whose activities (any of product/service characteristics, process, distribution channel or place, or different innovative usage), that can add at least "one voice or innovation" to the media marketplace (Khajeheian, 2017, p. 92). For example, a media entrepreneur is someone who starts a blog in the marketplace or a YouTube channel for his/her venture. This category of entrepreneurship evolved as a result of changes in the media landscape, particularly the extensive use of media within society and the novel employment opportunities that it can provide (Achtenhagen, 2017; Ferrier, 2012; Horst & Murschetz, 2019). This form of entrepreneurship is shaped by different social practices that are different from the routinised ways, including activities such as liking and sharing content; actors such as SM communities; and ideas, such as using artificial intelligence (Horst & Murschetz, 2019), leading to media entrepreneurship being associated with dynamic processes dealing with new information communication technology (ICT) developments (i.e. SM analytics, artificial intelligence and big data) and increasing demands from the market (Khajeheian, 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

2.3.3 Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship has been defined as the "entrepreneurial creation of digital value using socio-technical digital enablers for acquisition, processing, distribution and consumption of digital information" (Sahut, Iandoli, & Teulon, 2019, p. 4). This definition suggests that digital entrepreneurs can establish any type of venture (i.e. social enterprises) and encapsulates different phases of ventures (i.e. start-up or growth). Digital entrepreneurship emerged as a response to how digital technology has transformed businesses and societies (Allan, 2019; Arlott, Henike, & Hölzle, 2019; Nambisan, 2018). Digital entrepreneurship provides new ways of finding customers, designing and promoting products, generating revenue and reducing costs. It also provides opportunities for entrepreneurs to collaborate with a range of people, including business partners, using multiple platforms. Finally, it also provides new sources of opportunity and competitive advantage for entrepreneurs (Allan, 2019; Shen, Lindsay, & Xu, 2019; Sussan & Acs, 2017), which is particularly important in resource-restricted environments (Martinez-Dy, Martin, & Marlow, 2018; Ngoasong, 2018).

2.3.4 Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is the process whereby the creation of a new business enterprise leads to social wealth enhancement so that both society and the entrepreneur benefits (Mair, Robinson, & Hockerts, 2006; Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009). It emerged in response to heightened social problems (i.e. global warming and poverty) and new challenges (i.e. providing clean water for people in Africa) (Gandhi & Raina, 2018). Due to their desire for

addressing societal challenges, social entrepreneurs are motivated by social objectives (Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2016; Zahra et al., 2009). They also act as catalysts for society (Mair et al., 2006), by embodying the idea of social purpose that generates social impact through their ventures, thereby acting as role models for economic and social wellbeing.

2.3.5 Green Entrepreneurship

Green entrepreneurship includes the need for pro-environment behaviour from a venture and a responsible thinking entrepreneur (Gevrenova, 2015). Green entrepreneurs have been defined as "individuals who have become skilful in negotiating and influencing the presentation of environmental projects to the local community" (Franklin & Dunkley, 2017, p. 1500). Green entrepreneurship has emerged as a response to environmental degradation (Slavova, Heuer, & Agster, 2015). It focuses on how countries can pursue human development without compromising natural resources and ecosystems (Nordin & Hassan, 2019; Slavova et al., 2015). Thus, green entrepreneurship is presented as a solution for common environmental threats (i.e. climate change, resource scarcity and environmental pollution) faced by all nations and as a response that will enable sustainable development (Ge, Jiang, Gao, & Tsai, 2016; Nordin & Hassan, 2019). This sustainable development needs to balance economic performance, environmental impact and social responsibility in their business approach (Ge et al., 2016).

2.3.6 Novice Entrepreneurs

Novice entrepreneurs do not have prior experience in establishing businesses or have not owned a business (Westhead, Ucbasaran, Wright, & Binks, 2005). Although they are new to both entrepreneurship and business operations, they have an equity stake of a new, purchased or inherited venture (Anokhin, Grichnik, & Hisrich, 2008; Westhead et al., 2005). They are new to establishing businesses, although they may have been employed in other professions. It often emerges as a reaction to life circumstances, such as if migrants move to a country and their professional qualifications are not valid in that country, leading to them being left without money. This might lead some migrants to becoming novice entrepreneurs who are motivated by a necessity to earn a living (Anokhin et al., 2008)

2.3.7 Serial Entrepreneurs

Serial entrepreneurs continuously come up with new ideas. Their ideas lead them to repeatedly starting new ventures and leaving the responsibilities to someone else, then they move on to a new idea and new venture (Samuelson, 2018). They are used to selling their stake at a business venture and moving on to have ownership of a new or a purchased venture with their new ideas (Anokhin et al., 2008; Westhead et al., 2005). It is found that serial entrepreneurs are motivated by personal development or by the pursuit of a new product idea (Tervo, 2014).

2.3.8 Strategic Entrepreneurship

Strategic entrepreneurship involves entrepreneurial action and strategic thinking; in other words, a combination of opportunity-seeking behaviour and advantage-seeking behaviour (Anderson, Eshima, & Hornsby, 2019; Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2001b; Hitt, Ireland, Sirmon, & Trahms, 2012; Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2002a; Kim, 2018; Mazzei, 2018; Westgren & Wuebker, 2019). Strategic entrepreneurship involves environmental sensing (i.e. detecting an opportunity of threat that emerges from the environment), opportunity-seeking (i.e. timely decision-making with a clear strategic goal in mind), strategic flexibility (i.e. manage risk and optimise profit with strategic changes), entrepreneurial orientation (i.e. strategic choice of the key decision-makers) and organisational learning (i.e. how ventures build, supplement and organise knowledge and routines around their activities) (Paek & Lee, 2018) referred to as strategic actions (Hitt et al., 2002a). These strategic actions help entrepreneurs achieve a competitive advantage for their ventures and enables them to exploit opportunities that will help their ventures achieve sustained and future competitive advantages (Hitt et al., 2002a). Some have argued that this type of entrepreneurship is required to take advantage of, and capitalise on, changing environments to revitalise existing ventures and achieve innovation (Ketchen Jr., Ireland, & Snow, 2007; Paek & Lee, 2018).

2.3.9 Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurship researchers consider entrepreneurship to be a gendered phenomenon (Ladge, Eddleston, & Sugiyama, 2019; Xheneti, Madden, & Thapa Karki, 2019). Traditionally, entrepreneurship was considered to be male-dominated, which led to women taking a more family-oriented role in many countries (Brush, de Bruin, & Welter, 2009; Ladge et al., 2019; Pathak, 2017). Women entrepreneurship breaks the gender stereotypes and these were prevalent decades ago (Brush et al., 2009; Pathak, 2017). Women entrepreneurship emerged as a response to the inequalities faced by women in society (i.e. social expectations where being a wife and a mother was seen as more important for women than being a wage earner) and the marginalisation they have historically faced. It is seen as a mechanism that promotes women's contribution to economic growth (Ladge et al., 2019; Ndour & Alexandre-Leclair, 2015; Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019). It is seen as important for the development of economies because, in countries like India, 48% of its population are women (Pathak, 2017). Studies have identified the need to promote women entrepreneurship by providing women with mentorship and training programs, thus empowering and enabling them to create their own ventures and contribute towards economic growth (Ndour & Alexandre-Leclair, 2015; Sutter et al., 2019).

2.3.10 Artisan Entrepreneurs

Artisan entrepreneurs are considered to be a valuable resource that promotes the cultural identity of a country (Hoyte, 2019; Teixeira & Ferreira, 2019). Members of this group often establish ventures based on their hobbies and passions. In doing so, they find creative ways to discover and exploit opportunities and create sustainable businesses (Pret & Cogan, 2019). They emerged along with the expansion of creative industries and the renewed focus on home-made goods and services, which have a cultural value (Ratten, Costa, & Bogers, 2019). Other factors, such as lack of funding, inadequate government support for their crafts and creative products and new online platforms where artist-entrepreneurs' products can be promoted, have encouraged artists to engage in entrepreneurial practices (Crowley, 2019; Teixeira & Ferreira, 2019). The next section examines an essential aspect of entrepreneurship: venture creation.

2.4 Entrepreneurs and Venture Creation

Venture creation is vital for entrepreneurship (Gartner, 1985; Kloepfer & Castrogiovanni, 2018; Oseifuah, 2010; Shook et al., 2003; Simon et al., 2000). It is the process of turning a new idea or technology into a business that can succeed and attract investors (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019). A new idea is associated with inspiration, intention and attention, resulting in the creation of an entrepreneurial venture (Bird, 1988). Venture creation is vital because it demarcates the outcome of an entrepreneurial process (Bird & Jelinek, 1988), in which an entrepreneur's ideas get implemented (Bird, 1988). In other words, without venture creation, entrepreneurship is incomplete.

The creation of a new venture is a complex process (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Carter, Gartner, & Reynolds, 1996), without a prescribed or correct path to follow (Gatewood, Shaver, & Gartner, 1995; Shook et al., 2003, Simon et al., 2000). As a result, each individual takes a unique path, with their choice of path based on the type of venture created and the environment the venture operates in, as well as their personality and process (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Jackson & Young, 2016; Kloepfer & Castrogiovanni, 2018; Simon et al., 2000). Gartner (1985) argued that venture creation consisted of four major perspectives: (1) characteristics of the individual; (2) the venture which they create; (3) the environment of the new venture; and the (4) process accommodated to create the new venture. Similarly, taking a process-based perspective venture creation, Bhave (1994) argued that venture creation consisted of three main stages: (1) opportunity setup stage; (2) technology set-up and venture creation and the (3) exchange change. Business concept, production technology and products are, respectively, the outcomes of each stage (Bhave, 1994).

In the literature, three views related to venture creation are evident. Proponents of the first - the behavioural view - focus on the individual and argue that ventures are created due to individual choice and their interpretation of the external world (Bönte & Jarosch, 2011; Burt, Jannotta, & Mahoney, 1998; Gartner, 1989; Neneh, 2019; O'Gorman, 2019; Shaver & Scott, 1991). Proponents of the second – contextual view – deny the role of the individual in venture creation (Aldrich, 1999, Autio, Kenney, Mustar, Siegel, & Wright, 2014); instead, they focus on the environment and argue that entrepreneurial innovation is an activity influenced by the environment (Aldrich, 1999; Autio et al., 2014). Finally, proponents of the third, or middle view, focus on both the individual and environment to argue that new ventures are created as a direct outcome of an individual's intention and consequent actions by recognising the impact of, and need to, adapt to environmental changes (Edmiston, 2007; Liu, Zhu, Serapio, & Cavusgil, 2019a; Salunke, Weerawardena, & McColl-Kennedy, 2013; Sarason, Dean, & Dillard, 2006).

Considering the middle view of venture creation, one of the influential factors related to venture creation is the particular conditions within an entrepreneur's environment (Mitchell, Smith, Seawright, & Morse, 2000; Shook et al., 2003), including legislative requirements, acceptance of entrepreneurship within the culture and economic conditions (Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2000; Welter, 2011). An understanding of context is important for recognising the different factors that create opportunities for entrepreneurs (Autio et al., 2014; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Zahra, 2007). Most extant research on entrepreneurship has been undertaken in developed nation contexts (Olafsen & Cook, 2016; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). However, those who advocate for the importance of context have argued that findings related to developed countries could not be generalised to developing nations because conditions within these environments were different. They highlighted significant differences in environmental factors across developed and developing nations, such as legislative requirements and the extent to which entrepreneurship was accepted within the cultural and economic conditions (Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2000; Olafsen & Cook, 2016; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018; Welter, 2011). They have argued that these differences created unique opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurs.

The other elements considered in the middle view of venture creation were the motivation and the goals of the individual entrepreneur. In many studies, the individual entrepreneur was portrayed as an economic agent, as they only examined economic value gained through the new venture (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2007; Holmes & Schmitz, 1990; Jovanovic, 2019; Khilstrom & Laffont, 1979; Lucas, 1978). However, the goals of the entrepreneur might not be limited to economic value and might reflect the entrepreneur's family, business history (Benz, 2009; Davidsson, 1991; Wennekers, 2006), their needs and values, need for recognition (Gamage,

Cameron, & Woods, 2003; Moran, 1998), skills, resources and opportunities (Geldhof et al., 2014; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kautonen & Palmroos, 2010; Phillips & Tracey, 2007). Therefore, an individual's goals and motivations were considered vital for venture creation (Birley & Westhead, 1994; Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Parker, 2012; Robinson & Marino, 2013). The following section examines the process related to entrepreneurs' venture creation.

2.4.1 Entrepreneurs' Venture Creation Process

As discussed in the previous section, venture creation is the outcome of an entrepreneurial process. The creation of a new venture involves a complex process which is considered a milestone of a venture's life (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006; Carter et al., 1996; Cha & Bae, 2010; Robinson & Marino, 2013). The entrepreneurial venture creation process typically comprises five phases: (1) the discovery and exploitation of a opportunity; (2) the accumulation of resources; (3) the marketing of products and services; (4) the production of a product and building the venture; and (5) the response to government regulations and stakeholders in the society (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Gartner, 1985; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shook et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2017). The entrepreneurial venture creation process is represented in Figure 2.1.
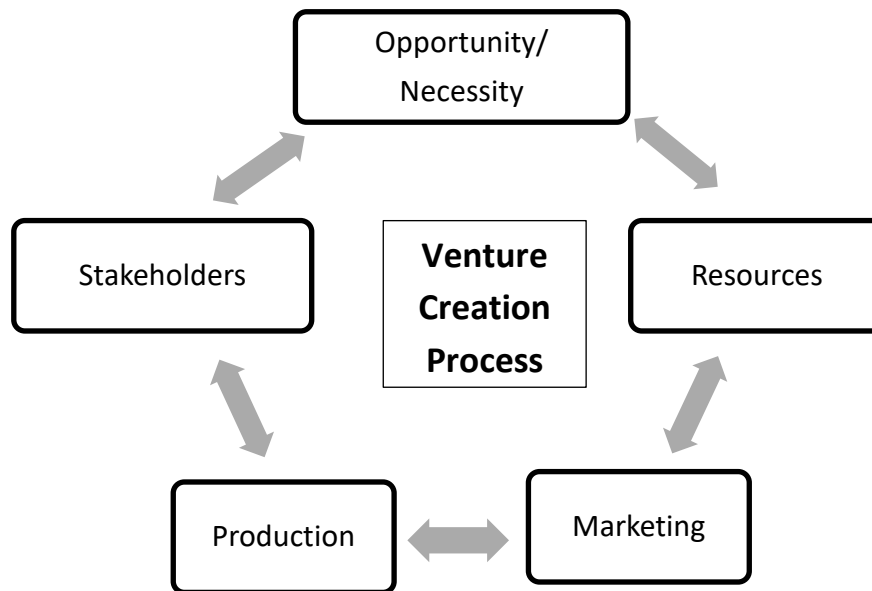
Figure 2.1. Entrepreneurial Venture Creation Process
Source: Gartner (1985)

The first phase of the venture creation process is the discovery and exploitation of an opportunity/necessity. Necessity is considered a different form of motivation towards

entrepreneurship in the pre-processing stage (Brewer, 2014); thus, the venture creation process for an opportunity-based entrepreneur and the necessity-based entrepreneur will remain the same. The explanation below considers opportunities. Opportunities are situations through which an entrepreneur creates profit by recombining existing resources (Gartner, 1985; Parker, 2012; Shane, 2003). The entrepreneurial opportunity was considered unique because it allowed for the development of a new framework, as opposed to using what already existed (Shane, 2003). Following the discovery of an opportunity was the decision to exploit the opportunity. Opportunity exploitation could take two forms: the creation of a venture, or the sale of opportunities to existing ventures (Gartner, 1985; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shook et al., 2003). Therefore, after exploiting an opportunity, the entrepreneur was assumed to create novel means and/or ends (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003a). The second phase of the venture creation process began with the accumulation of resources. During the resource accumulation stage, an entrepreneur might not control all the resources required for venture creation. Thus, the entrepreneur would be required to use already established networks to gain access to the resources needed (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shook et al., 2003). The third phase was marketing products and services. This phase started with a market analysis (Lee, 2002) to identify the target market segment. This process helped to set the price for the product/service (Araujo & Spring, 2006). In this stage, the entrepreneur also determined the distribution and promotional strategies they would adopt (Gartner, 1985; Greene, Walls, & Schrest, 1994). The fourth phase involves the production of a product or a service. This requires the investment/acquisition of capital, land or space for production activities, and the acquisition of labour and equipment to enable production (Araujo & Spring, 2006; Gartner, 1985; Maxwell & Van der Vorst, 2003; Spring & Araujo, 2009). The entrepreneur can then gain economic profit through the combination of all of these production factors (equipment, labour and capital). The final phase of the venture creation process involves building the venture and responding to government regulations and stakeholders in society. This is important as no business operates in isolation; businesses always interact with the society in which they operate (Noren, 2004). This means that government policies and regulations will affect the business; for example, in Spain, the government has encouraged their youth population to establish ventures through supporting them with access to flexible alternative financing options (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019), and the Commonwealth of Nations suggesting the necessity for formulating a national level youth entrepreneurship strategy in Commonwealth countries (The Commonwealth, 2018).

It is important to note that the entrepreneurial venture creation process was cyclic with interlinks between each stage so that the back and forth transition between the activities in the process were possible. This circular venture creation process also allowed ventures to go through this

process continuously for improvement, growth and survival. This continuous process also needs to ensure the creation of value which is essential for gaining a competitive advantage.

Competitive advantage gained through value creation can be explained using Porter's Value Chain (Mozota, 1998). Although Porter's Value Chain is appropriate for analysing strategically important activities and their impact on cost and value, it seems to lack the ability to analyse industry-dependent competitive advantage. To analyse industry dependent competitive advantage Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998) suggest two value creation models: the value shop and value networks. Value shops model ventures where value is created by mobilising resources and activities to resolve a particular customer problem (i.e. medical services and law firms), while value networks model ventures that create value (i.e. innovation and customer relationship management) by facilitating a network of relationships between their customers using mediating technology (i.e. retail banks and insurance companies) (Cheng & Shiu, 2019; Muninger, Hammedi, & Mahr, 2019; Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998). In all of these value creation models, the common element is the need for entrepreneurs to acquire the resources necessary to run their business.

2.5 Resources

Entrepreneurial resources comprise of resources that were owned and needed by the entrepreneurs prior to venture creation (as suggested by Figure 2.1). Specific resources were required in the venture creation process to generate value, such as financial resources and the skills and knowledge of the individual entrepreneurs involved in the venture related activities (Huang, 2016). Hence, resources are considered essential for entrepreneurial ventures, and resource-restrictions are one of the predominant reasons for venture failure (Yoon & Sung, 2019). In resource-restricted environments, entrepreneurs can establish micro-level ventures[4] which are smaller in scale requiring minimum resources as opposed to other venture types and an option where they can cost-effectively test their ideas (Odhiambo, 2013; Okurut & Ama, 2013; Oseifuah, 2010; Otieno et al., 2011).

Considering the suitability of micro-level ventures in resource-restricted environments, many youth entrepreneurs created micro-level ventures (Chigunta et al., 2005; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018). A key challenge for micro-level venture creation was the 'liability of smallness' (Bruneel

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[4] The definition micro-level ventures used in this study is one put forth by Ministry of Industry and Commerce (2015); that is a manufacturing and service sector ventures with an annual turnover of less than Rs.15 million (approximately 100 000 USD) or ventures with less than 10 employees. It is acknowledged that different measures are used to define scale of ventures, across different nations (see De Mel et al., 2010; Vial & Hanoteau, 2015). However, Ministry of Industry and Commerce's (2015) definition was appropriate for this study as it is the way Sri Lankan micro-level ventures are defined.

et al., 2012; Hagen, Zucchella, & Ghauri, 2019; Krackhardt, 1996; Steffens et al., 2009). Liability of smallness suggests that entrepreneurial ventures face challenges are more vulnerable to competition because of the size of the venture (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Hagen et al., 2019; Kale & Arditi, 1998). This was because micro-level ventures often had a low level of resources and financial support, meaning that they were unable to protect themselves from market contractions (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Hagen et al., 2019), especially in resource-restricted contexts (Ngoasong, 2018).

For youth entrepreneurs to create micro-level ventures, identification and utilisation of networks and resources are vital. Due to the limited resources in micro-level ventures, entrepreneurs need to establish and utilise networks and relationships to access resources (Greve & Salaff, 2003; Noren, 2004; Sarasvathy, 2001). Networks thus become a form of organising to acquire resources and capabilities (Hitt et al., 2002b). The connection between the resources and networks are summarised in Figure 2.2.
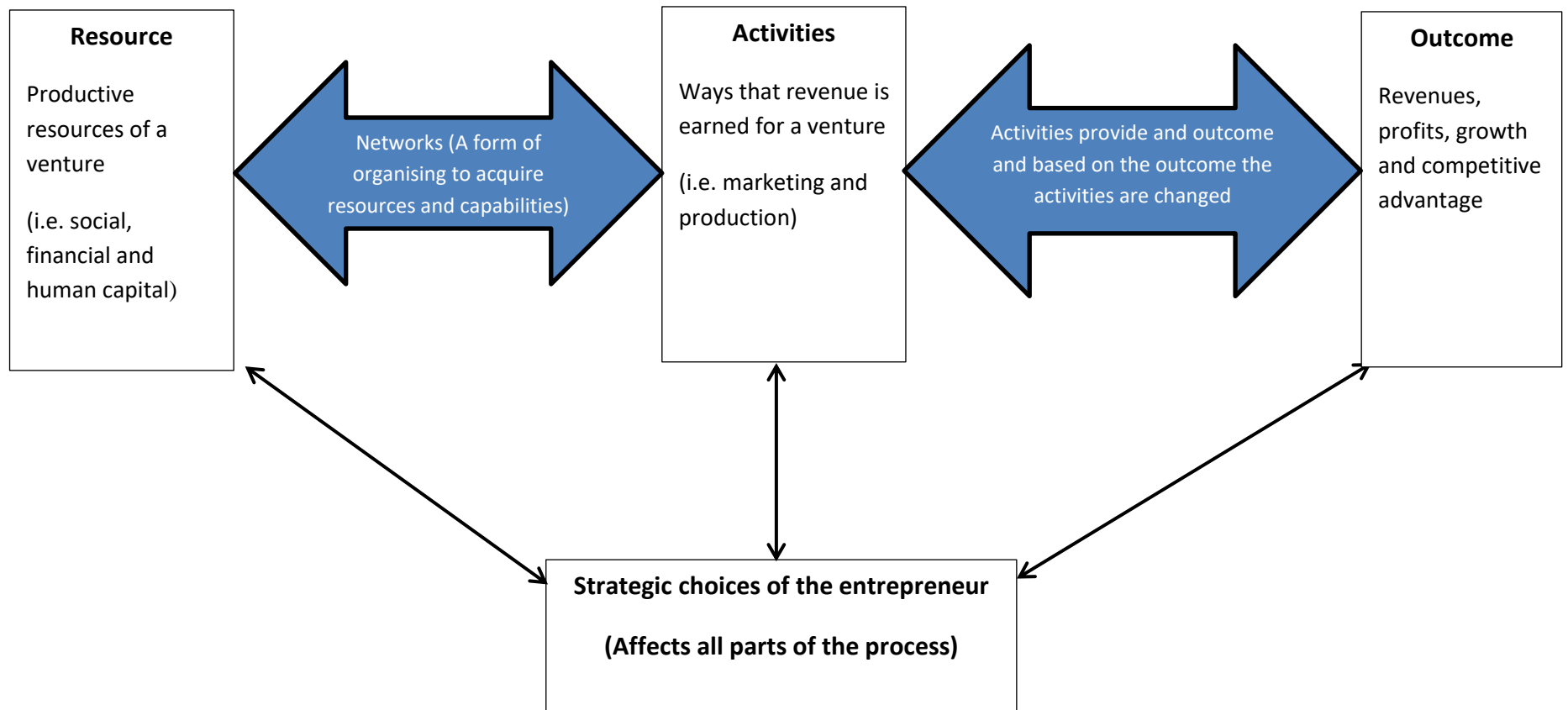
Figure 2.2**. The Circular Process between Strategic Choices of the Entrepreneur, Resources, Activities and Outcomes**
Source: Adapted based on Mathews (2010) and Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton (2002b)

According to Figure 2.2, resources are the input for the activities that the entrepreneur performs, and these activities ultimately result in outcomes, such as revenue, profits and competitive advantage. In the process between resources and activities, networks act as a form of organising to acquire the resources and capabilities to compete in markets (Hitt et al., 2002a). Networks can also become strategic networks, where resources and capabilities that are difficult to imitate are created with the support of the networks (Hitt et al., 2002a). Based on the outcome obtained by the entrepreneur activities are changed and, based on the changes in activities, the resources will need to be changed. For example, if the entrepreneur expected a revenue of 100 000 with activities A and B in place and if the entrepreneur only obtained a revenue of 50 000, then the entrepreneur will alter the activities which, in turn, may change the resources used in these activities (i.e. change of the combination of resource, change of quantities and/or add additional resources). These changes are influenced by the strategic choices of the entrepreneurs (Mathews, 2010), such as the intention to change the combination of the resources in the above example, and these strategic choices can occur at the resource, activity or the outcome stages. These strategic choices made by the entrepreneur ultimately results in the success or the failure of a venture (Hill, 2019; Hitt et al., 2002a). The process thus takes a form of a cycle where the resources, activities, outcome and the entrepreneurial strategy are interlinked. The sections that follow discuss each of the components that are identified in Figure 2.2.

2.5.1 Bricolage as a Way of Managing Resources

Scarcity of the resources is common today, thereby requiring entrepreneurs to manage their resources as effectively as possible (Olugbola, 2017). The notion of bricolage focuses on how entrepreneurs deal with limited resources and suggest that, under certain conditions, entrepreneurs may take different routes to identify opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Bricolage is defined as utilising the resources at hand (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Levi-Strauss, 1967) and as a particular mode for human actors to relate to their environments (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010; Levi-Strauss, 1967). When applied to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs may relate to their environment (context) by: (a) relying primarily on the resources at hand and ignoring the market need to uncover an opportunity (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Sarasvathy, 2001); (b) primarily focusing on pursuing the opportunity in the short-term ignoring the long-term returns (Sarasvathy, 2001); (c) refusing to endorse to resource limitations imposed by the environment (Baker & Nelson, 2005); and (d) engaging in long-term goals and plans (Sarasvathy, 2001).

Bricolage encourages experimentation as a way of solving problems. This experimentation as a way of problem-solving makes bricolage a relevant concept for youth entrepreneurs in developing nations because it encourages the reuse of resources for a purpose other than what it was originally intended (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Fisher, 2012; Sarasvathy, 2001). This involves

combining resources, the use of goods at hand, the use of readily available skills and existing contacts (Fisher, 2012). For example, in developing nations, one of the resources that are available is digital media. Using this resource that is available, youth entrepreneurs can create a blog, resulting in the emergence of digital/ media entrepreneurship (Khajeheian, 2017; Kraus, Palmer, Kailer, Kallinger, & Spitzer, 2019). Digital/media entrepreneurs thus can compete in the markets without the need for extensive resources as media covers some of the essential aspects such as cost of marketing and connection with the partners (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011; Harris & Rae, 2009; Khajeheian, 2017; Kraus et al., 2019). By using bricolage, entrepreneurs can recombine and make creative use of existing resources and mobilise practical knowledge, thus challenging the theoretical approaches (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010) which specify how resources are used conventionally.

Bricolage can be internal or external. Internal bricolage consists of the combination of unique skills, life and work experiences, professional and academic qualifications associated with an individual (Vanevenhoven, Winkel, Malewicki, Dougan, & Bronson, 2011). Therefore, internal bricolages represent the legitimacy of entrepreneurs controlling other resources and guiding venture (Vanevenhoven et al., 2011). External bricolage involves dealing with social relationships/physical or functional assets which influence the entrepreneurial process. External bricolage encompasses potential resources available to entrepreneurs from the external environment, such as a web of social relations or physical, tangible inputs such as machines, materials and financial resources (Vanevenhoven et al., 2011). External bricolage activities are based on networks and relationships and are strongly shaped by the contact networks of an individual (Baker, Miner, & Eesley, 2003).

Both internal and external bricolages play a vital role in the entrepreneurship process. Some authors argued that the entrepreneurial process was enabled through bricolages (Baker, Hall, & Aldrich, 2000; Vanevenhoven et al., 2011), because entrepreneurs often tended to recombine resources at hand for novel uses and, in time, developed a more practical approach to experimentation by combining resources (external bricolage), knowledge, and their past experiences (internal bricolage) (Vanevenhoven et al., 2011). This is considered essential for the venturing process, as it follows an adaptive design process of making solutions achievable, critical resources more obtainable and reduction of costs (Sarasvathy, Dew, Read, & Wiltbank, 2008). Therefore, through combining both internal and external bricolage, entrepreneurs can create economic wealth despite the resources constraints faced (Senyard, Baker, Steffens, & Davidsson, 2014; Valliere & Gegenhuber, 2014). Many studies have applied bricolage to entrepreneurship as well as organisational improvisation and transformation (Baker et al., 2003; Baker & Nelson, 2005; Engelen, Erturk, Froud, Leaver, & Williams, 2010; Hendry & Harborne,

2011). These studies indicate that bricolage involves the combination of the internal and external environmental scanning to create, develop or exploit a particular opportunity (Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005; Vanevenhoven et al., 2011).

For youth entrepreneurs, internal and external bricolage is different from what previous generations have used. For youth entrepreneurs, the previous internal bricolage, consisting of unique skills, life and work experiences, professional and academic certifications associated with an individual (Vanevenhoven et al., 2011), has changed. The youth population has multiple academic qualifications now and are exposed to a different set of skills, such as computer literacy (Bolton, Parasuraman, & Hoefnagels, 2013; Laird, Harvey, & Lancaster, 2015; Murray, 2011; Parry & Urwin, 2011). The external bricolage consists of social relationships/physical or functional assets. Due to frequent changes in the entrepreneurial environment, youth entrepreneurs are provided with different opportunities. For example, with the proliferation of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the social interactions and assets available for the youth entrepreneurs have changed. The expansion of the ICTs has meant many networks and relationships can now be formed online. For example, SM supports the formation of such networks and relationships online. These external environmental changes suggest the external bricolage based on networks and relationships has also encountered changes (Damon, Bronk, & Porter, 2015). Regarding youth entrepreneurs, these online-based networks seem to be more vital as they are more accustomed, behaviourally, to using them (Bolton et al., 2013; Damon et al., 2015; Martin, 2005; Salkowitz, 2010). They use online networks for their work, study and also as a means of enjoyment. The next section explores the networks, a way of organising to acquire resources and capabilities.

2.5.2 Networks as a Way to Acquire Resources and Capabilities

Networks play an important role in entrepreneurship. Networks are a way to acquire the resources and capabilities for venture activities necessary to compete in markets (Hitt et al., 2002a). Many entrepreneurs are embedded within networks (Zimmer & Aldrich, 1987), with research primarily focused on their business and personal networks (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; O'Donnell, Gilmore, Cummins, & Carson, 2001).

Entrepreneurs needed networks as a way to gain and mobilise resources for their survival in the competitive environment (Aldrich & Cliff, 2003; Desa, 2012; Newbert et al., 2013; Shane & Stuart, 2003; Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Starr & Macmillan, 1990; Yoon & Sung, 2019; Zimmer & Aldrich, 1987). This means that networks are essential for the growth of all types of ventures when the economic environment is competitive (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2015). Networks are vital for the entrepreneurial process as they support new venture development, the discovery of opportunities and the ability to obtain legitimacy for ventures (Adomako, Danso,

Boso, & Narteh, 2018; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003), affecting the survival and performance of entrepreneurial ventures (Adomako et al., 2018; Elfring & Hulsink, 2003). Networks are particularly crucial for entrepreneurs who operate in nations with a lower level of institutional development due to scarce resources and turbulent environmental conditions, as they enable the ability to obtain the required resources and mobilisation of resources (Hitt et al., 2015; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Kiss et al., 2012; Williams, 2010).

Networks are valuable across all stages of the venture creation and growth process. They provide valuable support during the start-up process of ventures (Adomako et al., 2018; Anderson & Jack, 2002; Anderson, Dodd, & Jack, 2010; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015). During the inception phase of a venture the personal networks of entrepreneurs, consisting of family and friends, are particularly important to gain emotional support and a sense of belonging (Choi, Kim, Sung, & Sohn, 2011; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Lee, 2013; Lee & Jones, 2008; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018), which is important in the early days of a venture because it promotes confidence in them and encourages them in their entrepreneurial journey (Nielsen, 2019). For the growth phase of ventures, entrepreneurs' business networks, consisting of suppliers and customers, are essential to share new information (Norris, 2002; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018; Putnam, 2000), that may enable them to penetrate other markets, create novel products/services and establish partnerships for growth. Across both the venture creation and growth stages, networks support access to knowledge (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Herhausen, Binder, Schoegel, & Herrmann, 2015; Stuart & Sorenson, 2005; Tiwana, 2008; Tsai, 2001). They provide entrepreneurs with the information they require to make decisions (Engel, Kaandorp, & Elfring, 2017; Morgado, 2018; Reuber & Fischer, 2005), including new product/service ideas and information regarding opportunities (Adomako et al., 2018; Casson, 2010; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Morrish & Jones, 2013; Shu, Ren, & Zheng, 2018), both at the national and international level (Aldrich, 1999; de Klerk & Kroon, 2008; Greve & Salaff, 2003; Simmons, Redd, Addae, & Cheng, 2016; Smith & Lohrke, 2008; Zimmer & Aldrich, 1987). At the international level, networks contribute towards the process of internationalisation (Kiss & Danis, 2008; Kiss et al., 2012; Reuber & Fischer, 2011) by providing information and contacts vital to access the foreign markets (Welch & Welch, 2004). At the national level, networks support entrepreneurs to source investment opportunities, knowledge sharing, new market creations and to find partnership opportunities and information necessary to succeed in the industry (Larson, 1991; Lechner & Dowling, 2003; Nielsen, 2019; Ozdemir, Moran, Zhong, & Bliemel, 2016; Premaratne, 2001; Sarasvathy & Dew, 2005; van den Heever & Venter, 2019)

Studies related to networks highlight three specific constructs: network governance, the pattern of relationships, network size and position as important for entrepreneurs. These constructs

affect entrepreneurs': (1) resource mobilisation; (2) the type of networks that entrepreneurs can access; and (3) the strength of the relationships that entrepreneurs build (Aldrich, 1999; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Burt, 1992; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993; Krackhardt, 1996; Lechner & Dowling, 2003; Smith & Lohrke, 2008; Tim, Dean, & David, 2000). The first construct is network governance that aids network exchanges. One such governance mechanism is trust which is considered critical for the quality of the resource flows (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; de Paula, de Campos, Pagani, Guarnieri, & Kaviani, 2019; Giurca & Metz, 2018; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Pérez-Macías, Fernández-Fernández, & Rua-Vieites, 2019). For example, a trusted supplier in the entrepreneur's network will provide the entrepreneur with better quality raw material within a specific/promised timeline while a supplier who trusts the entrepreneur may provide the entrepreneur with better credit periods. These elements of network governance provide a cost advantage as opposed to coordination through the market and bureaucratic mechanisms (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003).

The second construct is the pattern of relationships that emerge as a consequence of direct (strong) and indirect (weak) ties of the actor (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Han, 2006; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002; Kalish & Robins, 2006; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Newbert et al., 2013; Nielsen, 2019; Ruef, 2002; Tim et al., 2000; Uzzi, 1996; White, 2018). These ties are important for entrepreneurs as they influence resource flows. Strong ties in an entrepreneur's network will provide continuous support for the entrepreneur for his/her ventures and are also vital for the operational cycle of the venture whereas the weak ties are not mandatory for the operation of the venture and can be substituted if needed.

The third construct is network size and position (centrality) that an actor inhibits. The network size, position and the diversity influence the accessibility of resources (Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Semrau & Werner, 2014; Tsai, 2001; van Tubergen, Ali Al-Modaf, Almosaed, & Said Al-Ghamdi, 2016). If the entrepreneurs are placed in a central location within the network, the flow of resources will have to go through him/her, while if he/she is not in a central location, the flow of resources may take different paths. Further, if the entrepreneur's network is diversified the information that he/she would obtain from that network relationships would be diversified, making the decision-making process easier for the entrepreneur. An element of network position which has been heavily researched is structural holes (Baum, Calabrese, & Silverman, 2000; Burt, 2002, 2015; Kalish & Robins, 2006; Stam, Arzlanian, & Elfring, 2014; Tiwana, 2008). Structural holes are networks which are clustered without a connection in between, creating a hole in the structural arrangement of the network. These clusters contain similar information, and unless these clusters are joined together, access to diversified information is difficult. A cluster could be, for example, an accounting

community or lawyers' community. Unless the structural holes are bridged the information regarding accounting information and law-related information will not be shared. Bridging this structural hole is important for an entrepreneur to obtain both the information related to accounting and law in order to grow the venture. Studies related to constructs of networks have also encompassed technology-related entrepreneurship studies, where information technology and weak ties, the importance of foreign strategic partners were considered (Elfring & Hulsink, 2003; Ma, Yang, Yao, Fisher, & Fang, 2012; Reuber & Fischer, 2011; Shane, 2000). Further, research also indicates the properties of a network (network size, density and ties) heavily researched within the literature may provide mixed blessings for a venture (Burt, 1992; de Klerk & Kroon, 2008; Dunbar, Arnaboldi, Conti, & Passarella, 2015; Moody & Paxton, 2009; Sebora, Lee, & Sukasame, 2009). The section that follows will explain the resources that are prominent within the entrepreneurial context.

2.5.3 Social Capital as Resource

Social capital[5] is central to entrepreneurial success. Many scholars have identified the importance of social capital for entrepreneurship (for example, Casson & Giusta, 2007; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2016; Gedajlovic, Honig, Moore, Payne, & Wright, 2013; Light & Dana, 2013; Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017; Smith et al., 2017). Social capital provides networks that facilitate the discovery of opportunities, as well as the identification, collection, and allocation of scarce resources (Birley, 1985; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Uzzi, 1999). It influences resource acquisition through collaborations and sharing of non-confidential information (Lee, Tüselmann, Jayawarna, & Rouse, 2011). It also assists with the entrepreneurial opportunity exploitation process by providing and diffusing critical information and other essential resources (Uzzi, 1999). Further, social capital enables an entrepreneur and their venture to establish legitimacy and enables the achievement of desirable outcomes (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Smith et al., 2017; Uzzi, 1999). Therefore, social capital is considered a vital element of entrepreneurship (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Gedajlovic et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2017).

The benefit of social capital for entrepreneurship has been specifically linked with the types of social capital (bonding social capital and bridging social capital). Bridging social capital brings together individuals and ventures that associate different circles of friends while bonding social capital is associated with family and close friends, providing secure and consistent access to resources (Choi et al., 2011; Coleman, 1990; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018; Putnam, 2000). Studies have demonstrated the role of bonding social capital and bridging social capital in the

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[5] Social capital is defined as "the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 14).

entrepreneurial success (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Gedajlovic et al., 2013; Grichnik, Brinckmann, Singh, & Manigart, 2014; Thompson, 2018). Bonding social capital, in the form of encouragement obtained from family and close friends, is an essential consideration for nascent (budding) entrepreneurs (Davidsson & Honig, 2003) because it is fundamental for providing the financial and moral support required at the initial phases of ventures. For example, close friends and family may provide capital for the entrepreneurial process, which can compensate for the lack of bank finance. However, for carrying out and continuing the start-up process, bridging social capital, as an extension to family and close friends, has been identified as important (Davidsson & Honig, 2003). This is because bridging social capital links individuals beyond their social circle to include other ventures and individuals, who may provide valuable resources, support and access to previously unknown information (Bucholtz, 2019; Choi et al., 2011; Kwon, D'Angelo, & McLeod, 2013; Leonard & Onyx, 2003). This information is essential during the growth phase of a venture with the potential to provide new information and resources to an entrepreneur. Indeed, both bonding and bridging social capital contribute extensively to the emergence of ventures (Davidsson & Honig, 2003), especially in developing nations (Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2019).

2.5.4 Financial Capital as a Resource

Access to financial capital is important for small firms because it is a generic resource that can be converted to other types of resources (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Financial capital refers to assets needed by a venture to provide goods and services as measured in terms of money value (Ross, 2019). Small firms find access to financing difficult (i.e. debt financing), which requires an asset to be mortgaged, limiting the growth of small ventures (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Financial capital has the ability to buffer ventures from unforeseen difficulties from the environment, such as natural disasters (Cooper, Gimeno-Gascon, & Woo, 1994; Wiklund, 1999). The initial capital that entrepreneurs have may determine the initial strategy that they pursue when establishing their venture (Cooper et al., 1994). However, the amount of capital that is required for the initial start-up phase of a venture is heavily determined by the industry (Cooper et al., 1994), as some industries are capital intensive requiring more machinery and equipment (i.e. manufacturing ventures) and others may require less (i.e. digital media-based ventures) (Cooper et al., 1994).

Many entrepreneurs pursue partnerships as a way to secure financial capital, with others thinking of how they are better able to handle the ownership of the ventures. For example, some entrepreneurs resort to crowdfunding which is a collective effort where they collect funds from the customers, friends, family and individual investors (Dai & Zhang, 2019). Others seek financial support from friends and family as an internal source of funding (Kotha & George,

2012) or will use angel networks, venture capital, or staging capital as alternative external ways of financing the ventures (Orser, Riding, & Manley, 2006).

2.5.5. Human Capital as a Resource

Human capital is the entrepreneur's education, experience, their management or industry-specific know-how and technical capabilities which act as a key resource, especially during the start-up phase of a venture, as the entrepreneur will be the sole decision-maker (Cooper et al., 1994). Entrepreneurial education reflects the formal studies entrepreneurs have undertaken, with those who have completed higher education being equipped with the knowledge, skills and problem-solving ability to manage the entrepreneurial decision-making effectively. Education and experience allow entrepreneurs to cope up with problems and become successful (Cooper et al., 1994). Entrepreneurs gain industry-specific know-how through experience in the industry; through this experience, they develop a tacit understanding of the key success factors of the industry, specialised industry-specific knowledge (i.e. how the industry-specific processes work and what are the regulatory requirements that need to be fulfilled), and about key products and technologies (Cooper et al., 1994). Management know-how is also acquired through experience. It represents the tacit understanding and judgement of entrepreneurs and aids their decision-making (Cooper et al., 1994). Entrepreneurs also establish management know-how through working with partners and advisors as they share knowledge and guide them (Cooper et al., 1994; Estrin, Mickiewicz, & Stephan, 2016).

Human capital is important for entrepreneurship for several reasons. First, human capital is important for entrepreneurs to discover and create entrepreneurial opportunities (Marvel, Davis, & Sproul, 2016), based on their knowledge, skills and capabilities. Second, entrepreneurs can use the experience (human capital they have gained) to exploit the opportunities and obtain the financial resources (Marvel et al., 2016) to create the ventures. Third, human capital supports the accumulation of new knowledge (Marvel et al., 2016), based on the prior knowledge and experience of the entrepreneurs. The benefits of human capital could be examined with the use of human capital theory which suggests that individuals with higher knowledge, skills and competencies will achieve greater performance outcomes (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2008), which applies to the entrepreneurs in terms of them being able to discover, create, exploit opportunities, obtain financial resources and accumulate knowledge.

2.6 Developing Nations and their Use of Social Media (SM) as a Resource for Entrepreneurship

The proliferation of Information Communication Technology (ICT) has led to the emergence of SM as a key resource for entrepreneurship (Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Smith

et al., 2017). In the entrepreneurial process, ICTs (such as SM) play the role of an external enabler due to its ability to make boundaries more fluid and agency more dispersed (Berger, von Briel, Davidsson,& Kuckertz, 2019; Nambisan, 2017; von Briel, Davidsson, & Recker, 2018). The integration of ICTs with entrepreneurship has also supported the entrepreneurial innovation process (Nambisan, 2017; Schiavone, Tutore, & Cucari, 2019; von Briel, Davidsson, & Recker, 2018) . Entrepreneurs use SM for numerous reasons, with the most prominent reasons being the establishment of social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990, 1998; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Sharma, Ahuja, & Alavi, 2018), continuation of existing ties and the formation of new relations (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Makkonen & Virtanen, 2015; Smith et al., 2017; Williams, 2006), remaining up-to-date with the newest trends, increasing advertising and improving marketing, and seeking advice from experts using SM (Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

SM is a platform supported by the Web 2.0 backbone, which facilitates individuals' social behaviour through interactivity, collaboration and sharing (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Obar & Wildman, 2015; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). SM is extensively used globally, with 3.196 billion users worldwide in 2018; a figure that has grown by 13% each year since 2016 (Chaffey, 2018). Many studies recognise the most prominent users of SM are youth population (Chaffey, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2013; Smith & Anderson, 2018). The popularity of SM has led to the expansion of SM platforms. Owing to this popularity, in recent years, there has been an increasing amount of general literature on SM. Based on this literature, seven categories of SM platforms can be identified: social networking services, SM News, Voice over IP software (VoIP), document sharing services, media sharing services, blogging sites and social bookmarking services (Safko, 2012; Tahir, 2013). The examples for each of the categories and an overview are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Digital Media Spectrum Classifications, Examples and Descriptions
Source: Adapted based on Safko (2012) and Tahir (2013)

Social Media Category	Examples	Brief Overview
Social Networking Service	Facebook, LinkedIn	Management of social services through interactions.
Social Media News	Digg	All news related to social media can be found within these platforms.
Voice Over IP Software	Viber, WhatsApp, and Skype	Used to communicate with others. Seen as a cost-effective means to communicate with family and friends overseas.
Document Sharing Services	Slide share, Google Drive	Enables sharing of documents such as word processing, spreadsheets or other files.
Media Sharing Services	Instagram, YouTube, Snap Chat, Flickr	Sharing of videos, audio, and pictures. Classified into four classes - Video-Sharing /Video Hosting Service: for example, YouTube and Vimeo- accept videos from the users and provide them with free services -Photo sharing – for example, SnapChat, Pinterest, Flickr – sharing pictures among social circles. -Audio sharing – for instance, Soundcloud can share audio with friends. Mostly integrated into social networking services. -Podcast- for example, Livestream-broadcasting medium to share videos, audios, and files.
Blogging Sites	Blogging- WordPress and Blogger Microblogging - Twitter	Separated into blogging and microblogging. Bloggers (many individuals) provide in-depth comments on a topic (individually). Blogging sites can interconnect relevant blog discussion for further informational needs. Micro-blogging is a shorter version of blogs with fewer words being included in the expression.
Social Bookmarking Services	Delicious	Social bookmarking provides centralised services with the facility to add, annotate, edit and share bookmarks of web-based documents.

SM has significantly enhanced connectivity both at the individual and organisational levels. It encourages people to share their views, opinions at both personal and professional levels (Ellison et al., 2007; Fischer & Reuber, 2014; Kaye, 2005; Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2010; Sheldon

& Bryant, 2016). It facilitates interaction, institutional structures and professional routines by changing rules associated with social interactions by supporting functionalities such as polls, surveys and ratings (Culnan, McHugh, & Zubillaga, 2010; Dijck & Poell, 2013).

SM has enabled entrepreneurs to manage their ventures in different ways. SM has provided novel ways to generate revenue through aiding branding and advertising products/services (Felix, Rauschnabel, & Hinsch, 2017; Muntinga et al., 2011). For example, the creation of SM user-generated content adds to the brand value for entrepreneurs, with SM providing easy access to a larger audience for advertising. SM also provides a means for generating revenue (i.e. by attracting the audience through SM content and by running promotions on SM platforms) (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Olanrewaju, Whiteside, Hossain, & Mercieca, 2018). It has also enabled entrepreneurs to acquire and manage their resources in a more cost-effective way (Borgatti & Cross, 2003; Drummond, McGrath, & O'Toole, 2018; Felix et al., 2017; Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015; Wilson et al., 2015). For example, rather than spending on traditional media for marketing entrepreneurs can use SM cost-effectively. Therefore, SM derives multiple benefits for entrepreneurs and their ventures.

SM has also transformed traditional consumer behaviour, by providing consumers with substantial levels of control, information and power over marketing (Chivandi, Samuel, & Muchie, 2019; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), by enabling interactive two-way communication and SM communities. It has also empowered customers through facilitating interaction between entrepreneurs and customers; in some instances, it has also facilitated the co-creation and co-delivery of services (Cheung, Kwong, & Bhattarai, 2018). Collectively, these factors mean that SM supports the marketing of a venture because customers can easily communicate with entrepreneurial ventures and entrepreneurs, in turn, can use SM to attract customers to their ventures.

Although SM has many benefits, to realise these benefits, entrepreneurs need to use SM in a strategic way (Hitt et al., 2015; Steininger, 2019), as technologies by themselves are unable to create any value (i.e. without the activities of the entrepreneurs) (Steininger, 2019). This calls for strategic entrepreneurship, the integration of entrepreneurial action with a strategic perspective, focusing on how ventures adapt to changes in the environment and exploit the opportunities created by them to create wealth and add value (Hitt et al., 2015). This is important as entrepreneurial success depends on strategies that link ventures to its environment (Osborn, 1995). Through exploiting opportunities from a strategic (i.e. long-term perspective), strategic entrepreneurship enables entrepreneurs to achieve venture success over the long-term and, ultimately, competitive advantage (Vranovci, 2019). It does this through developing visions, exploring and exploiting opportunities, managing people effectively, building networks,

driving creativity, innovation and strategic planning (Hitt et al., 2002b; Horst & Murschetz, 2019; Vranovci, 2019). Although strategic entrepreneurship has traditionally focused on gaining a competitive advantage using resources, recently there have been claims that it is necessary to re-think and re-conceptualise venture strategy in regards to digital technology (Horst & Murschetz, 2019; Hsieh & Wu, 2019; Nambisan, 2018; Shen et al., 2019; Song, 2019). This highlights the importance of strategic entrepreneurship in a digital environment. Although different SM categories exist (as represented in Table 2.1) and ventures use a single or multiple SM platforms, there are some basic underlying principles (logics) and functionalities of SM associated with all of the SM: namely SM assessment and affordances. This is discussed in the next section.

2.7 Social Media (SM) Logics: Assessment and Affordances

SM is empowered by underlying principles (logics) and functionalities. Social media logics refer to the norms, strategies, mechanisms, and economies that underpin SM and its dynamics, while they are also strongly associated with the mass media logic (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018). There are two streams of SM logics, assessments and affordances (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Sahut et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2017). SM assessment factors are the base elements of SM functionalities. How individuals use these functionalities in their SM interactions, relate to affordances (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018; Smith et al., 2017).

SM assessment based on programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication relates to the functional features contained within SM. Programmability refers to the ability of SM to prompt and get users to participate in creative and communicative activities associated with SM (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018), such as through posts and commenting on others' posts. Popularity refers to how SM platforms can boost popularity (Dijck & Poell, 2013) such as the 'share' function and the 'like' function associated with Facebook. Connectivity enables people to establish connections with others (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018) by finding friends and establishing groups. Datafication refers to the ability to store data (Dijck & Poell, 2013) through ratings, polls and surveys.

The way that the functionalities (SM assessments) are used by individuals vary. Hence, the interaction that individuals have with the SM functional features can vary. This variation of interaction is explained with computer-mediated-communication (CMC) literature as affordances (Bradner, 2001; Kreijns & Kirschner, 2001; Leonardi, 2017; Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Wellman et al., 2003). Affordances explain how the functional features of technology, such as SM functions, have been used by an individual (Smith et al., 2017). Although the functional features offered through SM are common to everyone who encounters them, the affordances of SM are not. Affordances are unique to the particular ways in which an

individual, or a community of individuals, perceive and use SM (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). It is believed that SM provides two common affordances: they make communication between two people visible to a third party; and these communications progress over time, like a thread that reflects the context in which they emerged (Leonardi, 2017). Abiding by the principle of affordances, it is assumed that there would be different affordances of using SM among youth entrepreneurs.

SM affordances of visibility, persistence, editability, and association are considered the most important for ventures. These affordances tend to modify and alter socialisation, knowledge sharing, and power processes in ventures (Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Hence, in this study on youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for their ventures, it is assumed that these affordances will be relevant and applicable. Visibility refers to the amount of effort required by an individual to locate information (Brown & Duguid, 2002). Persistence refers to the "reviewability" and the "permanence" of the information (Leonardi, 2017), which enable conversations to persist past the time of their initial posts and has long-term consequences (Autio, Nambisan, Thomas, & Wright, 2018; Leonardi, 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). Editability refers to the ability of SM to provide individuals to craft and recraft a communicative act before others see it, and association refers to the connection developed among individuals and the individual and the content (Autio et al., 2018; Leonardi, 2017; Treem & Leonardi, 2012). The section that follows discusses previous studies related to entrepreneurship and SM.

2.8 Previous Studies on Social Media, Digital Entrepreneurship and Strategic Entrepreneurship

Although SM supports ventures in different ways, the role of SM in ventures in an entrepreneurial context is under-researched (Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Turan & Kara, 2018); with only a few studies evident (Fischer & Reuber, 2014; 2011; Mumi et al., 2018a; Nambisan, 2018; Smith et al., 2017)[6]. Recent studies have examined the need for entrepreneurship and SM-based research (e.g. Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020), although only few studies exist that empirically tested this interaction using SM spectrum as a whole. Many studies focus only on the marketing advantages that could be gained using SM (see Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2017; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Muntinga et al., 2011). A few studies concentrate on SM as a tool for knowledge sharing within ventures (see Leonardi, 2017; Zhang et al., 2015). In particular, some studies have explored the role of SM in ventures generally, for example self-branding and knowledge management (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). Some of the studies into SM in an

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[6] Please see Appendix A for an overview of studies that are closest to understanding how SM is used by entrepreneurs.

entrepreneurial context suggest there is a need for empirical research into SM and entrepreneurship as they propose conceptual ideas that lack an empirical basis (Nambisan, 2018; Smith et al., 2017). In addition, some studies focus on how a specific SM platform is used for social interactions and to mitigate uncertainty (Fischer & Reuber, 2011, 2014), with only one study on the whole SM spectrum (as far as the researcher is aware). The only study that empirically tested entrepreneurship and the whole SM spectrum was conducted in New England, US (Mumi et al., 2018a). However, it is worth noting that it was a quantitative study using artist-entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial students as the sample (Mumi et al., 2018a). This highlights the need for empirical research into entrepreneurship and SM, with Liu, Zhu, Serapio & Cavusgil (2019a) and Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca (2020) arguing this is a new and upcoming research area. Specifically, there is a need for qualitative research to obtain a deeper understanding of entrepreneurs' motivations for using SM and how they use SM as a valuable resource to create and grow their ventures. This study addresses this gap and focuses on how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth. The focus on youth entrepreneurs' use of SM is important because SM is used extensively by young people (Ito, Davidson, Jenkins, Lee, & Weiss, 2008; Jinadasa, 2016; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010), so it is assumed that youth entrepreneurs would also use it extensively. The focus on youth entrepreneurs' use of SM is also important as many youth entrepreneurs own micro-level ventures (Chigunta et al., 2005; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018) and some have argued that smaller (i.e. micro-level) businesses can benefit from using SM (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015; Mumi et al., 2018b).

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter identified that there is a gap in the literature regarding how youth entrepreneurs use SM to create and grow their ventures. It reviewed the literature relating to four main areas: entrepreneurship, venture creation, resources and social media. It argued that entrepreneurs respond to the changing marketplace and innovations by establishing new types of ventures, and it discussed the different types of entrepreneurship that have emerged based on changing environmental conditions. It highlighted that the key entrepreneurship types of most relevance to this thesis are youth entrepreneurs, strategic entrepreneurs and digital entrepreneurs because the focus of the study is on how youth entrepreneurs use SM, which is a part of digital media and closely related to digital entrepreneurship. Through exploring how youth entrepreneurs use SM, it is implicit that they will need to adopt strategies and make strategic choices, thus highlighting the relevance of strategic entrepreneurship. This chapter argued that SM usage is high among younger generations, with research also suggesting that it has been used by entrepreneurs to establish social networks and to support the continuation of existing ties and establishing new ties. SM has also changed the way that customers interact with entrepreneurs

and their ventures, thus leading to more two-way interactions and more ways in which to create revenue. This chapter outlined the numerous benefits of SM, including that when used strategically, it can enable long-term venture success and the achievement of competitive advantage through enabling more cost-effective use of resources. This suggests that SM could be considered a valuable resource for entrepreneurs in resource-restricted environments, such as developing nations as it is cost-effective and available in developing nations. This established the basis for this study, which explores why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth in a developing nation. The next chapter examines the context of the developing nation applicable to this study, Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER 3

THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT: ENTREPRENEURSHIP, VENTURE CREATION (SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES-SME) AND SOCIAL MEDIA (SM)

3.1 Introduction

The literature review focused on earlier analysed four main areas: entrepreneurship, venture creation, the essential resources in venture creation and SM; to identify that there is a gap in the literature regarding how youth entrepreneurs use SM to create and grow their micro-level ventures in developing nations. It suggested that SM as a resource could aid entrepreneurs by providing a cost-effective way to identify and exploit opportunities and that it had changed the way customers interacted with entrepreneurs and their ventures, thus leading to the potential success of ventures. It also suggested that the strategic use of SM by youth entrepreneurs making strategic choices could enable long-term venture success and the achievement of competitive advantage. It argued that this was particularly important in resource-restricted environments such as developing nations.

This chapter provides an understanding of entrepreneurship, venture creation (SME) and SM in the Sri Lankan context. It positions Sri Lanka as a developing nation with an emerging market where youth unemployment has been a severe issue for decades. It highlights how the Sri Lankan government has been encouraging youth entrepreneurship as a viable solution to youth unemployment. It discusses the status of SMEs in Sri Lanka and outlines the government policies/strategies that support SME establishment and operations. These policies/strategies of the Sri Lankan government express the need to incorporate technology for SMEs to uplift entrepreneurship and innovation. SM is one of the technologies that are available and used in Sri Lanka and this chapter explains SM developments in Sri Lanka. Finally, the chapter looks at entrepreneurial studies that have been conducted in developing nations.

3.2 Sri Lanka as a Developing Nation with an Emerging Market

Sri Lanka is an island republic located in the Indian Ocean with a total land area of 65 610 square kilometres, referred to as the pearl of the Indian Ocean owing to the shape of the country. It is a multi-racial country, which has a population of approximately 21.7 million, with the majority (14.5 million) within the age bracket of 15-64 years of age (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). It has an annual population growth rate of 1.1%, which is unchanged from the growth rate observed in 2016 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a, 2018). In Sri Lanka, approximately 70% of its population lives in rural areas similar to most Asia and Pacific regions, while their

primary source of income has mostly been agriculture (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018c).

Sri Lanka holds a Human Development Index (a composite index measuring life expectancy, education, and per capita income indicators) of 76 out of 189 nations and territories (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). It fares better than its neighbouring nations, such as India (130), Nepal (149), Bhutan (134) and Pakistan (150) (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). This Human Development Index value suggests that Sri Lanka is better at human development than the other nations within the same region, indicating that the people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). This highlights the necessity for the Sri Lankan government to focus on people and their capabilities (i.e. capacity building) as a strategy for economic growth. Understanding this need to focus on people and their capabilities as a resource for economic growth, the Sri Lankan government decided to develop an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy as a five-year roll-out plan for between 2018-2022 (Wijesinha, 2019). This strategy recognised that "only through innovation and entrepreneurship will Sri Lanka be able to increase and diversify its exports and create more and better jobs for its people" (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018, p. 32).

Sri Lanka is also a developing nation which contains significantly different characteristics than developed nations. Developing nations are characterised by four attributes, as specified by the World Bank (Ayesha, 2016). First, they have a low per capita real income as a result of low savings and low investments (Ayesha, 2016). Second, they have high population growth rates or large populations as a result of lack of family planning options, lack of sex education, the belief that more children could result in more income earners for the families in the future, increasing the overall wealth of the family and ensuring prosperity in the future (Ayesha, 2016). Third, they have high rates of unemployment and underemployment (Ayesha, 2016; Ilmudeen, 2019). Further, developing nations are characterised by a lower level of economic development and have immature legal, political and financial institutions, which consequently leads to ambiguous and uncertain business contexts (Singh & Gaur, 2018). These unpredictable conditions act as constraints to entrepreneurship and innovations (Vuong et al., 2016). However, not all of these characteristics are present in all developing nations (Ayesha, 2016). The representation of the characteristics of developing nations indicates why further research is necessary for developing nations as many studies focus on developed nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

Apart from being a developing country, Sri Lanka is an emerging market. Emerging markets are defined as low-income, rapid-growth nations using economic liberalisation as their primary

engine of growth (Tracey & Phillips, 2011). Tracey and Phillips (2011) argued that all developing nations did not necessarily belong to emerging markets, with two factors identifying emerging markets in developing nations. First, the nations have ongoing economic reforms as a response to poverty and improving the living standards of the inhabitants. For example, opening up economies to free trade and capital flows in Sri Lanka and reducing unproductive expenditures such as military spending and focusing on spending it on social sectors for poverty reduction in Sri Lanka (Senaratne & Ekanayake, 2015). Second, these nations have shown positive economic growth over a period. For instance, economic growth has translated into shared prosperity with the national poverty headcount ratio declining from 15.3% in 2006/2007 to 4.1% at the start of 2016 (Senaratne & Ekanayake, 2015). Extreme poverty in Sri Lanka is rare and concentrated in some geographical areas; however, a relatively large proportion of the population subsists on slightly more than the absolute poverty line (Senaratne & Ekanayake, 2015).

Sri Lanka, as an emerging market, strives towards becoming a sea and an air-based economy because of its geostrategic location (Balasuriya, 2016). All sea trade from East to West needs to pass through Sri Lanka because of its location. For the past three decades, Sri Lankans have forgotten its essential strategic location (surrounded by the sea, which is ideal for sea trade and air-based economy) and have moved towards a land-based economy (Balasuriya, 2016). Identifying the need to reinstate and take advantage of the geostrategic location, former Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickramasinghe, indicated that: "We are building on the plan to expand Sri Lanka to make it into a centre for shipping, for aviation, for communications, a logistics hub and a business hub" (Balasuriya, 2016, p. 1). The first step towards taking advantage of Sri Lanka's geostrategic location is to promote maritime trade because Sri Lanka has historically played an essential role in the region's maritime trade. The reason for this is twofold: one it is because of its strategic location; but in modern times, maybe more so because of the facilities and infrastructure developed in Sri Lanka, particularly in Colombo (Balasuriya, 2016). Second, the proximity of large customer markets such as India and China provides Sri Lanka with the potential to grow trade with these markets (Balasuriya, 2016).

Amidst the intention to grow trade with large consumer markets, the Sri Lankan economy has struggled with the global and domestic market disturbances. The vulnerability of the Sri Lankan economy to global and domestic disturbances became increasingly visible in 2018 when there was a modest expansion in real economic activity amidst a low inflation environment (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). Globally, monetary policy normalisation, particularly in the United States of America (USA), resulted in global financial conditions to shrink, causing capital outflows from Sri Lanka while increasing the pressure on exchange rates, particularly from mid-

April 2018 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). This was exacerbated following the political uncertainties and the downgrading of the country's sovereign rating in the fourth quarter of 2018 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). Domestically, the trade deficit surpassed USD10 billion for the first time in history with higher growth in import expenditure out-pacing the growth in export earnings (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018).

In 2018, the total size of the Sri Lankan economy was estimated at USD 88.9 million, while the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) was recorded at USD 4102 million (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018), which was marginally lower than in the previous year (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a). The real GDP growth was recorded at 3.2% in 2018, compared to 3.4% in the previous year (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017b, 2018). Although all three sectors (service, industry and agriculture) contributed towards real economic growth, the majority of the growth was due to the service sector (57.7%). The Real GDP growth, which measures the volume of output adjusted for inflation and measured at constant prices, was primarily supported by services activities that expanded by 4.7% and the recovery in agriculture activities, which recorded a growth of 4.8% underpinned by favourable weather conditions (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). The growth of the services sector was mainly supported by the expansion of financial services activities (11.8%) during 2018 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). Industry activities slowed down significantly to 0.9% during the year, mainly as a result of the decline in construction, and mining and quarrying activities (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018).

In 2019, the Sri Lankan economy declined further due to the Easter Attacks on April 21 2019, by Islamic militants, who killed over 250 people including 42 foreign nationals in churches and hotels across the country. These attacks collapsed the economy to a nearly two-decade low (an estimated slide in the economic growth of 2.5%) (Aneez, 2019; Findlay & Dissanayake, 2019). Further, a Reuters poll showed that tourism, foreign investment and overall business activity dropped sharply after the attacks (Aneez, 2019; Findlay & Dissanayake, 2019). Tourism suffered as travellers from around the world cancelled hotel and flight bookings fearing more attacks (Findlay & Dissanayake, 2019). The Easter attacks resulted in economic collapse because the travel industry alone contributes to 5% of the country's GDP (Aneez, 2019) and it is the third-largest source of foreign currency for the country (Findlay & Dissanayake, 2019). These attacks, which collapsed the tourism industry, in turn, has resulted in many individuals associated with the industry to lose their jobs and has led to economic and political uncertainty in the country (Findlay & Dissanayake, 2019). Apart from the economic and political uncertainty that place Sri Lanka as an emerging nation, there are also social factors that are associated, such as youth unemployment, which contributes to making Sri Lanka an emerging nation; this is discussed in the section that follows.

3.3 Youth Unemployment and its Consequences

Sri Lanka has struggled with issues around high unemployment and underemployment since gaining independence in 1948. During 2018, the unemployment rate increased to 4.4%, from 4.2% in 2017 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a, 2018). High unemployment among youth (aged 15-29 years), educated groups and females have been a longstanding issue in the country (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a; Ranaraja, 2013) with 150 000 youth entering the labour force annually (Ilmudeen, 2019). Youth constitute approximately 23.24% of the total population in Sri Lanka (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018; Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018). During 2018, unemployment among youth remained high at 32.3%, the highest reported unemployment rate among all age groups (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). This unemployment rate was also higher than other developing nations in the South Asian region at 9.79% in 2019 October (World Bank, 2019). The severity of the issue is evident with United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs suggesting that the key challenge in South Asia is youth unemployment (United Nations, 2019).

Underemployment is also an issue for the Sri Lankan youth population. Forty-five per cent of employed youth are in informal employment positions (Gunatilaka et al., 2010). Informal employment relates to job positions that offer no job security and a little possibility to advance either in pay or skills (Gunatilaka et al., 2010; Ilmudeen, 2019). These informal employments provide limited chances for earning a decent living, thus causing poverty (Ilmudeen, 2019). Therefore, underemployment among the youth population is a significant issue for Sri Lanka as a nation.

Youth unemployment and underemployment cannot be considered an isolated issue. The roots of the problem lie deep within the social, cultural, political and economic systems of Sri Lanka. Youth unemployment has caused a low level of disposable income to be available for a major segment of the population, reducing their purchasing power and causing poverty (Ilmudeen, 2019). The marginalisation of the Sri Lankan youth, especially secondary level-educated youth, is a significant challenge, especially in estate and rural areas because of the poor infrastructure (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Gunatilaka et al., 2010; Ilmudeen, 2019). Several occasions of social unrest and violent uprisings were seen in Sri Lanka during the last three decades due to dissatisfaction and frustration of youth, especially among the educated rural youth as a large number of them were employed informally (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Gunatilaka et al., 2010; Ilmudeen, 2019).

Although unemployment and underemployment are high, the majority of the youth in Sri Lanka has a high level of education. Sri Lanka is considered a nation that provides a high level of education for children and young people, with a literacy rate of 92% in 2018, the highest

literacy rate in South Asia (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018; Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018b). However, there are some disparities in the quality of education received across geographical locations and social groups, leading to unequal access to employment (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Ilmudeen, 2019). This can be seen in the case of Sri Lankan schools. The majority of schools in Sri Lanka do not possess the facilities to teach Science, Information Communication Technology or English due to the lack of facilities and unavailability of qualified teaching staff (Ilmudeen, 2019). For example, in the north, there is one untrained teacher per every 194 students (Amarasuriya et al., 2009). However, the Western Province (where the capital Colombo is situated) has the lowest ratio of untrained teachers, one untrained teacher per 1009 students (Amarasuriya et al., 2009). Therefore, different provinces offer different levels of education to students (Ilmudeen, 2019), although on a national basis, the level of education is considered high.

This disparity in education continues into the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. University education in Sri Lanka is restricted, accommodating only 2% of the population, while degree enrolment can also differ based on the family, education background, school attendance, family income and gender differences (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Ilmudeen, 2019). The majority of students enrolled in arts, and social science degrees come from rural disadvantaged families where parents are not involved in professional work. This contrasts with students who are enrolled in science degrees, especially in medical and engineering degrees, who come from more privileged backgrounds and are more likely to gain higher-paid jobs (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; University Grants Commission Sri Lanka, 2017). It is also evident that women graduates also seem to come from slightly more advantaged economic and social backgrounds, with the women from more disadvantaged backgrounds facing more constraints when it comes to accessing higher education (Amarasuriya et al., 2009). It is clear that rural youth are disadvantaged not only economically, but even if they gain employment, it may be a question as to how far their employment supports social mobility (i.e. moving towards areas with better living conditions and opportunities for employment) and increased social status (i.e. upwards mobility). Thus, although having a higher level of education, young people are unable to translate these achievements into employment opportunities.

The high rate of youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is a severe issue that needs to be addressed as it creates numerous issues. Some have argued that it may lead to lack of innovation due to lack of renewed thinking (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a, 2018; Department of Census and Statistics, 2018c). The high level of youth unemployment has also been linked to severe long-term adverse effects such as skill deficiencies, increased ineffective use of public spending in education and skill development (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a; Department of Census and

Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018c). Youth unemployment has also been associated with other social issues such as psychological distress (Bjarnason & Sigurdardottir, 2003; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Gunatilaka et al., 2010). Further, long-term unemployment has been linked with the prevalence of social exclusion resulting in labour market exclusion, economic exclusion, institutional exclusion, social isolation, cultural exclusion and spatial exclusion (Douglass, 2007; Kieselbach, 2003). Therefore, the provision of appropriate employment opportunities for the youth population is vital for many developing nations. In Sri Lanka, a higher level of youth employment is desired, as it can drive productivity and sustain and relate to long-term economic growth (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2017a; Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018d). Consequently, as an initiative towards providing employment opportunities, many developing nations have looked at supporting SMEs, discussed in the next section.

3.4 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Sri Lanka[7]

SMEs play a vital role in any economy, particularly through generating employment, embarking on innovations and stimulating other economic activities, contributing to a nation's GDP, supporting poverty alleviation, and facilitating wealth distribution among rural and regional areas (Chadha, 2019; Falkena, Levitsky, & Jacod, 2010; Gamage, 2003; Kuruwitaarachchi, Yajid, Khatibi, & Azam, 2018; Rajapaksha, 2016; Thilakarathna & Jayasekera, 2013; Vial & Hanoteau, 2015; Weerasinghe, Jayawardane, & Ramlogan, 2014; Wickremasinghe, 2011). The importance of SMEs to the Sri Lankan economy has been acknowledged by the major Sri Lankan political parties' presidential candidates in 2019, who promised to uplift the capabilities of SMEs through targeted assistance mechanisms (Chadha, 2019). In Sri Lanka, SMEs contribute to over 70% of the economy (Athukorala, 2017) while they contribute to 45% of total employment (Chadha, 2019). Therefore, SMEs are considered the backbone of the Sri Lankan economy.

SMEs are defined in many ways, including the number of employees, annual turnover and total investments (De Mel, Mckenzie, & Woodruff, 2010; Vial & Hanoteau, 2015). In Sri Lanka, SMEs are determined based on the number of employees or the annual turnover of the venture (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). Table 3.1 represents the criteria specifying the small, medium and micro-level enterprises in Sri Lanka.

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[7] This chapter focuses on SMEs as the information related to micro-entrepreneurial ventures is not available due to the majority of them representing the informal sector in Sri Lanka (De Mel et al., 2010). It is assumed that because micro-level ventures are defined and addressed in the National Policy Framework for SME development (2015) (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015), similar policies/strategies will apply for micro-level ventures.

Table 3.1. Defining SMEs in Sri Lanka
Source: (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015)

Sector	Criteria	Medium	Small	Micro
Manufacturing Sector	Annual Turnover	Rs. M. 251-750 (approximately 1.712-5.13M. USD)	Rs. M. 16-250 (approximately 0.11-1.71M. USD)	Less than Rs. M.15 (approximately 0.10M. USD)
	Number of Employees	51-300	11-50	Less than 10
Service Sector	Annual Turnover	Rs. M. 251-750 (approximately 1.712-5.13M. USD)	Rs. M. 16-250 (approximately 0.11-1.71M. USD)	Less than Rs. M.15 (approximately 0.10M. USD)
	Number of Employees	51-200	11-50	Less than 10

Distribution of the Small and Medium Enterprises in Sri Lanka varies according to the industry, as depicted in Figure 3.1.
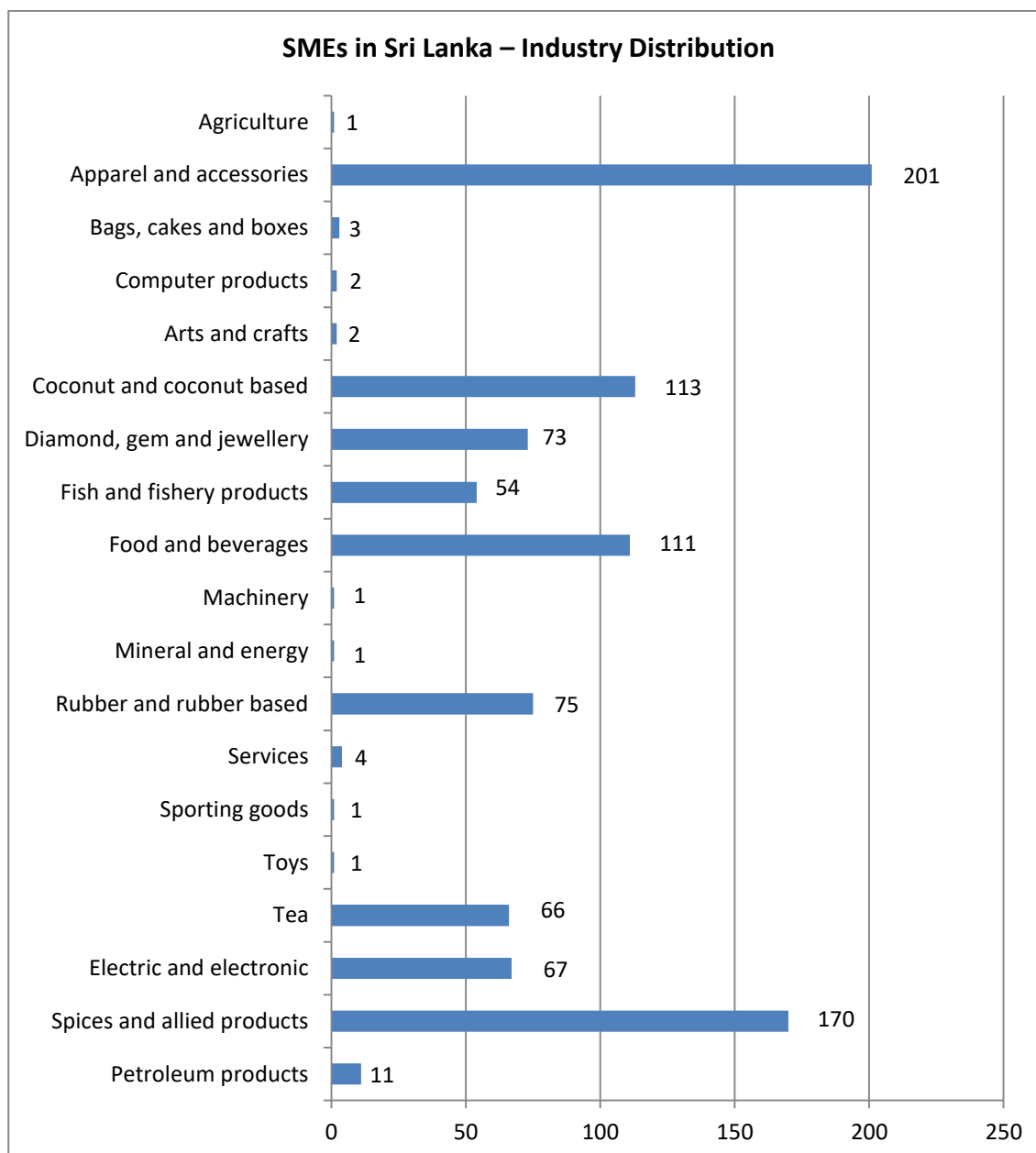
Figure 3.1 SMEs in Sri Lanka – Industry Distribution
Source: SME.lk (Registered SMEs)

Figure 3.1 illustrates that the majority of SMEs in Sri Lanka are located in the apparel and accessories sector, followed by spices and allied products and coconut-based products, respectively. It is important to note that, although micro-level ventures are defined and identified in the SME framework (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015), further details regarding these companies are not available. However, it has been argued that micro-level ventures make up around one-third of the non-agricultural labour force in low-income nations (De Mel et al., 2010; Vial & Hanoteau, 2015) and for poorer nations, entrepreneurship based on micro-level ventures provides a livelihood, which can cope with economic vulnerability (Vial & Hanoteau, 2015). These micro-entrepreneurial ventures also represent half or more of the

informal sector in developing nations (De Mel et al., 2010), which may explain the lack of official information regarding them as they are not registered under the company act of Sri Lanka, due to the cost and land ownership issues that they need to face in the registration process (De Mel, McKenzie, & Woodruff, 2013).

A significant number of SMEs are located in the Western Province of Sri Lanka (38.3%), which is an urban area of 3593 square kilometres with 7785 industrial ventures located within this area (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018; Department of Census and Statistics, 2018d). As the capital and the largest city in Sri Lanka, Colombo (located in the Western Province) has a history of international exchange with nations from the East and the West. Trade practices in Sri Lanka have been inevitably linked to the location itself by integrating a convenient sea trade route and its role as a gateway to South Asia. Over the decades Western Province has received financial and institutional backing of the government to establish itself as a business hub. The reason the majority of SMEs are located within this province is the infrastructural developments relating to transportation, telecommunications, port services (The World Bank, 2017). This region alone contributes 45% of the national GDP for the economy of Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018a).

Although the majority of the SMEs are located in the Western Province where the best infrastructural developments in the country are located, they also face constraints in their operations. The significant obstacles identified for SMEs are the lack of appropriate policy support, information technology and markets as well as high-interest rates, emphasis on collateral by the lending institutions, absence of technical and managerial skills, technological competitiveness and an absence of linkages with research-based institutions (Kaluarachchi, Weerabahu, & Nanayakkara, 2019; Suriyapperuma, Yajid, Khatibi, & Premarathne, 2015; Wickremasinghe, 2011; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). A study assessment by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank highlighted the following barriers to conducting business in Sri Lanka: (i) uncertain policy environment; (ii) macroeconomic instability; (iii) the cost of finance; (iv) poor infrastructure; and (v) a rigid labour market (Amarasuriya et al., 2009; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). The section that follows considers the status of SMEs in Sri Lanka.

3.5 The Status of SMEs

From 1950 to 1960, SMEs were considered non-existent, with heavy focus, priority, and encouragement extended to large enterprises (Stoke, 2003; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). This focus towards large enterprises has been a significant drawback regarding developing nations as broad enterprise-level strategies developed for large enterprises failed to address adequately issues related to unemployment, low income and poverty (Thrikawala, 2011). However, during the 1970s the situation changed through growing recognition that SMEs provided economic

growth, contributed to the GDP, generated innovation and jobs, and reduced poverty (De Mel et al., 2010; Prasad, 2004; Stoke, 2003; Weerasinghe et al., 2014), while increasing their resources and exports from liberalised economic policies to foreign direct investments (Raynard & Forstater, 2002). The liberalised economic policies introduced in 1977 enabled Sri Lanka to become open to import and export markets (Weerasinghe et al., 2014). From 1990 to 2013, SMEs were considered an essential element in economic growth with the Sri Lankan government establishing an SME policy in 2002 that provided institutional support for the growth of SMEs (Gamage, 2003; Weerasinghe et al., 2014; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). In 2014 the government established policies to enable financial assistance and credit support for SMEs, especially in terms of providing collateral support, improving infrastructure in economic zones dedicated to SMEs, providing research and development support along with encouraging youth to start or join SMEs consequently creating a culture of entrepreneurship (Xinhua News Agency - CEIS, 2014). A brief timeline representing the status of the SME sector in Sri Lanka is indicated in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2.Timeline depicting the Stages of SME sector in Sri Lanka

Time	Status of SMEs in Sri Lanka
1950-1960	Existence of the SMEs ignored (Stoke, 2003; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). Large enterprise was focused on and obtained encouragement (Stoke, 2003; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018).
1970-1980	SMEs were recognised as an agent providing economic growth contributing to the GDP, innovation, generation of jobs and reduction of poverty (Prasad, 2004; Stoke, 2003; Weerasinghe et al., 2014). Liberalised economic policies to foreign direct investments (Raynard & Forstater, 2002).
1990-2013	SMEs play a crucial role in developing economies. SME policy in 2002 to provide institutional support for the growth of SMEs (Gamage, 2003; Weerasinghe et al., 2014).
2014-current	Provide financial assistance and credit support to SMEs, especially in terms of presenting collateral. Improving infrastructure in economic zones dedicated to SMEs. Research and development along with encouraging youth to start or join SMEs. Creating a culture of entrepreneurship. (Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018; Xinhua News Agency - CEIS, 2014)

Currently, SMEs are heavily influenced by global changes such as the internationalisation of economies, globalisation of trade, the growth of internet and information technology. These

changes have impacted every country in the world, while the competition within the nations for sustainable growth is extensive (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin, & Regner, 2017; Prasad, 2004). Research conducted in the Sri Lankan SME sector also indicated the need to embrace these changes as a way of achieving competitive advantage and growth (Kaluarachchi, Weerabahu, & Nanayakkara, 2019; Kuruwitaarachchi, Yajid, Khatibi, & Azam, 2018; Suriyapperuma, Yajid, Khatibi, & Premarathne, 2015). The impact of these global changes was more significant for SMEs because of their low economies of scales, inadequate access to capital, inadequate infrastructure, lack of market-based information, obsolete technology, lack of modern management skills and lack of labour training. These factors resulted in the gradual closure of many SMEs in developing nations (Aragón-Sánchez & Sánchez-Marín, 2005; Kaluarachchi et al., 2019; Kuruwitaarachchi et al., 2018; Suriyapperuma et al., 2015; Thrikawala, 2011). In the face of these obstacles, ventures that were able to network with suppliers, buyers and competitors were able to survive and gain a competitive advantage (Johnson et al., 2017). Indeed, looking at the SMEs and their potential to provide value for a nation, it is essential that a developing country like Sri Lanka promote SMEs. The section that follows illustrates government policies that promote SMEs in Sri Lanka.

3.6 Government Policies on SMEs in Sri Lanka

Identifying the importance of SMEs for Sri Lanka, successive Sri Lankan Governments have taken various steps to promote SME development and support. The government of Sri Lanka acknowledges the contribution made by SMEs towards the economy, which accounts for more than 75% of the total number of enterprises, providing 45% of total employment while contributing to 70% of Gross Domestic Product (Athukorala, 2017; Institute of Policy Studies Sri Lanka, 2019; Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). A key mechanism for promoting SMEs is the *National Policy Framework for SMEs in Sri Lanka* (2015)[8] with the vision of creating a significant number of "globally competitive, innovative, technologically driven, eco-friendly and sustainable SMEs" (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015, p. 1). The national policy framework was introduced with a mission statement to produce globally-accepted products and services, that cannot only compete locally but globally "with the formation of a supportive environment with inventions of technology transfer, enhanced entrepreneurial culture, provision for development of skills, providing financial access required and facilitating the market requirements while aiding research activities" (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015, p. 1). Each of these considerations is summarised in Table 3.3.

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[8] National Policy Framework for Small and Medium (SME) Development was a policy intervention established in year 2015 and there has not been any official record of any implementation or suggestion of policy interventions afterwards in Sri Lanka (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015).

Table 3.3.Policy Interventions
Source: Ministry of Industry and Commerce (2015)

Policy Intervention	Policy Perspective	Outcome Expected	Challenges Addressed
Enabling Environment	Improving legislative, regulatory and institutional frameworks including proper coordination, simplification, and rationalisation.	Ease of doing business, improvement of competitiveness and providing a conducive environment for SME development.	Reduce transaction costs and improving the ease of doing business for SMEs.
Modern Technology	Facilitation, acquisition and adoption of state of the art, modern and clean technologies for SMEs.	Increase quality, innovative, productive and competitive products.	Access to appropriate and affordable modern technology.
Entrepreneurial culture and skill development	Promotion, facilitation, and support for entrepreneurial development by building capacities at educational institutions and schools focusing on youth and women in particular.	Strengthen the capacity of institutions by providing training and skill development.	Provide SMEs with access to finance to invest in modernisation, expansion and successful operations.
Access to finance	Facilitating, supporting and strengthening mechanisms to easily and affordably access finance for SMEs.	Strengthening the funds available for the SMEs.	Provide SMEs with access to finance for it to invest in modernisation, expansion and successful operations.
Research and development	Recognised as a key process to develop cost-effective modern technologies, innovations, and market-oriented new designs.	Improvement of product development, process development and productivity improvement to increase competitiveness.	Improve the partnership between industries and research institutions.
Resource efficiency	Recognises as a key element for competitiveness through cost savings.	Protection of the natural environment while maintaining future sustainable development.	Provide natural resources protection and rebuild SMEs through skill improvement. SMEs are encouraged to exploit short and long-term benefits of resource efficiency and recycling potential.

The first policy intervention sought to provide an enabling environment with improvements in legislative, regulatory and institutional frameworks providing ease of doing business,

improvement of competitiveness and an environment conducive for SME development (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). The second policy intervention was modern technology which acquired, facilitated and adapted state of the art, modern and clean technologies for SMEs (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). This is an important initiative as technologies play an essential role in the growth of the SMEs by opening up new global markets (Vijayakumar, 2013), and it was anticipated that using modern technology would increase the number of quality, innovative, productive and competitive products that would reach the marketplace. The third policy intervention was an entrepreneurial culture and skill development (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). This intervention was used as a means to promote, facilitate and support entrepreneurial development by building educational institutions and schools focusing on entrepreneurship. This policy was an initiative to build skills, entrepreneurial spirit and culture, improve the entrepreneurial mindset and institutional capacity, which eventually would strengthen the capacity of institutions. The fourth policy intervention was access to finance by facilitating, supporting and strengthening mechanisms to easily and affordably access finance for SME (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). This intervention to support financial access is important as financing SMEs remains a severe issue that has restricted the growth of SMEs, suggesting the need for more academic evaluations on performance and results of the funding models (Kulasinghe, Han, Hoshino, Rathi, & Lambert, 2018). This initiative was also important as SMEs lacked funds to invest in modernisation, expansion and successful operations, strengthening the funds available for the SMEs. The fifth policy intervention encouraged research and development to develop cost-effective modern technologies, innovations and market-oriented new designs (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). This ensured partnerships between industries and research institutions provided product development improvements, process development improvements and overall productivity improvement, thus increasing the competitiveness of the SMEs. The final policy intervention was resource efficiency, an essential element for competitiveness through cost savings (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). This policy addressed the challenges related to natural resources protection and rebuilding. Following this initiative, SMEs were encouraged to exploit short and long-term benefits of resource efficiency and recycling potential. While SME policy interventions support entrepreneurship, it would be valuable for Sri Lanka to establish ventures through innovation and creativity, technology and communication infrastructure to meet the global demands and become competitive (Kuruwitaarachchi et al., 2018; Suriyapperuma et al., 2015).

Although policies for SMEs have not been enacted since 2015, in 2018 Sri Lanka established an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy of Sri Lanka 2018–2022. This was a five-year rollout strategy where one of the main elements was to support SMEs to innovate and become more

competitive in domestic and export markets. By adopting this innovation and entrepreneurship strategy:

> Sri Lanka has commenced a journey of leveraging innovation and entrepreneurship to drive enterprise competitiveness in the economy, create better job opportunities for young people, and ignite a new growth impetus at a time when the traditional growth drivers are faltering. There is a yearning among Sri Lanka's young people to create a paradigm shift in our economy. Innovation and entrepreneurship provide an ideal platform to make it happen (Wijesinha, 2019, p. 1).

In this strategy, one of the main elements to uplift entrepreneurship and innovation is by using technology (Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). By providing improved access to technology and communication infrastructure, developing nations such as Sri Lanka are now able to gain a competitive advantage (Duncombe, Heeks, Kintu, Nakangu, & Abraham, 2006; Govinnage & Sachitra, 2019; Kuruwitaarachchi et al., 2018; Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018). This competitive advantage comes from opening up the global marketplace by eliminating the geographical distances and increasing the speed of transactions by facilitating buying and selling, providing accessibility to global ventures and individuals in a timely (continuous trading) and cost-effective manner (Govinnage & Sachitra, 2019; Ministry of Development Strategies and International Trade, 2018; Wijayarathne & Perera, 2018). For example, publishing a brochure online can reach an unlimited number of potential export customers and provide the facility of regular updates. One of the technologies used extensively in developing nations was SM (Poushter, Bishop, & Chwe, 2018), which is discussed in the next section.

3.7 Social Media (SM) Development in Sri Lanka

Developments in the Internet and related technologies are providing valuable opportunities for developing nations. Sri Lanka has a population of 20.19 million, of which 6.71 million are Internet users (32% of the population), and 5.5 million are SM users (Jain, 2018). Further, digital literacy, which is defined as a person (aged 5-69) with the ability to use a computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone in Sri Lanka is 40.3% and mobile phone users are 105% in 2018 suggesting multiple mobile devices and connections for a single individual (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018d; Ministry of City Planning Water Supply and Higher Education, 2018). These developments have provided access to the global market and enabled the ability to capitalise on opportunities in a timely and cost-effective manner for developing nations (Jain, 2018). Among these technologies, SM has taken a prominent role by providing connectivity and generating a vast amount of content daily. Extensive use of SM by Sri Lankans has also been influenced by the steady decline of mainstream media during the post-war period where outspoken journalists were killed or abducted, and anti-government media organisations were destroyed (Gunatilleke, 2017). During this time, SM became an instrumental force where

individuals had their own media freedom (Gunatilleke, 2017). The user participation of SM has been reflected in the countless number of updates, opinions, news, comments and reviews posted and discussed within SM sites. SM has effected how people generate, share and consume information and knowledge (Liu et al., 2019b). Studies also suggest that consumer buying in Sri Lanka has been influenced extensively by SM, especially during the post-purchase, information and evaluation stages, positioning SM as a current trend in Sri Lanka (Wickrama, 2019).

In Sri Lanka, SM use is growing continuously to a level of addiction among the Sri Lankan population (Rathnayake & Rathnayake, 2018), despite poor infrastructure that causes irregular access to technology that could hinder uptake and growth (SM Stats, 2018; Thuseethan & Vasanthapriyan, 2015). For example, although the Internet was used extensively, the infrastructure required (i.e. Wi-Fi network coverage) was limited and costly. Another issue related to SM use in Sri Lanka was the blocking of SM platforms by the Sri Lankan government to avoid the publicity of inaccurate stories and hate speech (i.e. the case of Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka mentioned in Section 3.2) (Cellan-Jones, 2019; Samath, 2019; Wakefield, 2019). These measures taken by the government itself indicates that SM has become the biggest purveyor of news and views across all media platforms in Sri Lanka.

Notwithstanding, the government has been unsuccessful in suppressing SM platforms as many individuals use proxy sites and virtual private networks (VPN) that are connected to SM platforms (Cellan-Jones, 2019; Samath, 2019; Wakefield, 2019). The use of proxy sites and virtual private networks (VPN) are known to many Sri Lankans, so the government's efforts to bring down SM platforms has proved unsuccessful (Samath, 2019). A few smaller business ventures were impacted upon with these blocking attempts, with individuals suggesting that the government should implement policies for tackling SM and moderating messages rather than going into the complete shutdown of operations (Samath, 2019). Despite the infrastructural challenges inherent and the government blocking of SM platforms, Sri Lankans use of technologies (such as computerised systems and mobile applications) have been increasing in all parts of the country (SM Stats, 2018; Stand, 2008; Thuseethan & Vasanthapriyan, 2015). In fact, any individual who owned a mobile connection in Sri Lanka obtained news and information using SM platforms rather than using traditional media such as newspapers and radio (Samath, 2019). The majority of SM consumed by Sri Lankans are social networks, while the user base for SM is almost the entire population (96%) of Internet users (SM Stats, 2018; Thuseethan & Vasanthapriyan, 2015). Among the different social networks used in Sri Lanka, Facebook is the most popular platform with 72.73% users, followed by Pinterest at 7.82%, and YouTube and Twitter at 3.56%, as of September 2019 (StatCounter, 2019).

Popularity and the extensive use of SM by Sri Lankans could be attributed to its high-context culture (Jayatilleke & Gunawardena, 2016; Kim, Yigang, & Heung, 1998) that builds all relationships with a long-term view and are socially-oriented. SM supports Sri Lankans to extend relationships and assists with the frequency of interactions and to reinforce relationships. Hence, many Sri Lankans use SM, and it has become an increasingly popular part of the Internet users' daily routine because of the need for them to be connected (Thuseethan & Vasanthapriyan, 2015). The section that follows describes studies related to entrepreneurship in a developing nation and emerging market.

3.8 Studies into Entrepreneurship in a Developing Nations and Emerging Markets

Studies on entrepreneurship have been lacking in developing nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). However, entrepreneurship is context-sensitive as they exploited opportunities, acquired and combined resources and made decisions based on context (Patriotta & Siegel, 2019). Research suggested that the environment in which a venture operated was vital for its success (Gartner, 1985; Gathungu & Mwangi, 2014; Klyver et al., 2008; Phillips & Tracey, 2007; Vogel, 2013). Despite this, many entrepreneurship studies focused on developed nations, with a deficit of studies of developing nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). There is a great need for entrepreneurship in developing nations, as it provided competitive advantages and economic growth (Lokuge et al., 2018; Singh & Gaur, 2018). Therefore, applying entrepreneurial theories to a developing nation like Sri Lanka could provide opportunities to expand understanding of entrepreneurship and add novel insights to the literature. It would also address calls for studies in developing nations (Bayrón, 2013; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Naudé, 2010; Naudé et al., 2011). Therefore, this study addresses this gap in the literature through exploring how youth entrepreneurs use SM to create and grow their ventures in a developing nation's context.

3.9 Summary

This chapter positions Sri Lanka as a developing nation with an emerging market. It has argued that similar to other developing nations, Sri Lanka faces an ever-increasing youth population for which employment opportunities are inadequate. The inability to create the necessary employment opportunities for youth has resulted in high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. The chapter has argued that one of the proposed solutions to address this issue is entrepreneurship, which has been put forward as an alternative method of employing young people. Successive governments have indicated their understanding of this need through promoting SMEs through key policies. This chapter has also discussed how governments have recognised that a key element to increasing entrepreneurship is by using technology. Improved access to technology and communication infrastructure could enable Sri Lanka to achieve a competitive advantage. Finally, this chapter discussed how one of the technologies extensively

used by Sri Lankans is SM. It argued that SM could be a mandatory resource for the growth and survival of ventures in Sri Lanka. However, limited research has been undertaken on how entrepreneurs use SM in developing nations. Arguably, there is a need for such studies because of the vast differences between developing nations and developed nations. This study addresses this gap through exploring how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their venture creation and growth in a developing nation.

The next chapter outlines the research design adopted in this study to explore why and how Sri Lankan youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the context of this study; Sri Lanka. It established that Sri Lanka was a developing economy with a growing youth population. It also established that youth unemployment and underemployment was a severe issue in Sri Lanka. It stated that entrepreneurship has been suggested as a way to circumvent these issues. Understanding its importance, the Sri Lankan government has developed policies and strategies to promote entrepreneurship. One of the key elements to strengthen entrepreneurship is technology. Over the past decade, SM has emerged as an accessible and cost-effective technology to use in Sri Lanka.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology for this study. It is outlined as follows; first, the chapter presents the research questions that guided this study, second, the research paradigm and philosophical assumptions that underpinned this study, third, the rationale for qualitative research design is provided, fourth, sampling strategy and participants are discussed. This is followed by an overview of the information collected, data analysis and synthesis and trustworthiness of the study.

4.2 Research Questions

The purpose of the research was to understand why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth. Thus, the research question that guided the study was:

- Main RQ: Why and how do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

To address this primary research question, two sub-questions were posed:

- Sub RQ 1: Why do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?
- Sub RQ 2: How do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

To answer these questions, the most suitable research paradigm and the relevant philosophical assumptions were adopted. These are discussed in the section below.

4.3 Research Paradigm and Philosophical Assumptions

Research paradigms are viewed as the basic belief systems or worldviews that guide investigators in their choice of methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). These beliefs correspond to responses to three fundamental and interrelated philosophical questions. There is the ontological question: "What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?" (i.e. what actually exists in the world about which humans can acquire knowledge?), the epistemological question: "What is the relationship between the knower or would-be-knower and what can be known?" (i.e. how do people create knowledge and what is possible to know?), and the methodological question: "What are the ways of finding out knowledge?" (How can we go about finding out things?) (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108;). Accordingly, the research design and methods adopted in this research were guided by the following assumptions.

4.3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Philosophical Assumptions of the Study

Research paradigms differ mainly based on the philosophical assumptions relating to the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge of this reality can be obtained (epistemology) (Durdella, 2018). This study explores youth entrepreneurs' perceptions regarding their use of SM in their venture creation and growth. A key assumption underlying this research was that reality exists, but can be never be understood perfectly because of "basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and fundamentally intractable nature of the phenomena" as such that "claims about reality must be subjected to widest possible critical examination" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Therefore, this research was underpinned by a critical realist ontology.

Critical realism is perhaps best known through the work of Bhaskar (1978). He coined the term 'transcendental realism', which suggests that realism is constituted by experiences, actual events, structures, powers and mechanism that underpin and facilitate the actual phenomena. Transcendental realism considers knowledge as structures and mechanisms which operate independently that generate phenomena, while the knowledge is produced in the social activity of science (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 2013). While not necessarily "flawed", transcendental realism acknowledges the fundamental role of the 'mind' in constructing reality. Bhaskar's transcendental realism is one of the several versions of critical realism, which is also known as classical realism (Smith, 2006).

Another version of critical realism is inductive realism. This ontology involves the falsification of theories (Smith, 2006). Inductive realism recognises theories that have undergone rigorous testing and the accumulation of evidence (Smith, 2006). This form of critical realism stresses

the importance of local context and social diversity. Inductive realism thus explores the process by which science accords the theories by identifying entities, attributes and relationships (Hunt, 2012). These entities, attributes and relationships support the identification of the local context and social diversity by providing explanations, predictions and interventions (Hunt, 2012). These explanations, predictions and interventions, in turn, change the understanding of the local context and social diversity, thus this study aligns with this perspective.

Despite the different versions of critical realism, the main argument of critical realism is that an objective natural world exists alongside the subjective social world (i.e. considering the world as a theory-laden but not theory-determined) (Archer et al., 2013; Fletcher, 2017; Smith, 2006). It is the ontology that underpins this research, as it enables engagement in explanations regarding social problems (Archer et al., 2013; Fletcher, 2017) by capturing the objective reality, as well as subjective interpretations of that reality.

In this study, it is recognised that reality cannot be perfectly understood because youth entrepreneurs have different knowledge, perspectives and experiences, which would lead to them using SM in different ways. However, an individual's experience can be examined critically to understand their knowledge, perspectives and experiences. This enables an imperfect understanding of how youth entrepreneurs use SM through analysing similarities and differences across individual experiences. To understand the reality, which is stratified under three levels: empirical, actual and real (Dobson, 2001; Fletcher, 2017; Hu, 2018; Smith, 2006) as closely as possible the similarities, as well as the differences, need to be acknowledged (Durdella, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014).

To understand the similarities and difference that exist in the use of SM by youth entrepreneurs in this study, it was important for this researcher to interact with multiple participants to uncover their individual views of reality and perspectives. This was also important to uncover to what extent youth entrepreneurs construct meaning for their use of SM, particularly since how they engaged and understood their world was based on their cultural, historical and social perspectives and, thus, meaning/knowledge arises from their interactions with others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014). Therefore, this research was underpinned by a social constructivist epistemology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2017) as well as a critical realist ontology. Both emphasise the social origin and character of meaning. In this research, it is recognised that meaning derives from social interaction amongst people and is handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in their daily encounters (Crotty, 1998; Durdella, 2018). These meanings shape how people perceive,

understand and make sense of the world, as well as how they act toward things (Crotty, 1998). These beliefs underpin the theoretical perspective and methodology of this research.

4.3.2 Theoretical Perspective and Methodology of the Study

Theoretical perspectives represent the researcher's philosophical orientation that guides the research; when made explicit they reveal assumptions that the researcher brings to their research and these assumptions lead to the choice of methods (Crotty, 1998; Durdella, 2018; Moon & Blackman, 2014). This study is underpinned by the interpretive theoretical perspective, which seeks understanding by looking at individual cases to trace the development of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Moon & Blackman, 2014; Morgan, 2007), therefore understanding the world as socially constructed through interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013; Durdella, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon of youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for venture creation and growth is understood by examining the interactions of youth entrepreneurs.

As this study focused on the phenomenon of youth entrepreneurs' use of SM, it adopted the phenomenology methodology to explore the lived experience of youth entrepreneurs. Phenomenology enables interpretation of the experience of youth entrepreneurs' use of SM to provide a novel, refreshed, and a richer meaning (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Other studies on entrepreneurship have adopted a phenomenology methodology to understand the lived experience of entrepreneurs in different contexts (Berglund, 2007; Gil & Silva, 2015; Hemme, Morais, Bowers, & Todd, 2017; Stevenson, 2018). The use of phenomenology in this study explores the meaning that individuals (i.e. youth entrepreneurs) attribute to experiences (i.e. use of SM) in their world (entrepreneurial context) or make sense of interactions in social settings (Durdella, 2018). In phenomenological research, researchers often use qualitative methods to explore the lived experience of individuals.

4.4 Rationale for Qualitative Methods

This study used a qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of how youth entrepreneurs use SM. Qualitative methods enable researchers to examine a social situation or interaction by allowing the researcher to enter the world of the others and attempting to achieve a holistic understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Phenomenology is concerned with understanding the lived experience of a phenomenon (Dowling, 2007; Groenewald, 2004; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016; Norlyk & Harder, 2010); thus, it draws on qualitative methods to understand the lived experience of the youth entrepreneurs' use of SM for their venture creation and growth.

4.4.1 Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative research uses a range of data collection methods, with this study using semi-structured interviews, document analysis (SM based and print-based) and qualitative network mapping as ways to capture the experiences of youth entrepreneurs' use of SM. Field notes and memos (discussed in Section 4.7) were also maintained during data collection and analysis to document the researcher-generated factors (Durdella, 2018; Mason, 2002).

- Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are central to the phenomenological methodology (Durdella, 2018) used in this study because they enable consistency across interviews, with participants asked the same broad questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). However, it also allows sufficient flexibility to delve into matters deemed most important by participants. Further, conducting interviews with discrete, but interrelated, protocols are preferred in phenomenology because it establishes and maintains long term rapport with the participants, which consequently assists the rich data, requiring fewer participants to be invited and to be recruited (Durdella, 2018). In this study, interviews were undertaken in two phases, as explained below.

During the first phase, participants were asked about their general experiences as an entrepreneur and regarding their ventures. This information was vital to understand the operational process of the venture (which was information that was not available on SM or websites), to understand what motivated them to become entrepreneurs and the challenges that they faced in establishing and growing the ventures. The first phase enabled the researcher to establish rapport with the participants, which was important for focusing on the SM based information in the second phase of the interviews and did not require familiarisation into the research or to the researcher. During the second phase, participants were explicitly asked about their lived experience with using SM to create and grow their ventures. Participants also discussed the meaning they attached to the use of SM and how they perceived the advantages of using SM.

- Phase One: Online Interviews[9]

Potential participants were contacted using email, SM and telephone (please see Section 4.5 regarding the sampling strategy and the participants). Of those who were contacted to participate, two individuals declined to participate due to their unavailability during the phase

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[9] Please note that the some of the content of Section 4.4.1 has been published in :
Ranasinghe, G. (2020). Barriers and Drivers of SME's Internationalisation in Emerging Markets: Study of Sri Lankan Youth Entrepreneurs. In P. Jones, P. Haddoud, & A. Onjewu (Eds.), *10th Volume of the Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurial Research* (10th Editi, pp. 141–160). London: UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

two (face-to-face) data collection and busy schedules (as the dates were roughly planned and were known before the data collection stage because the researcher had to travel overseas). The 40 individuals who agreed to participate corresponded with their preferred online VoIP (Voice over IP) platform example, Viber, Skype or WhatsApp and provided preferred date and times for interviews.

At the inception of the interview, the purpose of the interview, and what would be covered was specified. Permission and consent to use the interview data, to record the interviews, as well as to have access to their SM platforms (individual entrepreneur and venture specific platforms) were verbally obtained on record. Interview questions were targeted towards the discussion of individual and contextual information. All interviews in phase one lasted for 30-50 minutes in duration.

The phase one interviews built a rapport with the participants by understanding them as an individual (i.e. their motivation to start the venture, their educational background), and their venture specific information (i.e. their business process and products and who was involved in the venture). This was essential to become familiar with the participant to make sure that they were known to the researcher so that they would be more open, approachable and comfortable during the next phase of interviews. They were also made aware of what the research was about by providing them with the background information, which made it easier for the next phase of interviews to focus on SM and start with the interview protocol. Hence, the first phase of the interviews provided the necessary information regarding the venture and the participant, making it easier to understand their ventures and their aspirations. Phase one interviews also aided in obtaining permission to access their SM profiles, by them agreeing to do so verbally on record (See Appendix B for the interview protocol).

- Phase Two: Face-to-Face Interviews

The face-to-face interviews were conducted approximately three months after the initial phase one interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain detailed information about the youth entrepreneurs' (i.e. participants') lived experience with SM for their venture creation and growth. Therefore, these interview sessions were more in-depth and focused on addressing the research questions. Face-to-face interviews were conducted at a location specified by participants, depending on their schedule and considering their availability. Interviews ran for 45 minutes to 1 hour in duration. See Appendix C for the interview protocol. On completion of the interviews, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

- Document Analysis (SM Data)

The SM-based data was obtained with the verbal consent of the participants during the phase one interviews. This data that was obtained through SM profiles included demographic information that is publicly available and public messages that they post. Mainly Facebook posts were used as the SM data (as all of the participants used Facebook for their ventures which was identified in the online interview sessions) and posts relevant to the ventures were saved in my Facebook page (temporarily) and later copied into word documents with the relevant participant numbers, coded and included in the analysis process. These posts were acquired during the time period from the phase one interview sessions up until the data analysis phase commenced. These messages contained publicising information for their ventures and operational challenges faced by these participants.

- Document Analysis (Printed Form)

Document analysis was conducted using published articles related to the participants or the venture. They comprised of magazines, featured articles and newspaper articles. These documents were useful in terms of validating the contextual and individual-level data supplied at phase one interview sessions. For example, these published articles represented participants and their passion, skills and also indicated the individual participant personal-level information that was useful to obtain a complete overview of the participant and cross-check this data with the individual and contextual data obtained during the phase one interview sessions.

- Qualitative Network Mapping

An activity was included at the end of each of the phase two interviews to capture the SM networks of the participants. Identifying the participants' online, SM-based networks, was necessary because networks play an essential role in the acquisition of resources and capabilities needed for an entrepreneur to effectively compete in the market (Hitt et al., 2002b). Networks are also influential in the venture creation process, and research suggests that a lack of networks has led to the failure of some ventures (Cooper, 2017; Yoon & Sung, 2019). Thus, in the exploration of why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their venture creation and growth, it was necessary to understand the SM-based networks and resources associated with those networks used by the participants. Network mapping was used in this study as it enabled the identification of participants' social interactions (networks) and how well SM supported them. It also enabled identification of the strength of each interaction, as engaging in the activity prompted participants to explicitly reflect on how they operated. The use of network mapping as a method influenced the individual player within the network structure (i.e. the youth entrepreneur's) to identify their network processes while it was also essential to recognise

networks that were inherent with interconnections and chain reactions (Aldrich, 1999; Moody & Paxton, 2009; Zappa & Robins, 2016).

In this study, the starting point of the network was the personal network of the participant as eventually it could be cascaded up (Mitchell, 1969). The researcher used the positional method for the process of identifying and categorising network actors (Rice, 2013) where a person or venture occupying the key roles in the analytic system were recognised and represented (Rice, 2013; Walker, Wasserman, & Wellman, 2013). Although there were other methods to represent networks (Gunasekaran & Kobu, 2002; Tian, Ray, Lee, Cao, & Ding, 2008), this network mapping was considered most appropriate because of its simplicity. It was a network mapping that the participants would be able to understand easily and relate to within a short time span. The network mapping used for this study only considered the structure (i.e. network size and the network participants/organisations) from a relational view (i.e. identify relationships and their strength) (Rice, 2013; Thevanes & Saranraj, 2018). This structure suggested the extent to which actors interacted directly (i.e. strong ties) and indirectly (i.e. weak ties) as they processed resources (Rice, 2013; Thevanes & Saranraj, 2018). The reasons for forming and maintaining networks were considered to explain why participants established these weak/strong relationships with others, and the resources that were exchanged/shared (Rice, 2013). A sample of qualitative network mapping is represented in Appendix D.

- Field Notes

Field notes were taken during phase two. Field notes were used to support the researcher's understanding of the context and setting (Patton, 2002). These field notes were detailed and reflective to capture observation relating to non-verbal communications and behaviours of participants. Some of the content that was captured included physical setting description, actions (mood, attitude and general environment ambience), behaviours and conversations observed (conflicts, decision- making and collaborations), interaction frequency and communication patterns (interaction between the researcher and participants and others), participants and their roles in the setting (if the interview took place at the ventures), exact quotes or close approximations of comments that relate directly to the purpose of the study and reflective content such as thoughts and ideas, questions and concerns (the afterthoughts mentioned by the participant upon completion of the interviews, which were not audio-recorded). Field notes also captured any post-interview comments that participants made. Although the field notes were not directly used for the data analysis phase, these field notes contained the researcher's thoughts and feelings at the time of the interviews. This information was useful, as it permitted the researcher to recollect the context and the settings and immerse

with the study findings (Patton, 2002). The post-interview comments made by the participants helped provide a clear picture of the entrepreneurial eco-system challenges faced by them.

4.5 Sampling Strategy and Participants

A purposive sampling procedure was used to select study participants, as the selection of information-rich participants who met the particular selection criteria was necessary for the study (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling enabled the selection of youth entrepreneurs within a specific age bracket (aged 15-29 years), who owned micro-level ventures (annual turnover of less than LKR15 million (approximately USD 100 000) or with less than ten employees), within the Western Province (commercial hub where majority of the SMEs were located) in Sri Lanka and who used SM for professional purposes.

Participants were youth entrepreneurs aged 15 to 29 years. The "youth" age bracket was established based on three contextual factors. First, in the Sri Lankan education system, students finish the school-based examinations at the age of 19, and they start their university education at the age of 21 years. The individuals who enrol at university-level education might not finish their education until the age of 29-30 years (Ministry of City Planning Water Supply and Higher Education, 2018; University Grants Commission Sri Lanka, 2017). Youth tended to start their ventures during or after their university education time. Second, the selection of the age bracket was also similar to the criteria of youth for low and middle-income countries in a recent research study (Burchell & Coutts, 2019). Third, the transition period for youth entrepreneurs could be categorised into three stages. First, the pre-entrepreneurs (15-19 years) where the youth leaves home and started identifying themself as an individuals while developing entrepreneurial ideas, second, budding entrepreneurs (20-25 years) where they attempt to start and run smaller ventures and gained the practical know-how, and third, emergent entrepreneurs (26-29 years) where they have gained the experience and realise how they need to manage a venture (Juneja, 2019). Abiding by these three stages, it clear that the youth age-range specification should be 15 to 29 years, encompassing all three transition periods.

Micro-level ventures specific to Sri Lanka consisted of two elements: the annual turnover or the number of employees (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). Given that the annual turnover was not readily discussed, the number of employees was the dominant criteria for venture selection. At the time of selecting the ventures for the study, the number of employees was less than or equal to ten, aligning with the guidelines specified by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce in Sri Lanka for micro-level ventures (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2015). In some micro-level ventures (60%), there were no permanent employees associated with it, requiring the involvement of the participants extensively for all aspects of the ventures. As a

result of this direct involvement of the participants in their ventures, an individual participant was the unit of analysis for this study.

Participants came from the Western Province of Sri Lanka, where a significant number of SMEs are located because of the extensive infrastructure developments relating to transportation, telecommunications and port services). This province has a long history of international exchange with the West and the East, where the capital and the commercial hub of Sri Lanka (Colombo) is located (as previously explained in Chapter 3). Therefore, this study was geographically limited to the Western Province in Sri Lanka.

4.5.1   Selection of Participants[10]

From the purposive sampling process, 10 participants were identified. Following this process, this study used the snowball sampling technique to identify further participants. At the end of the interviews with these 10 participants, they were asked to identify other participants (aged 15-29), who owned micro-level ventures in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. This strategy of obtaining participants through others (i.e. participants) provided the added advantage of having at least two participants within the same industry (Patton, 2002).

The identification of the sample size for the research was based on opting for a sufficient sample size to ensure data saturation. Studies suggest that the sample sizes of 20-30 participants in qualitative research, as this is often when data saturation is reached (Boddy, 2016; Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). It has been suggested that a sample size of 40 is a sufficient sample size for qualitative research (Boddy, 2016; Marshall et al., 2013). Hence, in this study, the researcher opted for the larger sample size of 40 participants as a way of ensuring data saturation.

Forty youth participants associated with 37 micro-level youth entrepreneurial ventures participated in the study. Three ventures were partnership ventures, and both partners were interviewed separately (both for phase one online and phase two face-to-face interviews). Each venture was allocated a unique V number to identify the venture while each participant was allocated a unique VP number (venture-participant number). The VP number was assigned to a participant, therefore uniquely identified the participant and associated the participant to the venture with the V number. For example, V8P7 represents Participant P7 representing Venture 8. These participant ventures were from different industries. However, at least two ventures

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[10] Please note that the some of the content of Section 4.5.1 has been published in :
Ranasinghe, G. (2020). Barriers and Drivers of SME's Internationalisation in Emerging Markets: Study of Sri Lankan Youth Entrepreneurs. In P. Jones, P. Haddoud, & A. Onjewu (Eds.), *10th Volume of the Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurial Research* (10th Editi, pp.141–160). London: UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

representing the same industry was selected for the study (Table 4.1). In Table 4.1, "M" represents the number of male participants, and "F" represents the number of female participants.

Table 4.1.Venture Participant Details
Source: Study Data

Sector	Participant Numbers	Brief Description of the Ventures
Creative	V10P10, V11P11, V11P12, V13P13, V14P14, V16P16 V19P19, V20P20, V21P21, V22P22, V27P28, V30P31 V31P32, V37P38	Most of the ventures in this category were service providers, while a few (3 ventures) were manufacturing and service sector integration ventures. Consisted of ventures dealing with digital media service providers, graphics and website designing, photography, media solution providers, digital marketing services, professional art services, dollhouse designing and logo design ventures. (M=11, F=3)
Food and Beverages	V1P1, V23P23, V26P26, V35P36 V5P4, V8P7	Majority of the ventures in this category were service providers while two ventures were a combination of both manufacturing and service sector ventures. Most ventures were home baking ventures with a few outlets. (M=2, F=4)
Retail	V3P2, V9P8, V9P9	All of the ventures were service sector representations. Novel delivery service providers, as well as unique coconut-based product distributors, were included in this category. (M=3)
Education	V15P15, V18P18, V4P3	Education service providers were represented in this category. They used novel ways to provide their services using niche market segments. (M=2, F=1)
Consultancy	V6P5, V39P40	These ventures were providing consultancy services. One venture was targeted towards agriculture consultations and the other software consultations. (M=2)
Software	V12P13, V7P6, V24P24, V38P39	These participants were engaged in novel software development areas based on the platforms or services that they provided. (M=4)
Apparel	V29P30, V25P25, V34P35	Consisted of manufacturing and service-based ventures. They were able to design the apparel, sew it and also sell them online or through a small outlet. (M=1, F=2)
Travel	V32P33, V36P37	The ventures were both service-based representing the inbound travel sector. (M=1, F=1)
Medical	V17P17, V28P29, V2P1	Service-based ventures. They provided unique services targeted towards a niche market segment. (M=3)

Table 4.1 demonstrates that 14 participants were from the creative industry; six were from the food and beverage industry. Four industries (retail, education, apparel and medical industries) contained three participants each. Consultancy industry and travel industry was represented with two participants each while four participants represented software industry.

Considering participants use of SM, it was clear that they used a spectrum of SM platforms. This spectrum of SM included social networking services (LinkedIn and Facebook); voice over IP (Viber, WhatsApp and Skype); document sharing service (Google+); media sharing services (Flickr, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube); and blogging services (Blogger, WordPress and Twitter). The SM platforms used by participants varied in popularity. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and voice over IP (WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype) were the most popular with 100% of the participants using Facebook, 61% Instagram, and 42% Twitter, LinkedIn (39%) and voice over IP (WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype- 39%). Participants offered various reasons for using SM platforms; a few of these reasons are represented in Appendix E.

4.6 Overview of the Information Collected

The information that was collected from participants to answer the research questions can be separated into four categories: contextual, perceptual, demographic, and theoretical. Table 4.2. illustrates some of the information that was collected in each category and the primary method that supplied such information for the study.

Table 4.2. Information obtained from Participants
Source: Study Data

Category of Information	Main Source of Information	Examples	Notes
Contextual	Phase One: Online Interviews	The individual-level information (skills, motivation), venture process, products, services offered.	Although such information was often gathered through documentation, there was a limited amount of documentation present on these participants and their ventures. Although online forms (SM and websites) contained some information which could be obtained, they also did not explain the business process-based information within the venture. This was vital for understanding how SM was integrated into the business process.
Perceptual	Phase Two: Face-to-face Interviews	Participants' perceptions about the use of SM in their ventures. Although this information was illustrated as perceptual, the researcher made sure that they explained examples of how they used and when they used SM to convert perceptual information to actual evidence.	These perceptions related to how participants used SM, what they use it for, how they measure the value of SM etc. Through the interviews, participants' experience and descriptions related to the use of SM in their ventures were obtained. These example illustrations proved to be valuable in the conversion of perceptual information to evidence.
Demographic	SM Profiles and Published Documentation	Participant profile information- location, interests, education, age, and gender	This information was readily available on their SM profiles and other documentation.
Theoretical	Review of Literature	Information searched and collected through various literature sources to assess what is already known about the topic of inquiry	The literature supported the understanding of the research area and context. It also supported identifying the areas that were under-researched

4.7 Data Analysis and Synthesis

- Input and organisation of data

All interviews (including the participant's explanations of the network mapping conducted during face-to-face interviews) were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by comparing the transcription to the audio recording. This process ensured the accuracy of the data. All interview recordings were named appropriately to indicate whether they were contextual online interviews or formal interviews (face-to-face interviews), participant number and date were added. All transcripts were also categorised to make sure that they were immediately identifiable. For example, in the initial contextual interview transcript "Contextual V35P36 2017_3_30" the name indicates participant V35P36's contextual interview conducted on 2017_3_30. Similarly, for formal interviews (face-to-face interviews) "Formal Interview V10P10 2017_07_05" indicates its participant V10P10's formal interview session held on 2017_07_05. This naming protocol made it easier to code data, transfer data to NVivo and cross-reference data sets in the analysis process. Even during the analysis stage, reflective memos were named with the same convention; for example, "V32P33 Formal" indicates V32P33's formal interview reflective analysis memo.

All participant details and venture details, such as name and the code assigned, were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet for the de-identification process used in the research, which was later transferred to an NVivo 12 Classification tables. These classification tables contained information such as Participant Number, Industry, Sector, Area of Business, Brief Description, Gender, Age and Level of Education. For example for Participant V39P40 (participant number), Industry: Service, Sector: consultancy, Area of Business: a consultancy service provider, Description: provides consultancy services to individual farmers and companies, Gender: Male, Age: 27 and Level of Education: university graduate. Classifying participants in this way enabled this information and the data to be easily sorted and accessed. For example, by selecting consultancy as a sort field for the sector will display all consultancy ventures in the sample. By using the classification tables in NVivo 12, the researcher was able to filter and search for details faster, making the final documentation and classification process easier.

Field notes were used as a secondary data collection method. Field notes were also named with the field notes (FN) participant number (VP number) and the date (FN V18P10 2017_07_07). These field notes were linked to the formal interview session by linking it with the NVivo 12 using the "see also link" to the same participant. Document analysis was conducted on printed data on magazines, reports and newspapers; all participants had the digital records of their printed data which was also added and linked in the same manner as explained in the field notes. SM posts that were saved were also added as Word documents with the participant

number into NVivo for analysis. All the data obtained through primary and secondary data collection methods were included in NVivo 12 for process coding and thematic analysis.

- Process coding

In this study, process coding (Saldana, 2016) was used to code and categorise data. It was considered appropriate because research questions Sub RQ2 (mentioned in Section 4.2 in this Chapter) is process-based. Sub RQ2 focused on a 'how' question, which required the examination of routines and understanding the interaction between SM and the participants. By using process coding, different activities about how participants used SM for their ventures were identified; thus, the process of human action was identified (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These activities were useful for understanding the process of SM use by participants for their micro-level ventures.

- Thematic analysis

This study analysed data thematically. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within the qualitative data; it is not tied to any particular epistemological or theoretical perspective, which makes it more flexible to use (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The analysis process that was conducted for the study was informed by the six-step thematic analysis framework presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2013). However, the process was adapted to suit this study; this is explained in Table 4.3. The thematic analysis was undertaken using NVivo 12 software, where "nodes" are used to denote "codes" in the six-step thematic analysis framework.

Table 4.3. Thematic Analysis Process Conducted
Source: Adapted based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2013)

Process Sequence	Analysis Process
STEP 1 Familiarisation with the data	Reading and re-reading all of the interviews to establish an understanding of the phenomena according to the participants. Interpretation of general narratives and specific quotations into reflective memos were conducted within these processes. The researcher made the initial nodes on NVivo 12 categorised by the broad areas related to interview questions. For example, one of the categorisations is "Q1. What are the social media that youth entrepreneurs used?"
STEP 2 Coding and Searching for themes	Individual interviews were re-read line by line and then broken down into discrete parts based on the changes in the meaning. Based on the meaning if it was better to have a subcategory, then they were allocated to a sub-category and codes were assigned using NVivo 12 nodes. For example, if the main theme was the use of SM then based on the participant answers, it was broken down into sub-categories named technical usage (i.e. algorithms) and building virtual communities. To capture the contextual understanding, coded narratives were assigned to

| | nodes. For example, not a word or sentence was coded to nodes, but the entire paragraph was allocated the node in NVivo. This eventually was very helpful in understanding the context during the write-up process. Anything interesting and significant about what the participant said was allocated to a corresponding node. Comments in the memos were used to summarise, paraphrase and to provide initial connectors and associations.
Each transcript was individually worked through for similarities, contradictions and the differences as opposed to another. While the similarities were grouped to an existing node, the differences were assigned a new node. |
|---|---|
| STEP 3 Reviewing themes | These nodes in NVivo 12 contained the isolated meaning units. When the whole texts were broken down in this manner, the resulting units were re-read and discussed with the primary and the secondary supervisors. These discussions ensured the consistency and accuracy of the transcripts. |
| STEP 4 Searching for themes | Working through the list of meaning units (Nodes), the units with similar meaning were grouped together and categorised under a new tentative node. Each meaningful unit was either classified to an existing node or provided with its own new node. |
| STEP 5 Searching for themes | This process generated several nodes, and during the processes, some nodes that were found to be similar were merged and some split up. For example, the use of SM for ventures seemed to change based on the venture stages. Initially, the themes were venture creation personal networks, venture growth professional networks. However, at the final stages, while discussing with the supervisors, it was identified that these nodes should be merged into one single node called the use of SM for ventures. Having a single node ensured that the participant quotes for the narrative related to the use of SM for ventures were in one main node. |
| STEP 6 Searching for themes | The nodes and their interrelationships to the research question were focused on in more detail at this stage, and similar themes were generated. |
| STEP 7 Searching for themes | During the analysis stage, continuous interpretations were made as nodes emerged. The intention was to find expressions which were high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across the transcripts. Similar themes that emerged were grouped under the same node.
Not too many nodes were developed as it would make the analysis process cumbersome and unmanageable to make sense, as the story would be split. This was helpful for the write-up process as within one main/parent node the information needed to document that section was available. |
| STEP 8 Reviewing themes | By constant questioning and categorisations, themes were rearranged in consultation with the supervisors. The emergent themes were maintained as nodes with subcategories in NVivo 12, and the connections between them were investigated. A more analytical ordering was conducted at this stage. Some of the themes were clustered while some remained as it is. For example, nodes related to social interaction ties, trust and reciprocity were grouped as strong networking. |
| STEP 9 | As the clustering of the themes emerges, it was again cross-checked with the |

Defining and naming themes	transcript to make sure the connections work for the actual words of the participant as well. Looking under each of the research question-based broad categories at this stage, the emerging themes were evident, and support evidence was maintained with the use of nodes in NVivo.
STEP 10 Defining and naming themes	All the nodes used for the study was named as an activity abiding by the process coding approach adopted. For example, a few of the node samples are "Q 3. Perceive, Interpret and give meaning to SM" which contained the sub-nodes Customer Acquisition Tool, Marketing Tool, Investment Tool and Partner acquisition tool. The prominent themes (nodes in NVivo 12) could be identified with the use of frequency and references fields contained in the codebook. A unique identifier was associated with themes in each node (as a pathname) indicating the location within a transcript where each theme could be found. This identifier was represented as a 'link' in NVivo. By clicking in this identifier link, it diverted to the source location, which was useful, if further information was required.
STEP 11 Defining and naming themes	The same themes (nodes) from the first transcript were initially used to orient the subsequent analysis and to identify the recurrent themes. However, new emerging themes were also acknowledged adequately and represented in the process of working through the transcripts. When the first few interview transcripts were selected, the researcher chose the interviews with a lot of information (judged by the breadth and depth of information obtained during the interview sessions). Therefore, as the researcher worked through the rest of the interviews, it was easier as most of the relevant nodes were already available. These themes were not purely selected based on prevalence within the data. Other factors such as the richness of a particular passage by having relevant and well-explained information, how the theme helps in bringing out other aspects of the account was also considered.
STEP 12 Results	After the completion of all the transcripts, a final codebook with the themes was generated.
Results	Results were a natural extension of the analysis process and contained further interpretative elements, obtained from field notes and memos. To demarcate the clear distinction of the participant and the researcher, participants' accounts were presented using direct quotes.
Writing up	Translating the themes into a narrative account. The themes were explained and illustrated. The codebook is the basis for an account for participants' responses, which takes the form of a narrative argument interspersed with verbatim extracts from the transcripts to support the claim. The results Chapters (Chapter 5 and 6) will contain the emergent thematic analysis and separate discussion (Chapter 7) that links analysis to the existing literature.

The section below discusses the ways in which the study trustworthiness was accomplished.

4.8 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the "eight big tent criteria" by Tracy (2010) was used. These criteria suggest eight attributes to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research namely: worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. This section illustrates how each of these attributes was ensured in this study.

The first criteria, worthy topic, refers to the research topic being "relevant, timely, significant and interesting" (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). This study explores why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth. By exploring why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM, the value of SM is extended through this study by shedding light on some strategies that participants develop and utilise to build successful and sustainable ventures. Hence, the study contributes to the strategic use of SM (i.e. strategic entrepreneurship literature) by considering the strategic choices made by the participants. This understanding is important because strategies are essential for entrepreneurial success, and they are the link between the entrepreneurial venture and its environment (Osborn, 1995). Conducting this research in a developing nation is important as research is lacking in developing nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020) on youth entrepreneurs and on micro-level ventures (Aragón-Sánchez & Sánchez-Marín, 2005; Falkena et al., 2010; Jayaram et al., 2014; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Stockdale et al., 2012; Thrikawala, 2011; Wickremasinghe, 2011). Thus, by providing insights to youth entrepreneurship in developing nations, this study takes a timely and relevant approach in finding ways enhance youth entrepreneurship which is considered a viable solution to reduce youth unemployment (Awogbenle & Iwuamadi, 2010; Burchell & Coutts, 2019; Vogel, 2015b; World Economic Forum, 2018). This exploration into youth entrepreneurship is also necessary as youth population figure is estimated to double by 2050 with 90% of the youth population living in developing countries (Pieters, 2013; Population Reference Bureau, 2013; United Nations, 2015; Vogel, 2015a). This study is interesting as it explores under-researched areas: youth entrepreneurs, micro-level ventures, SM strategies and developing nations (Aragón-Sánchez & Sánchez-Marín, 2005; Falkena et al., 2010; Jayaram et al., 2014; Kapurubandara & Lawson, 2006; Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017; Stockdale et al., 2012; Thrikawala, 2011; Wickremasinghe, 2011).

The second criteria, rich rigour refers to the adequacy and appropriateness of the data, time spent collecting the data, understanding the context and data analysis process (Tracy, 2010). Rich rigour is important for qualitative research to have integrity and to make an impact on practice and/or policy (Hadi & José-Closs, 2016). The sample size of 40 youth-entrepreneurs from 37 micro-level ventures was sufficient to ensure data saturation, as in qualitative research

data saturation is usually reached with a sample size of 20-30 participants (Boddy, 2016; Marshall et al., 2013). Rigour was also achieved through collecting data in two phases using semi-structured interviews and supplemented with document analysis and qualitative network mapping (explained in Section 4.4.1). Data analysis was conducted in a rigorous way, with the use of process coding and thematic analysis (explained in Section 4.7).

The third criteria, sincerity, refer to the study being characterised by the researcher's self-reflexivity about their subjective values, biases, and inclinations and their transparency about methods and challenges (Tracy, 2010). These reflexive practices occur at all stages of the research, including when negotiating access, collecting data, and presenting findings. For this study, access to participants and data storage is explained in Section 4.5 while the data collection, analysis and presentation stages were explained in Section 4.7. What is important to note is that ethical approval was obtained for all data collection methods and prior appointments were obtained from all participants for interviews. The researcher took numerous steps to ensure sincerity. First, the researcher clarified the interpretations made by providing reasons for doing so and also charted them through journal writing (Janesick, 1999; Ortlipp, 2008). Second, in terms of the findings, the researcher took precautions not to eliminate the inconsistencies that the data revealed; instead, the researcher ensured they were understood and documented, as exceptional cases. For example, in the results Chapter, they are understood and included as exceptions as they also reveal different perspectives and approaches. The researcher also made sure that procedures were documented, ensuring the coding and themes are consistently used. In terms of reporting the results, the researcher strove to obtain a logical, informative storyline. Third, the researcher maintained an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) that showed the evolution of thinking and documented the rationale for all choices and decisions made during the research process. This audit trail was maintained as NVivo 12 based memos, which ensured the transparency of the method. Fourth, the researcher used member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2017), where a sample of results and interpretations were taken back to the participants for confirmation. This member checking was also useful as a strategy to confirm the researcher-generated factors that shaped what the researcher thought about the interviews conducted with members and how data analysis was approached (Durdella, 2018). Hence, member checking assured whether the interpretations made were correct and provided a manner for the participants to correct or make changes to their transcripts. Therefore, the accuracy and credibility of the participant responses were ensured. Fifth, to ensure traceability (Lincoln & Guba, 1989), continuous interconnections using naming conversions were used. This process ensured related documents were linked together and was easily identified. For example, interview records, transcripts, findings, field notes and memos interlinked through the names (as explained Section 4.7).

The fourth criteria, credibility, refers to research being marked by thorough description, concrete detail, explication of tacit knowledge, and 'showing rather than telling' (Tracy, 2010). The researcher assured the criteria of credibility by providing thorough descriptions. The study explicates how different participants provide explanations for a certain phenomenon and how they are explained in the literature by providing evidence through the use of citations. Explanations illustrated in the literature were represented as themes surrounding the area of research, while the novel explanations were used as extensions to the literature with emerging data. Findings and interpretations were regularly communicated with the supervisors to identify whether the interpretations reflect what data intended.

The fifth criteria, resonance, illustrates that the ability of the research to influence, affect, or move particular readers or a variety of audiences through aesthetic, evocative representation, naturalistic generalizations, and transferable findings (Tracy, 2010). The findings of this study are represented as a narrative which could be easily followed by the reader, and the researcher has striven to obtain clarity in the narrative. Rather than generalising the findings, the focus of this study was to provide rich descriptions. It was expected that these thick descriptions would promote transferability of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1989), as they would provide sufficient background information. To aid the understanding of the context of this study, a chapter was dedicated in this thesis (Chapter 3) with the background information related to Sri Lanka.

The sixth criteria is a significant contribution, referring to the contribution of the study to the extension of concepts, theory, practice and methodology (Tracy, 2010). This study contains significant contributions (elaborated in the Introduction, Discussion and Conclusion Chapters). This study contributes to the entrepreneurship (i.e. strategic entrepreneurship, youth entrepreneurship, micro-level ventures and entrepreneurial process) and information systems disciplines (i.e CMC) (Lokuge et al., 2018; Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Salunke et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2017) by exploring how SM contributes to venture creation and growth, which is an under-explored area in the literature (Durkin et al., 2013; Mumi et al., 2018b; Nambisan, 2018; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2017). Further, there are few studies that examine how youth entrepreneurs' use SM to create and grow their ventures in developing nations (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). This study also considers youth entrepreneurship in developing nations, contributing to an under-researched area. Given the challenges and the importance of entrepreneurship in developing nations (explained in Chapter 3), it is vital to understand how SM can be used strategically to benefit venture creation and growth in developing nations' perspective, which is explored in this study. This strategic use of SM (by considering the strategic choices) is valuable as developing nations have resource-restrictions and SM is available in these contexts, by strategically using SM youth entrepreneurs can gain

many benefits that would result in increased revenue for them and economic growth for the nation.

The seventh criteria is adherence to ethical practices (Tracy, 2010). This is ensured by obtaining ethical clearance for the study from HREAP A: UNSW Canberra (approval number HC16923). Ethical considerations included areas enlisting voluntary cooperation, informing the participants about the purpose of the study, treating the information in a manner that protects the participants. Although it was anticipated that no serious ethical threats would be imposed on any of the participants or their wellbeing, the study employed various safeguards to ensure the protection and the rights of the participants. First, informed consent remained a priority throughout the study. Verbal permission was obtained during phase one interviews, while written consent was obtained during phase two interview sessions (Participant consent form used in this study is represented in Appendix F). Second, participant rights and interests were considered of primary importance when choices were made regarding the reporting and dissemination of data. The researcher was committed to keeping names and other significant identity characteristics of the sample ventures confidential. Cautionary measures were taken to secure storage of research related records and nobody other than the researcher had access to this material.

The final trustworthiness criteria is meaningful coherence, which refers to the study achieving what is it supposed to and the appropriate use of methods, procedures that fit its stated research question and meaningful interconnections between literature, research questions, findings, and interpretations (Tracy, 2010). A coherent storyline was strived for at all times. The researcher made a conscious effort to make meaningful interlinks between the literature, research questions, methodology, findings and its interpretations by highlighting the strategic choices made by participants' in their use of SM and by positioning SM as a resource that is valuable for developing nations to overcome the resource-restrictions.

4.9 Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of the study's research methodology. This study adopts a critical realism ontology and is epistemologically constructivist. The study takes an interpretive theoretical perspective with a phenomenological methodology. Based on the nature and the purpose of the qualitative study approach was most appropriate. The study uses semi-structured interviews conducted in two phases, document analysis (SM and Print-based) and qualitative network mapping to identify the participants' online (SM based networks) which was considered to play an essential role in the acquisition of resources and capabilities needed for them to effectively compete in the market. The participant sample was made up of 40 youth entrepreneurs owning 37 micro-level ventures in the Western Province of

Sri Lanka. Process coding and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data with the aid of NVivo 12. Careful planning of the research was conducted to ensure trustworthiness by considering a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and meaningful coherence. The evidence related to interview protocols and network mapping is represented in appendices.

The next chapter uses the research methodology to explore the findings of the study. This chapter is the first of the two results Chapters and examines why SM is a valuable resource for youth entrepreneurs.

CHAPTER 5

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A RESOURCE FOR YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 of this thesis articulated why this research was needed and justified. It argued that youth unemployment was a severe issue facing many nations and entrepreneurship a viable solution. Chapter 2 discussed the emergence of different types of entrepreneurs as a response to the changing environment and the traditional venture-creation process and the resources needed for the entrepreneurs to establish ventures. It also acknowledged the changes that SM has brought forth to customers and businesses, illustrating that SM could add tremendous value for the entrepreneurs to create and grow their ventures. The chapter also identified the lack of studies related to the role of SM in entrepreneurial ventures. This thesis addresses the gap through considering why and how youth entrepreneurs use SM for their venture creation and growth. Chapter 3 described the context where the data were collected for the study, Sri Lanka, while Chapter 4 explained the research methodology adopted in this study.

This chapter is the first of two empirical Chapters. It explains the reasons why youth entrepreneurs used SM for their ventures, including to create awareness of their ventures, acquire customers, market their products and services, and establish and maintain networks in a cost-effective way. First, this chapter outlines the key reasons participants used SM. Second, it discusses the use of SM as a resource in participants' venture creation and growth. Third, it explains participants' use of SM to establish and maintain networks, and why this was important for their ventures.

5.2 Key Reasons Participants Use Social Media Platforms

The study participants discussed how they used multiple SM platforms, rather than a single SM platform, providing different reasons. For example, participants indicated two preferences to create awareness of their venture: (1) Facebook, primarily because most Sri Lankans use it; and (2) Instagram because it can provide valuable information about their ventures by portraying its culture. Facebook and YouTube were the platforms that offered maximum visibility to create awareness among the audience for most participants, while YouTube was considered a useful demonstration, learning and testing ground for new products and services.

The findings of this study reveal that the participants (youth entrepreneurs) used SM for various reasons. The majority of the participants in this study used SM extensively for their ventures

because it was cost-effective and provided access to a larger audience. These attributes of SM made the participants depend on it as a resource for their ventures. Because participants were micro-level venture owners, they had restricted resources. Therefore, the cost-effectiveness of SM and the ability to reach a large audience through using SM made it lucrative for them to use SM. Further, because they owned micro-level ventures, participants relied extensively on SM as a resource to overcome the liability of smallness (explained in Chapter 2). Study findings suggest that participants were able to deal with the liability of smallness by creating virtual networks with customers, organisations, friends and suppliers. These networks acted as a way to acquire the resources that were necessary to run their micro-level ventures.

Participants discussed how, through using SM as a resource, they were able to create awareness of their products/services, market their products/services, acquire new customers, and reach existing customers and stakeholders. Creating awareness was an activity in which participants engaged to provide visibility for their ventures/products/services so that the audience knew of the existence of their ventures/products/services. The participants believed that if brand awareness was appropriately created, it would remind the audience about the venture's products/services and lead them to purchase products/services from the venture. Once a customer decides to purchase products/services, and pay for the product/service, then the customer is attained through the participants using SM. Through considering SM as a network, these findings are similar to a network supporting the acquisition of the resources and capabilities for venture activities necessary to compete in markets (Hitt et al., 2002).

Participants also discussed the pivotal role that SM played in marketing their venture in a cost-effective manner. This mostly included participants administering SM campaigns[11] and influencing the audience to purchase products/services. The cost-effectiveness of SM was a tremendous factor influencing participants to use SM for their marketing activities. Participants contrasted this with using traditional media (i.e. newspapers, television), which is more costly, both in terms of financial resources (i.e. cost) and human resources (i.e. the participants' time and effort):

> We did broachers (repeats), which also didn't [work]. Yeah, that also didn't. It was just cost-benefit is not there. Like... Social media investment is much lower than what you would do [in traditional media]. Not just in terms of money, in terms of physically having to be there, in terms of distributing, even if you print a letter we have to labour, the time and the reach also are like…For example, we can use 4 000 [rupees] which didn't bring us anything, but on Facebook like for 4 000 rupees you can reach around 100 000 people (V11P12).

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[11] A business co-ordinated marketing effort to reinforce information about a brand/product or service using SM platforms (Baker, 2019)

This participant (V11P12) indicated how the money that was spent on SM derives greater value than traditional media, in terms of revenue and effort. Participants also indicated that the high revenue obtained from SM was partly due to its ability to impact on more people. Participants discussed how using SM meant that they opened up a two-way communication path between them and the audience, resulting in better value for the participant:

> On social media, that is happening with anything, even news, even anything. When you put it online, you see what is happening. But that is not visible [in other traditional media], TV and… if you put it there, and someone will be watching somewhere out there, but they can't directly communicate with us. But here, people can directly communicate with us. That is live. Now if you're putting something on TV, you'll be watching it here, you don't even, you can't communicate with the person. But if it's Facebook, you can communicate, you can inbox, you can talk to, and in the future you'll be able to, if you're selling a, if our service is selling something, sooner, within one year's time I think, there will be a payment gateway as well on Facebook to sell directly (V10P10).

Findings suggest SM supported participants in their demonstration/testing of products. For example, participants were able to demonstrate how one of their products (i.e. software products) worked using SM videos. Some participants used SM as a testing platform:

> Yeah, so most of our products are, it actually starts with social media. So we test technology products because rather than going offline materials, marketing, we test start the products, with the beta editions with the social media (V7P6).

Findings also suggest that SM supported learning activities. For example, some participants used SM to learn new techniques (i.e. how to use equipment in their industry), and products (i.e. new tools available for production) that were available for their industry using SM:

> Yeah a lot of equipment (i.e. baking tools), like, actually I self-learned how to use them. I haven't gone for any classes or anything, so I go to YouTube and all the tutorials, so the things they use; most of them are not even possible to purchase them here. So whatever possible, I get him (referring to her husband) to bring, but still, there is some stuff which he can't go and look around, you know, cake supplies (V35P36).

This process of learning enabled the participants to gain knowledge and skills using SM. Facebook, YouTube, and Flickr were suggested as the best tools to gain knowledge. They enabled the participants to stay up to date with important developments in their area of expertise and to gain knowledge from experts located anywhere in the world. In other words, the use of SM has brought the world closer to the participants and provided them with the ability to learn from the experts.

Participants also used SM for recruitment purposes by initially going through potential employees' profiles and their respective manager/peer recommendations, which are available on SM platforms such as LinkedIn. This made it easier for participants to conduct the background checking of their potential employees:

> I do a thorough background search before I contact a person. Especially on LinkedIn and on Google as well just to see press releases and what they have been doing. Or because I always try to identify whether we have anything in common or we know anyone in common. Or whether they have worked in a company where I have worked before, I know someone. I don't... I have never contacted a person (i.e. for recruitment purposes for projects) without knowing a little bit of background. Ah… so yes, I use social media in that terms to do a background search on the person (V4P3).

SM supported the participants to identify and recruit the most suitable employees for their ventures. This was particularly important because participants owned micro-level ventures, employing less than 10 employees (as defined contextually in Chapter 3). Participants had restricted resources, which meant they did not have the means to embark on expensive recruitment campaigns. In addition, due to their lack of resources, participants often recruited employees on an 'as-needed' basis, which meant they could not afford time delays while looking for suitable employees. Thus, identifying the most suitable employees (i.e. employees who have the requisite skills, knowledge for a specific project and who suits the culture of the youth entrepreneurial venture) for these ventures in a cost-effective way (i.e. using SM contacts) and within a short amount of time was paramount for the participants to succeed in their ventures:

> Apart from that, finding the right team was a challenge because once we find employees, we need them to, like, still all employees… all three of us eat together, today also, so we needed to find a team that suits this process other than like, because [in] this field of business [we] do not have the starting at this time finishing at this time. Sometimes they have to go in the night, so the persons who have that calibre need to join us, join with us, so we had to struggle a bit to find the right team (V30P31).

Another important reason participants used SM was to engage their customers. This engagement was a two-way process. It involved customers having direct communication with participants using messages, reviews and comments and the participants being able to communicate back to them immediately. The participants' engagement with their customers on SM ensured that customers remained happy to purchase products from the participant:

> As soon, the post goes on Facebook; people will come looking for it. And then what happens is the online store also gets a stock. So like they take online orders from like right now we don't have a website. But we are planning [to] launch our website also within next week. So right now they get Facebook messages saying I want this, this particular code. So then they build up a conversation like where do you stay? Ok we can send it like ..if you buy above 5000 the delivery is free and ….. Then we send the items to third parties because we don't have a delivery team as such. So we depend on people like TT (delivery company name - coded) and AE (delivery company name - coded). So we give the package to them. And then they go and hand it over to our customers. And they collect money (V25P25).

Findings of this study further revealed that participants used SM because they were influenced by "trends" within the specific industry to which their venture belonged. Findings suggested that different type of ventures were more prominent on different SM platforms. Participants

identified these SM platforms based on industry trends. These industry trends were used, usually, to share messages, advice and accomplishments of the individuals and share important industry-related information. Participants were also able to share their existing excess resources using these SM platforms (i.e. if some excess raw material is available for them, they advertise on these platforms and sell it to another). Participants used these platforms to overcome resources constraints by acquiring the necessary information, advice, engaging in knowledge sharing activities and sharing their excess resources. For example, participants who have ventures related to the travel industry were commonly found on Twitter. These industry-specific SM platforms used by the participants are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1.Venture Type and the Specific SM Platform Preference
Source: Study Data

Type of Venture	Brief Description	SM Utilised
Service-based ventures/ Creative based ventures	Ventures that were dedicated to providing software applications, apparel and painting were able to demonstrate the software application or showcase their products using YouTube and were using Pinterest for inspiration.	YouTube, Pinterest
Ventures related to images	Ventures where there was some form of image production involved, such as cake images, logo designs and videography or where the outcome can be captured with an image, found Instagram useful for them as it was based on a picture-based representation.	Instagram
Photography	Ventures related to photography itself found Flickr to be a value sharing and constructive feedback receiving platform where the like-minded others were present.	Flickr
Education	Ventures which provided unique educational services in areas such as technology and management considered their presence on related blogs to be important to connect with the target audience.	Blogs (WordPress and Blogger)
Travel	Travel ventures were present on Twitter to share their messages with like-minded others. This was a hub where the like-minded others were found. Yet another platform extensively used by the travel industry was the Voice Over IP solutions such as Viber, WhatsApp where the messages can be cost-effectively transferred between international clients, as well as internally within the ventures.	Twitter Voice Over IP (Viber, Skype, and WhatsApp)

Being part of these industry-specific SM platforms, participants felt that they belonged in that community. This helped them to establish strategic links with individuals in that community and establish themselves within the community by obtaining guidance and sharing their accomplishments. For example, one participant added the comment: "And Flickr also supports many forums where professional photographers interact, talk and share ideas" (V14P14). In the previous example, V14P14 is a participant who has a venture associated with photography. The

participant found it 'trendy' to belong to the Flickr community, where the participant found a global community of like-minded individuals. He also found that forums on Flickr were useful as a tool which provided valuable advice for improvement. In the absence of a strong network of mentors in the Sri Lankan entrepreneurial community: "in terms of mentorship I think it's still quite low" (V18P18), to guide the youth entrepreneurs, this initiative through SM was a welcoming gesture.

The section that follows further considers how SM becomes a resource for participants by considering how SM has influenced youth entrepreneurial venture creation and growth process.

5.3 SM and Ventures

The study participants used SM as a resource to create and grow their ventures in four significant ways: (1) targeting and tracking to discover and exploit opportunities; (2) redefining venture capital by reducing the business costs and overhead costs; (3) integrating marketing, products/services, culture, and personal branding to create a strong brand image; and (4) converting the customer to a brand ambassadors using reviews and testimonials. This venture creation process can be explained as an SM-based extension of the concepts of value shops and value networks identified by Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998) and provides empirical evidence for their existence.

5.3.1. Targeting and Tracking to Discover and Exploit Opportunities

Participants used SM to discover and exploit opportunities globally. They used SM to identify opportunities through following other ventures, particularly their competitors, to obtain information regarding their products (i.e. type and variety) and costings. This targeting and tracking maintained participants' awareness of significant people (i.e. competitors) and events (i.e. industry-specific exhibitions) and was thus particularly useful for targeting both international and national markets. This enabled them to discover opportunities to grow. For example, a participant who was a photographer (V14P14) found a party that was going to be held in his local area with the use of SM pages (i.e. by following a photographic community on SM). As he was going to be at the same location at the time of the party (attending a different event), he decided to attend the party, and as a result of attending the party, the participant acquired new customers which enabled the participant's venture to grow:

> Okay, this is one famous example. In 2014, me and a friend found RO (an undergraduate level education institution-coded) ball on social media, and we thought let us drop by and take some photos and see how it goes. We gate-crashed the RO (an undergraduate level education institution-coded) ball. Yeah, I had a wedding at KI (a hotel name-coded) and right when it finished, I knew from the social media-based event info, if I came downstairs, the RO (an undergraduate level education institution-coded) ball would be happening. And me and my friend, we just gate-crashed in it, and we took a few pictures,

and they were really happy with it. They had some other small, small photographers, but people immediately started coming to us. That was around the time I was 22. So, all the people around there was like around the ages of between 18-23/24. Like that. So after that, I put the pictures on Facebook, and it reached a lot of traffic there. People liked them, there were a lot of shares, and the interaction was very high. So within the next 5-6 months, I covered like around 10- 15 21st birthday parties of the same crowd. Like they contacted me through Facebook. And that was then like those were people, I was like 21, they were like 23, 24, somewhere there. And now this year, I'm covering around 6 or 7 of their weddings. Like people who are getting married (V14P14).

Through using SM, participants also exploited opportunities by publishing their own events by targeting a specific category of users. For example, one of the participants who targeted the book-reading community for a mobile app in the main urban areas in Sri Lanka (Colombo, Kandy and Kurunegala), explained how Twitter was used to achieve this targeting:

We haven't used Twitter as the main tool, but we have seen that, like we are doing an app called CI (book exhibition name-coded) book exhibition, for the book exhibition. So we have seen that most of the book readers [are] from Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala and other places, those book readers, we have seen some niche market on Twitter. Therefore, we used Twitter to publicise about our upcoming app and features and everything to connect with the users. We use the relevant hashtag with it like BSIE18 (book exhibition name related hashtag-coded) for last year. That gets most users through Twitter (V24P24).

V24P24 was developing a mobile app which was used to provide publicity to CI (book exhibition name-coded). The participant used Twitter to publicise the upcoming app and its features to the specific target group who was supposed to use the app from the urban areas of Sri Lanka (i.e. Colombo, Kandy and Kurunegala). For this participant to target the urban areas and to find the specific book readers within those areas, SM was useful. By doing this, the participant has already communicated to the target audience about the upcoming app and its features. This will ultimately result in easy marketing because the target audience is already aware of the app. The interested audience will also start communicating with the participant using SM. This example shows how a youth entrepreneur used SM (i.e. Twitter) to target a niche market which enabled them to grow their venture (i.e. increase their revenue). Further, to gain international clients, some participants were following specific interest-based groups (i.e. travel communities and ayurvedic product communities) and interacted with them through posts.

Another way that participants used SM was to track their competitors. Many participants (75%) used SM to follow their competitors as a way of identifying their competitive moves (i.e. change of pricing and new products that they were launching and targets). This information was readily available on SM, providing the participants with information about the strategic direction of their competitors. For example, V8P7 explained this understanding of the strategic direction, and keeping up with the strategic direction of the competitors by explaining it was a

benchmarking activity involving products and the costs in which the participant was constantly engaged:

> So I have chosen a few ventures that are doing the same kind of thing in the same domain, and then it kind of helps me to benchmark against them as well (V8P7).

Participant V8P7 used this as benchmarking, and this allowed them to view the new products that competitors were using, as well as the associated costs. This helped the participant also create similar products and match or reduce the participant's costs to ensure that they retained the customers that they had already acquired, and also gain new customers. Therefore, on V8P7's perspective, she was making a strategic decision by following the other similar organisations to expand and grow the venture. Apart from SM being used for targeting and tracking opportunities, it was also useful for redefining venture capital, as explained in the next section.

5.3.2. Redefining Venture Capital by Reducing the Business Costs and Overhead Costs

This study found that participants used SM to reduce business costs and reduce overheads. This occurred in three main ways. First, SM enabled participants to promote their ventures in a cost-effective way:

> When we launched, I actually asked a lot of my friends to, you know to go and like this page. Because that's the way, we can capture consumers for free. And then I asked [them] to share it and then we got a significant number of eyeballs (V5P4).

This was particularly important in the initial phases of venture creation and enabled participants to manage their finances (which were often deficient). Participants also said that SM enabled them to connect with a broad range of people at low cost:

> So basically Facebook, Google Hangout, Skype, WhatsApp we use. When considering about Google tools, all the tools we are using, including Google Sheets and Google sites also; Hangout also Google. The reason was social media is less costly. It helps us to connect with more people (V6P5).

V6P5 has started an international venture with the use of SM. He obtained his partnerships using SM. His venture is virtual in nature and uses an extensive range of SM. His collaboration with the international partners are all on SM platforms, and communication handling is done with SM. The cost-effectiveness associated with SM has thus redefined venture capital for this entrepreneur.

Second, participants reduced costs by replacing the need for a shop-front or physical business presence with technology: "We are working (operating) as a virtual office" (V6P5). They used SM to connect with their customers and used their home addresses as their physical location.

This removed the need to pay rent for most of the participants, as the majority of the participants in this study were unmarried and still lived with their parents who covered their living costs:

> First few days it was really hard. Because they were asking about the store, where is your store, where is your store. That was the question. So I would say that we don't have a store, but you can come to my house and get it from there (V29P30).

Third, participants reduced staffing costs because they had access to a pool of employees through SM. The nature of their ventures meant the work varied, with a high demand for staff during the production phase but not at other times. Therefore most of the participants only required staff on an *ad-hoc* basis. To recruit staff when required, participants would use SM to source suitably qualified and experienced staff. This was facilitated by platforms, such as LinkedIn, which showcased an individuals' qualifications, skills and also rated them. Thus participants would contact prospective employees using platforms such as LinkedIn and use this in lieu of permanent full-time staff. This also made the entrepreneurial process less risky for participants:

> Pretty much, I am the player hands-on. I am the one who deals with the universities, and I am the one who deals with the companies, the HR heads and CEOs. I didn't want permanent staff in the company. Because I was starting on my own. Ahhh… you know it's scary. I didn't want any responsibilities in terms of full-time staff working for me in case I don't earn enough to pay their salaries so. I.. I decided to keep the cost down. Everything else is outsourced like the accounts; you need charted accounts to do company accounts in Sri Lanka that is outsourced to a company, company sectorial work is outsourced to a company; marketing activities are outsourced to another private company. So I operate on a very minimum cost-based system. I didn't want permanent staff in the company. And when I had programs, I use all [my] social media pool of contacts to handle stuff (i.e. select individuals from social media contacts) but the company accountants and the company secretarial work, that, of course, is on-going (V4P3).

It is evident that participants used SM to attract and appoint staff as required to fulfil work demands. Over a period of time, they used SM to maintain contact with casual employees, which enabled them to assemble teams as required:

> I don't need full-time [employees], but whenever the project is there, I get them and form the team …... Because I don't need to have them in-house. There is no need for having full-time employees in one specific area, I have a pool on social media, so whenever a production comes, I pick them and make the team. So that is how actually the whole process runs (V10P10).

Through using SM, participants could maintain an awareness of the skills and experiences of others (both those on their casual register and prospective employees). Participants also used SM to establish and maintain networks with these people, with one emphasising the importance of knowing: "how to network with the right people or how to network right people [with each other]" (V10P10). In this instance, establishing links with appropriate people provided an

advantage for the participants by not having to incur the cost of having employees attached explicitly to the venture. Therefore, to reduce the responsibility of having employees working for them and the associated costs, most participants, did not believe in having permanent employees in their ventures.

This study also found the emergence of altered business models (i.e. blogger and vloggers) in response to SM. For example, a lifestyle vlogger[12] (i.e. video bloggers) can create a video-based story on exercising based on their lifestyle, and a travel blogger can write about the locations visited, their culture and the method of travel. These vloggers and bloggers generate money using advertisements and affiliated promotions and require a minimum amount of infrastructure to run their ventures:

> Because there are people that are building careers just sharing content online. And in Sri Lanka we haven't, we've just started getting into getting that like influential marketing and building brands as a personal; you know those bloggers on YouTube, all of these people. There's a massive opportunity for just 15-year-olds to have a computer and an internet connection that doesn't do anything. They can build like an entire business out of it (V16P16).

These business models are characterised by lower overhead costs, more accessible customer experience, digital marketing used for ventures and an *ad-hoc* team responding to the needs of the projects rather than having permanent staff. Similar to these business models, most of the participants were running their ventures as home-based ventures enabling them to eliminate the cost of infrastructure. Their meetings with the clients were usually held at their home or at coffee shops. All their transactions were handled online. The emergence of altered business models can be illustrated as:

> I have been going like in the same structure where I manage all administration to finance and everything, and other people who come and work for me. They are not on a contract basis like since they are all freelancing (V14P14)

Therefore, these new models have made the entrepreneurial journey less risky for participants, who "…operate at a very minimum cost-based system" (V4P3). They have limited infrastructural requirements; need limited equipment (e.g. a vlogger would only require a camera, tripod and a microphone); they can run their ventures on SM, there were no requirements to maintain a storefront, and employees were recruited on a 'need-basis'.

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[12] Vlogger is a person who regularly posts short videos to a vlog (or video blog). A vlogger's business operations generally involved shooting, editing and posting.

5.3.3. Integrating Marketing, Products/ Services, Culture, and Personal Branding to Create a Strong Brand Image

Participants used SM to create a brand image for their venture and market their products/services to target audiences. To do this, participants used live updates, marketing campaigns, publicity, and two-way communication using messages and forums. Participants argued that using SM to market their brand (i.e. products/services, and so on) enabled online word-of-mouth marketing. Instead of relying on traditional media-based marketing methods which were costly and reached a lesser spectrum of the audience, SM enabled a broader range and enhanced scale of communication and attracted more customers for the ventures: "word-of-mouth at scale" (V16P16). The brand image created using SM was the integration of marketing with products/services and the culture of the ventures:

> To create the brand image, like even to show what's happening, like in terms of like what the staff is like, what the staff is doing and what kind of people are working, we use the social media to show the company culture. It's not only the products. So, the whole brand image is being created, you know, by using social media (V23P23).

Creating a cultural integration on the brand using SM was easy as it supported the projection of work culture. For example, V16P16, who worked with international clients on projects, had a tendency to interviews the clients on SM and include videos on how the project had progressed from the startup until that moment. These SM videos communicated the venture's culture to the audience, who then associated it with the brand's image. Findings also suggested a strong association between the brand image that was established by the participants for their ventures and their personal branding:

> I mean the modern trend, the way I see it is, we also market ourselves as individuals so even though we have the business, like V18 (venture name-coded) will be my business, people will know me as P18 (participant name-coded) is the founder of V18 (venture name-coded) right. And so sometimes…So there's a how you say it, like an overlap between personal life and business space. I mean I might write a blog or post on education in the 21st century and then tie that up with V18 (venture name-coded). So people will read it as okay P18 (participant name-coded), this guy who's into E-learning is writing about this, and this product called Product1 (Product name-coded) which uses gamification and these are the techniques. So yeah, I think in terms of defining those spaces in modern times [with the use of SM] there's more of overlap so, in terms of marketing, people tend to use that (V18P18).

This branding created with the integration of marketing, product/service, culture and personal branding was effective for the participants as the impact of such an integration was better than the traditional media-based branding, which only integrated the product/service to the marketing activities. It is evident from these findings that SM as a resource has increased the potential of youth entrepreneurial ventures to create a strong brand image. Participants also used SM to engage the customers as brand ambassadors, as explained in the next section.

5.3.4. Converting the Customer to a Brand Ambassadors using Reviews and Testimonials

Participants also used SM to convert customers to brand ambassadors for their products and services. SM has opened up two-way communication between the participants and their customers, with customers being able to leave reviews, feedback, testimonials and engage in word-of-mouth marketing. This form of two-way communication made the customer voices (i.e. opinions and suggestion) to be considered by a large audience who would tend to believe the reviews as opposed to official venture-related communications, as reviews were third-party information. Participants considered reviews to be a "sword with double blades" (i.e. a double edge sword) (V19P19), or could be "make or break" (V10P10) the business because the survival and the success of their ventures often relied on these reviews, which could be both positive and negative. On the other hand, testimonials positively confirmed the success of the venture with participants describing them as "living breathing" (i.e. alive) (V16P16). These testimonials can come in the form of star ratings provided, 'thumbs ups', such as, "hey we work with these guys [and] they are cool" (V16P16). Participants claimed that testimonials were extremely valuable to gain new customers, gain trust among the community and grow their ventures. SM has thus converted the customers into brand ambassadors. These brand ambassadors vouch for the quality of the product/service offered by the participants. This has also resulted in traditional word-of-mouth marketing[13] being redefined to SM:

> ...someone sharing something. That's word-of-mouth right now. And someone shares a post, I have done work for you, and you share it, and one of your friends sees it. That's word-of-mouth, the current word-of-mouth. So that actually worked. I have received so much [work] like that (V20P20)

As potential customers could not always experience a product or service, word-of-mouth marketing and customer brand ambassadors were influential in convincing them to purchase a product/service. It is evident from these findings that SM, as a resource, has converted customers to become brand ambassadors for participants' ventures.

In summary, for participants, SM has become a valuable resource in how they create and grow their ventures. The next section further explains the influence of SM as a valuable resource, on the venture creation and growth process compared with the traditional process.

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[13] Word-of-mouth marketing online is a useful means of informally promoting the ownership, use or characteristics of goods or services to prospective consumers (Toufaily, Souiden, & Ladhari, 2013). It is valuable for venture success, as personal comments typically surpass formal, official communications (Jalilvand, Esfahani, & Samiei, 2011; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010; Lee & Youn, 2009).

5.4 Influence of SM as a Resource for Venture Creation and Growth Process

As explored in the previous section, this study found that SM is important for participants' venture creation and growth. The use of SM was particularly crucial for the participants who operated in a nation with a lower level of institutional development due to scarce resources and turbulent environmental conditions, as SM has the ability to obtain the required resources and mobilise them. This is similar to the previous work suggesting the importance of networks for entrepreneurs in nations with limited resources (Hitt et al., 2015; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Kiss et al., 2012; Williams, 2010). These SM networks were especially important for the participants' venture creation and growth process. Creating and growing ventures traditionally involved a five-step process: (1) the discovery and exploitation of a opportunity; (2) the accumulation of resources; (3) the marketing of products and services; (4) the production of a product and building the venture; and (5) the response to government regulations and stakeholders in the society (Gartner, 1985; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Shook et al., 2003). With the use of SM as a resource, this venture creation process has altered. A comparison of the traditional venture creation and growth process and the SM based altered venture creation and growth process is represented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Traditional and Altered Venture Creation and Growth Process
Source: Study Data

Traditional Venture Creation and Growth Process Source: Gartner (1985)	Altered Venture Creation and Growth Process with SM	Difference
Opportunity discovery and opportunity exploitation: this process first searches for an opportunity and develops a new framework as opposed to using what already exists. Outcome: creating novel means and/or ends.	Targeting and tracking to discover and exploit opportunities (Discussed in Section 5.3.1: i.e. following and targeting the audience).	Participants were able to use SM to exactly pick the market segment that needs to be captured and exploited the discovered opportunity within this specific market segment.
Resource accumulation: An entrepreneur does not control all the resources required to run their venture. Entrepreneurs use their already established networks to gain access to the resources needed. Outcome: accumulated resources.	Redefining venture capital by reducing the business costs and overhead costs (Discussed in Section 5.3.2: i.e. cost-effectiveness,	As participants do not have all the resources that are required, using SM, they minimised the business cost and overhead costs. They used virtual office spaces and extensively used SM

	connectivity, virtual office space).	cost-effectively to run their ventures.
Marketing products and services: Entrepreneurs conduct market analysis to identify the target market with the outcome being the price-setting. Entrepreneurs also determine the distribution and promotional strategies they will adopt. Outcome: marketing and distribution plan.	Integrating marketing, products/ services, culture, and personal branding to create a strong brand image (Discussed in Section 5.3.3: i.e. branding).	The focus of marketing was to establish a clear brand using SM. This brand was an integration of marketing, products/ services, culture, and personal branding. This combination created a strong brand image which was easier to establish using SM.
Producing the product: Entrepreneurs at this phase require the investment of/ the acquisition of capital, land or space for production activities, and the acquisition of labour and equipment to enable the production. Outcome: economic profit.	Redefining venture capital by reducing the business costs and overhead costs (Discussed in Section 5.3.2: i.e. cost-effectiveness, connectivity, virtual office space).	With the use of SM, participants did not need to acquire resources such as land and space. SM only required a minimum infrastructure. Acquisition of labour was based on a need basis. Participants were responsible for production.
Building the organisation and responding to government regulations and stakeholders in society: Entrepreneurs use different methods (i.e. newspapers and magazines) to interact with the society they operate in, as they need to make the society aware of the existence of the venture and make them interact with the entrepreneur. Outcome: stakeholder involvement.	Engaging the customer as brand ambassadors using reviews and testimonials (Discussed in Section 5.3.4: i.e. a two-way communication method, reviews and testimonials).	Interaction and awareness creation among the society was no longer a challenge for the participants. They continuously used SM (i.e. posts and promotions) to establish interactions awareness. They additionally got customers to act as brand ambassadors with the customer reviews and testimonials. Through these reviews and testimonials, they gained the trust of the stakeholders.

It is apparent from Table 5.2 that SM as a resource has altered the existing venture creation and growth process. The extent that SM has influenced the participants' venture creation and growth process as a resource is further evident with many participants suggesting that the existence of their ventures is dependent on SM:

> Basically, it [the existence of the venture] depends on the social media platform. But without it, there wouldn't be a business, first of all. Because people are now moving towards social media and online buying, right? As I see, they are slowly, slowly moving out from the web sites and everything (V29P30).

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that SM, as a resource, has altered the venture creation and growth process. SM has also enabled the creation and maintenance of networks that are vital for participants' venture creation and growth, as they enable the acquisition of resources required for their ventures. The section that follows discusses the SM networks used by the participants in this study and how these networks support their ventures.

5.5 Reasons Participants' Use of SM to Establish and Maintain Networks

Study findings suggested that participants used SM to establish and maintain networks. These networks and their weak/strong ties (Granovetter, 1973), and resources that entrepreneurs acquired using these SM networks are represented in Table 5.3. Ties are a dyadic interpersonal relationship between individuals (Granovetter, 1973). Strong ties in an entrepreneur's network will provide continuous support for the entrepreneur for his/her ventures and are also vital for the operational cycle of the venture. Weak ties are not mandatory for the operation of the venture and can be substituted if needed (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Levin & Cross, 2004; Valenzuela, Correa, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018; Weng, Karsai, Perra, Menczer, & Flammini, 2018). It is apparent that, as no individual participant has all the resources required, participants had to access these resources using different chosen networks.

Table 5.3. SM based Networks and Resources
Source: Study Data[14]

Network Category	Strength of the Network		Total (Weak + Strong Ties)	Resources Acquired
	Strong Ties	Weak ties		
Customers	50	8	58	Revenue and information (i.e. reviews, shares and user-generated content).
Organisations	40	10	50	Financial (i.e. obtaining funds), knowledge sharing (i.e. technological use, expert knowledge and online training programs) and information (i.e. changes in policies).
Friends	29	13	42	Financial (i.e. purchasing), knowledge sharing (friendship-partnerships), sharing their networks (i.e. contacts), information (i.e. locations to be used for the venture and trends).
Suppliers	29	11	40	Information (i.e. quotes, purchase orders, communication of requirements and quality, flexibility in credit periods and quantities, influence (i.e. demanding power).
Partners/alliances	3	0	3	Information (i.e. different market segments and ways to access them), influence (i.e. trends and sharing their existing market segments) and knowledge sharing (i.e. technology, expert knowledge and know-how of the particular industry).
Competitor	0	1	1	Influence (i.e. identify the trends and things that work) and knowledge sharing (i.e. by working online on joint projects).

Table 5.3 identifies SM-based networks and the resources acquired. The majority of these networks were established offline but were maintained on SM platforms. SM platforms enabled

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[14] Note that the accumulations of weak and strong ties are sometimes more than the number of participants. This has been because in some instances, there were occurrences that network became strong and weak both as explained by the participants. Thus, they were marked as both strong and weak.

participants to acquire and maintain multiple networks, including those comprising customers, employees from other organisations, friends, suppliers, partners/alliances and competitors. Considering the number of ties (strong and weak), partner/alliance and competitor ties were rare; thus it was not discussed in the next section. Each of these networks was associated with strong and/or weak ties, while the resources obtained from each network differed. Some networks had more ties than the total number of participants (40) considered. This is because the participants, in most cases, did not explicitly distinguish between the strong and weak ties, but rather focused on the outcome that they wanted to achieve. These ties were utilised to access a variety of resources, such as supplier networks which had 29 strong ties and 11 weak ties and was used by the participants to mobilise information (i.e. quotes, purchase orders, communication of requirements and quality, obtain flexibility in credit periods and quantities, and to obtain influence (i.e. demanding power). There is a wide array of networks that could be discussed, but only the main networks found in this study have been discussed in this chapter. The section that follows illustrates the prominent SM networks mentioned previously, highlighting how they are established and maintained on SM as a way of organising resources and capabilities in participants' ventures.

5.5.1 Customer Network

The study findings revealed that participants used SM to establish networks with their customers. This was the strongest SM network for study participants, with 50 strong ties and 8 weak ties. Customer networks on SM provided the participants with revenue and information (i.e. reviews, shares and user-generated content) for their ventures. Customers were categorised by the participants based on their interaction with the SM platforms (i.e. top fans or supporters) and sometimes based on the type of customer (i.e. wholesale customers, retail and online). Some participants also had complex categorisations for their SM customers. Some of these categorisations considered customer interactions on SM (i.e. online customer behavioural aspects) such as online spending patterns and data related to frequently viewed product ranges (i.e. colours, patterns of clothing and plus sizes). For example, participant V36P37, who was associated with the travel industry, indicates the complexity of his SM based categorisations, suggesting that it is a competitive advantage for him as he used them to personalise his travel packages:

> For example, we have a very quiet, a detail categorisation list for our existing customers on SM. So I mean see it's very important also to categorise because like I said before … we ensure that the tour is customised as per the person travelling. For example, even once we get an inquiry on SM, we try to find out a little more about the person … So that we can, I'm sharing some inside information, but that's okay. We try to find out more information from the person because we try to give a very personalised, very detailed tour. For example, if you are a person who wants to just relax. There's no point in me to make the tour very hectic. You want to relax … that also further categories into where do

you want to. How do you want to relax? Do you like to sit in a mountainous area and just enjoy the views from somewhere from a mountain or do you like to go to a forest and sit and then listen to the birds humming and all that or would you like to see an elephant in front of your tent as you wake up or go to a beach and then just relax. So we like to categories because then we can really cater to the needs of the customer (V36P37).

However, these complex segmentations were derived by the participants after managing the venture online for at least 6-8 months and by tracking the user activity on SM (i.e. using SM Analytics). If a user clicks on a particular type of products, advertised on the participants SM platform (i.e. herbal soap) and not others, then SM Analytics will show that the particular user has clicked on these types of products continuously when advertised. This suggests to the participants that the particular individual prefers herbal soap products. The participants thus can target the user by advertising and promoting herbal soap products in an attempt to convert the user to become a customer. In the same manner, it also indicates to the participants that there is a target audience who may have similar preferences (maybe based on their affordability) that need to be targeted. An instance of the extent of customer tracking conducted by a study participant is indicated as follows:

> We track very heavily. We track every single person who clicks in our every business content, where they are coming from, how they are interacting with…our SM and sales systems are completely interlinked, so for example if you see one of our office ad's on Facebook or something and then go to the website and then inquire all things are tracked right. So we value everything based on conversion. Say Ok this piece of content is going to generate us…you can literally say this much in revenue. So you can literally put a price tag on to that. You figure out how to do this so that you can make more informed decisions down the road (V16P16).

Participants' SM platforms supported maintaining strong ties with the customer by providing participants an easy, fast (i.e. timely responses using SM messages) and cost-effective two-way communication mechanism (i.e. customers can send their queries on SM). Using an SM based network to acquire customers was necessary for participants to gain revenue and grow their ventures. SM was also useful in finding organisational customers. For example, a participant indicates how he had used 'LinkedIn Premium' as a tool to find his relevant market segment and to regularly engage with them using SM:

> I mean you can, especially like LinkedIn, has 'LinkedIn Premium' you can categorise by companies and find, for an example, senior-level executives, above [a] certain level. And you can do those categorisations and send them like these personal emails and things. We got OI (coded) in Sweden, that's OI (coded) globally; they engage with us based on a LinkedIn post we have done (V18P18).

This discourse reveals that the participants considered that maintaining such strong interactions with customers was the key to the success of ventures: "customers are the backbone of my business" (V20P20). Participants also preferred the conglomerates as organisational customers (a company that owns several smaller businesses whose product or services are usually very

different and one company would own the controlling stake) to attract customers because they were likely to purchase a second time for another of their businesses. This preference for conglomerates provided a larger pool of potential customers for the participants to access. In this regard, participants stated:

> Where I knew they (the business organisation) have so many subsidiaries and if I 'tapped' (i.e. tried hard to communicate with them and acquire the business) just one big conglomerate, I could get my 30 participants that I needed. So that's what I did for the last program I had in Sri Lanka. I just contacted HA-based (name of a conglomerate-coded). And they were confirmed. They were willing to confirm 15 to 25 participants, [saying] I will give you 25 participants if the program can be tailor-made to us (V4P3).

> Sometimes from the same company like we work with MA (name of a conglomerate-coded) and MA (name of a conglomerate-coded) had different departments. So, first we did one job, and then some people who saw that particular video at an event came back to us saying, will you be able to do it for our department as well (V11P11).

These reveal that participants found their customers: individuals and organisations were readily accessible using SM. Therefore, participants made sure they established and maintained links with customers using SM (i.e. using updates, posts and personal level interactions with individuals using messages). They further considered these interactions, which resulted in retaining the customers, to be more effective than searching for new customers. Another SM based network that participants used was the organisational network explained next.

5.5.2 Organisational Network

This study further revealed that participants used SM to build strong organisational networks (as represented in Table 6.1). Findings of the study suggested that the majority of participants had multiple organisational networks with which they interacted on SM. These organisational networks were non-customer, non-supplier-based organisations, such as those from the government, which the participants had linked on to their SM pages. Study participants used these organisational networks in three ways: (1) to obtain financial resources (i.e. obtaining funds); (2) to share knowledge (i.e. technological use, expert knowledge and online training programs); and (3) to obtain information (i.e. changes in policies). SM supported communication with organisational networks by providing the opportunity for participants to follow and 'like' the SM pages of the organisations to keep in line with the changes and announcements they made. Maintaining awareness of these changes and announcements was necessary as they enabled participants to obtain information regarding policy changes (i.e. export policy changes, tax structure changes and legislation changes) that may affect their ventures. Further, these organisations also supported the participants by providing them guidance and advice using their experts and online training programs using SM platforms. For example, a participant indicated how he had used the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce to guide

him in the creation of a website and promotions on SM and how he had also been guided by government and non-governmental advisors (organisations):

> I already started discussing with Ceylon Chamber of Commerce as well. I want to start my own web thing plus Facebook promotional program. So, both will come together soon. One thing is the network. Because I have advisors working with me online, I have a lot of government and non-governmental advisors…… (V39P40).

Following the same vein, many participants followed organisations on SM, which has helped them as advisors. This advice provided through the organisational networks was pivotal for participants to gain support related to preparing their marketing plans and helping them with technology. They also provided networking opportunities:

> Not really, but when it comes to getting consultancy, we work with [the] Photography Society of Sri Lanka (V19P19).

Another important SM-based network used by study participants was their friends' networks, which is explained in the next section.

5.5.3 Friends' Network

The study findings revealed that participants used SM to maintain friend networks. Most participants (65%) stated that friends were important for themselves and their ventures. Some participants (20%) suggested that friends were a weak network in supporting their ventures, while others (15%) suggested that some cohort of friends are supportive for the business ventures, while others were not. The findings suggested that the majority of participants' friend networks were maintained using SM platforms, as they were able to communicate with them simultaneously and correspond with them from any location and at any time. This was easy and well-suited to the busy lifestyles of participants. Through maintaining friends' networks on SM platforms, participants could market their products (which often resulted in product purchases), share knowledge, expand their networks, and obtain information that was useful for their venture (i.e. locations to be used for the venture and trends).

Friends' networks were important for devising business proposals and ideas, with participants and their friends creating ventures and establishing partnerships[15] by developing ventures together. Some friendship-based partnerships were tied to mutual interests (i.e. gaming online), which has resulted in international ventures for the participants:

> In the early days of V16 (venture name-coded), I am talking about five years ago; I met this dude through online gaming... We just clicked because of our mutual interest in

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[15] Please note that friend based partnerships occurred as a combination of in-person and SM. Rather than just establishing partnerships with another company or an unknown individual who is able to invest on the venture; friendship based partnerships included individuals who have known each other and who had formed friendships prior to engaging in the venture creation process as partners.

games and finance, and we communicated to each other and started building a product together. Then spoke about it (i.e. product) for [a] couple of months on Facebook. I just wanted to talk about this product a little bit….and we somehow built a venture together using the product (V16P16).

In the case of V16P16, the majority of the collaborations of his partners have been online, with face-to-face meetings held at a later stage. Apart from friendship based partnerships established online, friendships formed during school, university, and workplaces were also sometimes converted to partnerships. These networks were established in-person and later on converted to SM friendship based partnerships:

One of my best friends are partners, whom I started the company since school time and he's still with me, and he's a lawyer right now and apart from studying the law degree and stuff, he's working on and helping me with the law aspect of the company as well looking to the legal and finance side of the company (V19P19).

These findings suggested that friend-partnership based networks provided additional advantages for the participants, as a partner to share their knowledge, experience and risks associated with the ventures, as well as financial resources that aided the growth of ventures. Further, they were able to accumulate the capital required for the venture by pooling their money while sharing the risk associated with the venture:

The most, biggest challenge was financing. Because we three, all three are from normal families. So, we didn't have much to invest in this business; less than 500 000. We just put in all what we had. But some projects, it takes like 2 million, 3 million so to finance those projects we had to, like, get loans, ask from parents and keep, like, do credit transactions with our suppliers, and they start to ask for money, and that was the biggest challenge we had. Still, we have like, not at that level, but we still struggle sometimes (V30P31).

Further, in the case of school, university and workplace friendships, because of their previous interactions with the friends involved in the partnership, participants were aware of the skills of their partners and were able to capitalise on the combination. Additionally, the partnerships were also an investment of networks as they were able to share, access and depend on each other's established networks, which strengthened the start-up process of ventures.

Some participants also made a deliberate attempt to make friends with other entrepreneurs and individuals. Participants established contact with entrepreneurs and other individuals on SM and maintained contact with them using SM. This enabled participants to interact with them (i.e. SM based contacts) and ask for help, if needed. The advantage of having these contacts on SM is that when help is required, participants were approaching a known friend in their SM contact list, rather than a total stranger. This also enabled them to build friendship-partnerships:

So, friends again had been a very big part of the whole thing. Because all the places, again friends now. Most of the businesses I interact with, almost all of them are, my friends actually. So that's how it is (V10P10);

Participants discussed how they and other entrepreneurs also supported each other through their business ventures in a reciprocal manner:

> But the again RW (friend name-coded) and NV (friend name-coded), they normally handle stuff through EY(venture name-coded) as well. Because a lot of stuff came through EY (venture name-coded). So they go for say an office like in SE (organisation name-coded), they spoke to EY (venture name-coded) about their media stuff and all, and when they go to the new place like, I really want to do this (i.e. wall paint), do you know a person?. So, through EY (venture name-coded), a lot of other things also came (i.e. orders). I also do the same for them, whenever I am asked to recommend someone, I recommend them (i.e.RW, NV and their venture EY). EY (venture name-coded) handles my videos. The…What do you call them time-lapse videos (V22P22).

Findings suggested that reciprocal friendships formed between entrepreneurs as friends were mutually beneficial for both youth entrepreneurs to get more revenue. In this reciprocal process, youth entrepreneurs were also able to share their resources with another (i.e. contacts) to expand their ventures. Friends further supported the participants by sharing details (i.e. sharing posts, contact details, and locations for business expansions). The role of SM was essential for many participants because when friends shared information in their own networks, participants were able to broaden their networks:

> Like I don't go and like, publish my new releases even now I don't do it, I hardly do it. But most of my friends, like, they just go and, like, share it on their page, and they were, like, when they come up with, when they see like something nice a design or something they send me a picture, and like when they see a showroom in a good location they tell me. Like when they get to know about a good fabric supplier or even accessories they like, P25 (participant name-coded) there's a person like this [who is able to do this work], why don't you just go and talk, and sometimes they will give my number to them (V25P25).

Further, the friends who were not partners of the ventures also supported the participants financially by purchasing their products or services and then publicising the details of the product or services on their SM platforms saying 'created by the participant (i.e. by tagging participant's name on SM) or linking the participant's venture details (i.e. tagging the SM page). Participants explained that friends sometimes purchased products from them not because they actually needed the product but rather with the aim of supporting the participant. This type of financial support provided by friends was a morale boost and encouragement for the participants:

> One of my friends purchased the first one, she wanted to kind of help me, and she wanted it for her daughter. But anyway, it was kind of an encouragement for me. So ya…they help me a lot. They encourage me and make me feel good and promote the finished product linked with V21 (venture name-coded) (V21P21).

Friends' networks have been essential during the start-up phase of the ventures because they encouraged the participants and supported them with the funds:

My friends have actually supported me in terms of funds sometimes. Wherever I have had cash flow issues, they've helped. And some of the work I get is through friends (V13P13).

Some participants also revealed that their friends acted like marketing agents. This primarily occurred when friends promoted their venture through SM based word-of-mouth:

But there's been a lot of word-of-mouth marketing, my friends telling their friends, telling (sharing content on SM) their family. So that's how it's been so far (V8P7).

Further, participants indicated that some friends purchased product/services from them. They discussed how these friends used these products and services and uploaded photos and information about them on their SM platforms. They would also tag the participants so that it identified clearly the creator of the product/service. In doing so, these friends aid in promoting the venture on SM from a third-party perspective. Some participants' responses added evidence to this:

Like mainly through social media, they always share the pictures, and you know always direct their friends through my profile and always share things and stuff. And I have a hell of a lot of friends, good friends, cool and everything yeah. They are really helpful, and they appreciate my work (V34P35);

Friends, it's strong [tie] because they are the ones who helped me and they share, and their friends share. So that's a direct link (V22P22).

Friend SM networks were important for marketing ventures, but they were also important for growing participants' networks. For instance, V14P14 explained how his network connections expanded within four years providing him with a readily available, trustworthy set of friends (as indicated in the quotation below as 'circle of mine'), who would vouch for his work (as shown in the quote below by 'they know what they would get'). V14P14 represented a typical youth entrepreneur (i.e. a participant) considered within this study who kept expanding the SM based friend lists, thus expanding the network on SM:

Because when I look back at around say four years ago, it was like a very small network of people who knew what I do and people, there weren't many people. Say if it's like a friend list (SM based) of like 800 people and now it's like 2000 people (referring to SM contacts). All of these are people I made through, like the connections I made through my photography, from my friends to clients. And they are all these people who are in that circle of mine. They know what I do, and if I put something out (i.e. post content on SM) they know what they would get, the next time they contact me (V14P14).

Another SM-based network used by the participants was the supplier network, which will be explained in the next section.

5.5.4 Supplier Network

Participants discussed how they used SM to establish and maintain their supplier networks, which enabled the creation and growth of their ventures. Supplier networks differed across

participants in terms of the intensity of the ties. Among the participants, 29 of them had strong ties with the suppliers, while 13 indicated they had weak ties (Table 6.1). Supplier networks were maintained on SM and provided the participants with information (i.e. quotes, purchase orders, communication of requirements and quality, flexibility in credit periods, quantities and influence in terms of the demanding power). The majority of participants established strong ties with the suppliers based on their long-standing relationships, while those with weak ties were established by participants who had multiple suppliers:

> When it comes to different supplier segments, we have different–different (indicating strong ties with some and weak ties with the others) set of connections. There are some suppliers, and we're working only with them. That is when it comes to business; it's not a good thing because we need to have different suppliers from the same supply category. But when you're taking everything from one person, the bond is strong. But as a strategy what we have to do is, we need to have different suppliers from the same category. Because, if someone goes down, we have the other person (V10P10); and

> The suppliers, I would say we have very like, we have just a few. But it's a strong link I would say because they have all come through (V32P33).

Participants maintained the supplier relationship on SM platforms. Most of the supplier relationships were initially established offline and then converted to being SM-based relationships at the latter stages. SM tools were used to coordinate and share the information which ensured a trail of evidence for the participants. The single-supplier relationship provided stronger ties than multiple-supplier relationships. To select suppliers, retain them, and to communicate with them, the participants used SM and heeded the recommendations offered on SM platforms. SM-based recommendations were personalised reviews/ratings about an organisation/individual. For example, V32P33 suggested that when selecting suppliers, they considered these personalised reviews on SM as a way of ensuring the quality of the organisation/individual:

> The suppliers, I would say we have very like, we have just a few. But it's a strong link I would say because they have all come through, like, all the channels and even through social media it's all like recommended people (individuals who have been reviewed and rated by others) (V32P33).

The supplier relationship maintained using SM differed based on two factors: first, the evidence of growth and second, the quantity of purchase. A few suppliers were assured of more future business transactions after witnessing the growth of the youth entrepreneurial ventures (based on locations, details uploaded on SM pages, increase of the quantity of ingredients purchased). The growth of the ventures indicated to the supplier that the venture could be trusted, and it could be relied on for future businesses. Therefore, the suppliers were flexible towards the participants, so their relationship strengthened significantly:

It's just that they have seen the growth of the company from ordering a very small quantity to ordering very large quantities. From a like, say not like after 10-15 years, within 2-3 years. And I've had a personal connection because I was the one who first ordered so now they can see from me, from home to ST (a building name-coded) to AR (a building name-coded) to this within 2 years because the ST (a building name-coded) started in 2014 maybe we opened this outlet [in] 2016 March. So that's less than two years. So, they can see the growth of the company from sending stuff to home (coded) to ST (a building name-coded) to this within a very short period of time. So, then I think as suppliers also they see potential business. Then they become very, you know [nice] to give credit periods. When we, especially when we make blunders like when we order too many things during the season and unable to pay and all, they are very flexible (V23P23).

Apart from the venture's growth, the quantity purchased from a supplier also indicated the strength of the relationships. If most or all of the stock available (i.e. raw materials) was purchased by a participant, then the supplier depended on that participant. This strengthened the relationship between the supplier and the venture, which consequently led to the participants' controlling such a relationship:

We have a very strong relationship because we work with only very few suppliers, not many. So, like, we ensure that we buy their whole, like, available capacity and because of that we have more demanding power also. If they don't deliver on time, we can say okay, we are not accepting. If they can't give us a good credit period, things like that and at the same time, the flexibility like they know, like, what we want, what's our quality standards they were like working with us now close to seven to eight years now (V25P25).

A few companies who were suppliers for the participants' venture took initiatives that benefitted them in selling their products, which further strengthened the supplier relationship using SM. For example, V35P36 explained such an interaction she had with a supplier, the extra effort that MALI (supplier company name-coded) provides by tracking the operational cycle and contacting her using SM to get an update of the products needed:

I get lots of my stuff from MALI (supplier company name-coded). They are really very good. I used to use NNO (supplier company name-coded) then I got to know about this MALI (supplier company name-coded) because their products are actually very good and then they are, the way they handle everything. They have like a different person to handle the home baking people, they come and deliver to your doorstep like icing sugar, baking powder, everything. And there's this girl called VAR (employee name-coded), she's really nice. Like, normally once a month I order. So, if I just pass the time, she just calls me (using SM); Hey you didn't get the stuff like that, so they are really nice. Very easy and otherwise I have to go, I used to go to the supermarket and get everything, but now I get most of the stuff from MALI (supplier company name-coded) (V35P36).

Most participants were keen on maintaining a strong relationship with the supplier because they provided the raw materials and services to handle their operational cycle smoothly in accordance with quality standards. Supplier networks also assisted some youth entrepreneurial ventures by supporting them, even if it had little cost-benefit to them. For example, V6P5 explained how a company helped in the start-up process of his venture using SM, how this

relationship was established using SM and how he finally met the person who helped in person (face-to-face):

> And that time, I did not have much connection with BY (supplier company name-coded) technology. Just talk (using SM platforms). Right. But I did …this was my real experience of a non-Sri Lankan team and my necessity of my website. They develop[ed] my website for a free cost (i.e. free of charge). Last month AY (CEO of the supplier company- name coded) came to Sri Lanka and met me. We have built that kind of relationship (V6P5).

Based on this discussion, it is clear that some suppliers had strong relationships resulting in them providing the participants with deals and discounts while with some suppliers, it was weak. According to participants, the duration of the relationship, the quantity of the product purchased by the venture, and the ability of the supplier to deliver on time were considered the demarcations for the supplier relationship intensity.

5.7 Summary

This study found that participant youth entrepreneurs extensively used SM platforms for three main reasons: awareness creation, customer acquisition and marketing (selling products and services). SM attributes of cost-effectiveness and reach were valued by the participants. The study findings also found that using SM as a resource had altered the traditional venture creation and growth process by: (1) targeting and tracking to discover and exploit opportunities; (2) redefining venture capital, by reducing business costs and overhead costs; (3) integrating marketing products/services, culture and personal branding to create a strong brand image; and (4) converting the customer to a brand ambassador using reviews and testimonials. Further, the use of SM in ventures resulted in the emergence of altered business models (i.e. bloggers and vloggers) that were different from traditional business models because they required minimal infrastructure.

This chapter also examined how participants used SM to establish and maintain networks to enable them to acquire the resources they needed for their ventures. This chapter outlined different kinds of networks used by participants and the role that SM played in establishing and maintaining them. The prominent SM networks used by the participants were customer networks, organisational networks, friends' networks and supplier networks. The customer network on SM enabled participants to gain revenue through customers sharing their content on SM. Customer reviews on SM also provided the participants with important information regarding their products/services. Organisational networks were vital for the participants to obtain funds, engage in knowledge sharing using advisors and online training programs, and to gain information. The friend networks were essential for the majority of the participants as they supported their ventures as partners and by purchasing their products, sharing networks and

providing information. The majority of the friend networks were maintained on SM. The supplier network was vital for the participants in supporting their operational cycle. To select suppliers, retain them, and to communicate with them, the participants used SM and heeded the recommendations offered on SM platforms. The resources obtained through SM based networks were vital for the creation and growth of youth entrepreneurial ventures. The next chapter will illustrate how participants use SM for their venture creation and growth.

CHAPTER 6

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR VENTURE CREATION AND GROWTH

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that SM was a resource for participants in this study. It found that participants extensively used SM platforms for three main reasons: creating awareness, customer acquisition and marketing (selling products and services). It discussed how participants valued the cost-effectiveness and the reach of SM for their ventures. Findings also suggested that participants used SM as a resource for creating and growing their ventures. Its cost-effectiveness was valued by participants as they could use SM to create and grow their ventures within their resource restrictions. SM also provided participants with the ability to access and market their products/services to a larger audience. The previous chapter also identified that using SM as a resource had altered the traditional venture creation and growth process. Finally, the chapter discussed how, through using SM as a resource, the participants were also able to establish and maintain networks online (i.e. customer network, organisational network, friends network and supplier network). These networks were valuable for acquiring resources such as information, knowledge and financial assistance.

This chapter describes how participants use SM to create and grow their ventures. It explains how participants used SM, identifying five main ways that they used SM to create and grow their ventures. It discusses how participants used SM to: (1) frequently communicate with their audience; (2) expand their networks to include new contributors; (3) project shared values; (4) establish transparency; and (5) learn the features of the SM continuously. This chapter describes and discusses each of these ways of using SM and how they supported the participants' venture creation and growth.

6.2 How Participants Use Social Media

The findings of this study revealed that the participants used SM to create and grow their ventures. They used SM to create and grow their ventures by: (1) frequently communicating with their audience; (2) expanding their networks; (3) projecting shared values; (4) establishing transparency; and (5) continuously learn the novel features of SM. These five ways are summarised in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Use of SM, SM Process, Specific Benefits for Venture Creation and Growth
Source: Study Data

Use of SM	SM Process	Specific Benefits
Frequent communication	Obtaining information directly from the audience to identify opportunities. Responding to customer queries. Building a dialogue with customers through two-way communication, which supports future decision making. Maintaining followers on SM for customer retention. Identifying customer preferences. Enabling the sharing of personal experiences through reviews and testimonials. Corporate citizenship by ventures contributing to society.	Generating new ideas. Identifying opportunities. Informing future decision making. Improving reputation. Establishing reliability and accountability to the public. Increasing revenue. Retaining customers.
Network expansion	Establishing partnerships. Creating alliances on SM. Associating virtual communities. Accessing international suppliers and customers.	Obtaining new information and knowledge that is vital for future decision making. Maintaining partnerships and alliances for the growth of the venture. Expanding their business. Generating revenue.
Showcasing shared values	Communicating and imparting shared values on SM. Enabling storytelling to gain the support of the community.	Gaining a competitive advantage through the projection of shared values. Generating revenue. Acquiring resources, recognition and support from the community.
Establishing Transparency	Showcasing user-generated content. Creating a trusted brand by projecting ethical behaviour. Creating visibility for information and documents that are important to the audience. Sharing information and engaging in dialogue with the audience.	Gaining a reputation by establishing the venture as a trusted venture.

Continuous Learning of Novel Features of SM	Committing the time to learn the new features of SM. Keeping pace with the new changes in SM platforms. Experimenting on SM.	Generating revenue. Gaining insights to best strategies to use with SM.

Table 6.1. represents how participants have used SM for their venture creation and growth. It identifies five main ways in which the participants used SM, the process associated with their use of the chosen platforms and their specific benefits, which, ultimately led to participants' venture creation and growth. Each of these main ways is described in the following sections.

6.2.1 Frequent Communication

Study findings suggested that participants communicated with customers frequently to enable venture creation and growth. They considered SM an important enabler of frequent communication, as it contained multiple features (i.e. 'share', 'likes', 'comment' and reviews) and was accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week which enabled participants to be immediately responsive:

> I could be working on the go. I could be working while on [the] bed until I sleep. [The] phone is there always; so, obviously if there is any time I always have Facebook page connected so whatever the messages or likes or comments, reviews I get I will get it on the Facebook app. I will respond to them on the dot (V13P13).

Participants considered frequent communication with their audience was necessary and made an effort to communicate with them in a timely manner. Availability of participants around the clock (i.e. 24 hours a day, seven days a week) ensured that customer queries and issues were addressed in a timely way; it also assured customers that help was available any time that they required it. Participants reflected that SM played an important role with this, as it enabled the participants and their audience to communicate at any time.

Participants considered frequent communication on SM as essential for their ventures, similar to the concept of value networks where the ventures relied on the mediating technology to link their customers (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998; Xu & Saxton, 2019; Zadeh, Zolfagharian, & Hofacker, 2019). Frequent communication allowed the participants to make their touchpoints easier, stay relevant with what is currently happening and to act on it faster than their competitors. To enable frequent communication, the participants used a schedule with some using posts daily and some using a post once every two days:

> For end-users, we do post some stuff like regularly, like one per day, so they keep in touch with us using those. For other clients, we regularly check with them through SM

messages, like if there are any updates kind of things. That's how we keep in touch with them (V24P24).

The necessity for the participants to frequently engage in communication with the audience was explained by V14P14 as:

> Overall what happens is like, in my line of work I have to keep in touch with a lot of people, I have to be very social. And I need to make them see and know what I do. So it's mainly done through the showcasing of the pictures, on social media like Facebook and Instagram. When you upload something, you share it, and you send it across. Like, show it to people around. Their interaction rate creates a lot of traffic to that post or whatever you do. Then people who would be interested will contact on social media immediately, or if they have any interest in the future, they would readily know where to come to, and whom to contact that way (V14P14).

This frequent communication enabled the participants to publicise their work to the audience and to capture their interest, which they claimed ultimately led to revenue generation for their ventures.

Participants also commented on how frequent communication, enabled through SM, also enabled them to receive information directly from their audience (particularly customers). This meant they could remain abreast of customer needs and preferences. It also meant that customers could order products/services directly from the participants, with minimal effort and no additional cost:

> Because most of the people use them [i.e. SM]; that's the first thing. Most of the people are on WhatsApp and Viber. It's because people don't want to spend money, extra money to buy something. So if he (i.e. a customer) gives me a call, he has to spend like, I don't know 5-10 rupees or something, to give the order. So no point. So if you use WhatsApp, you can send me the order details, the proper order details. There is a separate product code for every product. Normally the customer sends me this code. What I use is "BUS" for V29 (venture name-coded). "BUSA" for Adidas, "BUSN" for Nike; So what they do is, "BUSN 001", give me medium from this T-shirt. So that's how the process goes. They send me the code [and make the order] (V29P30).

Participants also used information about customer preferences to generate new ideas that 'fit-to-market' which supported brand loyalty and advocacy. For example, participant V29P30 used SM to identify customer preferences and demands, reflecting that:

> [Last year], there were 100 or 150 pieces [of a striped Adidas t-shirt] … the stock went [quickly] … People, they loved it. So they asked me for more. Even I boost something else; they keep asking 'don't you have this, don't you have this?' (V29P30).

Equipped with this information, the participant V29P30 was able to try to get a similar type of a product as he was aware it was in demand. Recognising the high demand product enabled him to generate further revenue.

For participants in this study, SM was a key mechanism to frequently communicate with the audience due to the features, functionalities and openness (access to public) it contained. These features and functionalities also allowed customers to communicate content (i.e.information) related to their preferences, needs and desires:

> Because Facebook they have this review thing, where I have got 5 stars everywhere. So if I get one negative review about my business that will cause my whole business. People nowadays, they are used to going to reviews. They say their likes and what they don't like on social media. This info I need to listen to. So, social media is a main part now. Not like those days, now people are using Facebook now. People are more engaged; it has become a daily routine for people to go to Facebook and check. So social media marketing is like a prominent marketing place. I look at the reviews and then if there is something that I can work on, I do it. A business should prioritise, give priorities to social media if they are hoping to go for a higher reach (V27P28).

Participants obtained reviews directly from SM platforms and also through customer-to-customer dialogue where the product or the service provided by participants would be discussed in a positive or a negative way. This information provided input into the participants' future decision-making process and enabled them to improve their products/services:

> And Facebook would be to get reviews and all. We already...Even though we don't have extensive activity, we have gained a lot of positive reviews and some negative as well, which we use to make our products better (V26P26).

Access to this information provided participants with an in-depth understanding and appreciation of customers' requirements. Obtaining this information using SM also enabled them to respond to these requests and requirements within a short time. An understanding of customer requirements also provided participants with ideas on how to improve their products. Customer reviews provided ideas for participants to include in their future content and new ways that they needed to market their products/services to the audience. Thus, this acted as a way of identifying opportunities, including how to customise their products and services. For example, a participant indicated how she posted images of finished products on SM and used the SM reactions (i.e. 'likes' and emoticons such as 'smiley faces' and 'hearts'), and comments by customers, to understand customer preferences better and incorporate them for the next production cycle:

> I also check which image has the highest number of likes, so, maybe like thrice a day, because that's where I also get a lot of information to do my next collection. Which has, the highest demand or even, when I go through our photos and see [the] number of likes and comments, with that comparison I can figure out, [what] people like [i.e. preferences] this type of material, this type of styles and when you read the comments you see, what are the others things that they are looking for. A lot of information (V25P25)

Through receiving 'likes', 'comments', reviews and 'shares' on SM, participants received information directly from their audience regarding what products were in demand (i.e. based on

the 'likes' for the posts and inquiries) and what products were less attractive for the audience (i.e. where the audience showed no/reduced interaction). Participants commented on how this information was helpful for immediate and future decision-making, with most participants monitoring their SM at least daily to obtain an update of this information so they could make decisions based on these interactions.

The participants in this study also found that SM provided a two-way communication process and created a dialogue[16] between them and the customers. For example, a participant indicated how she advertised her paintings and showcased a sample of them on her SM platforms. Her audience viewed these samples posted on SM platforms and made queries about various features that had not been included in the sample:

> If I'm posting something yes it's after I am done with something. Then again answering questions happens always. At least once a day somebody will ask me a question. How do you do it? What do you use? What do you paint? Is it good for pregnant mums to be there? So I have to answer a lot of questions like that as well. So I have to know about the medical side. About the paint. Whether it's tested on animals, so people are concerned about that as well. They go like, so what paint do you use? Ahh... DL (paint name-coded). Is it tested on animals? (V22P22).

Answering these questions established a dialogue between V22P22 and their audience. It provided the participant with an opportunity to understand others' interests and concerns. Thus, the continuous interaction enabled through SM provided participants with access to customer data that enabled them to make informed decisions. Participants reflected on how this enabled them to save on research costs and the time to make decisions.

Another way that SM enabled frequent two-way communication between participants and their audience was by having followers (i.e. using the follow function on SM platforms) for their ventures. Once the audience followed the SM pages for their entrepreneurial venture, participants' posts were displayed to the audience. The participants indicated that these posts and the content were usually interactive content, which pushed the audience to interact with the participant. Thus, this 'follow' (i.e. SM follow function) established frequent communication between the audience and the participant:

> We have a big following. So whenever we post something we usually, how it works is, we post pictures of the products, and then we get inquiries, from customers, interested parties (V31P32).

This approach in customer interactions ensured to the participants that their SM posts were in the customer's news feeds. Any new post or announcement that was associated with the ventures

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[16] Dialogue is an interaction between two or more individuals, that involves in asking and answering questions (Derham, Cragg, & Morrish, 2011; Fujita, Harrigan, & Soutar, 2019; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011; Möller & Halinen, 2018; Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015)

was also automatically sent as posts to the audience who followed the ventures. Further, because the 'follow' function's rule was associated with individuals who were genuinely interested in the product/service offered by a venture; participants posts were targeted at the correct segment of the audience, which would result in increased revenue. This also added a mechanism to retain customers, as it regularly reminded them of the venture.

Frequent communication also enabled participants to optimise brand awareness and educate the public. Optimising brand awareness by educating the public was vital because it acts as an initiative for corporate citizenship where ventures become conscious of the impact they are having on all aspects of society including economic, social and environmental effects (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008). This corporate citizenship was illustrated by one of the participants as:

> As doctors and as human beings of this society, to deliver certain health messages to the public, it (referring to SM) is essential. So I think whatever that comes up new or new findings or various things that people can be made aware of, it could be used to make awareness about various diseases. So for health purposes, it can be used, for preventing diseases (V28P29).

The participants achieved this corporate citizenship by sharing information that had a social value for the community on SM and by engaging in community-building activities such as fundraising events on SM for a social or an environmental goal. This corporate citizenship, in turn, provided recognition and a reputation for a venture among the environment in which it operated:

> Because all, our LIV (venture name -coded), is working very fine. Because I don't, it's not about the money there in LIV (venture name -coded), so it's all about how many projects are happening, how many people are making, how many people are happy, and how many people are making lives better. So that's perfectly happening. So I take that as a very success[ful] story. I believe supporting people and creating a product to support them again, which is like a social enterprise, [which] can support more people. And people know my work because of my projects and the publicity and [the] support that I get for these projects on SM (V10P10).

Corporate citizenship established using SM means the audience is able to obtain essential information as well as comment and post. This has created a dialogue between members of the public and the participants, ensuring brand awareness, brand recognition and a community for the brand. By providing cooperate citizenship and delivering reliable information to gain the trust of the public, participants were able to establish their ventures as credible and dependable ventures in the public eye.

The impact of having frequent communication on SM with the audience was explained by a participant as:

> Because it is one on one communication that you (referring to the researcher) are having. It's great that I mean I can sit down with you (referring to the researcher) and I can have a conversation, and it can have an impact. But you can do that… but you can at least get closer to that level of impact with 100 of 1000 of people on social media. And that has tremendous value (V16P16).

This quote illustrated the perceptions of multiple participants, who claimed that SM enabled communication with a broader and larger audience than face-to-face communication. They suggested that reaching more people increased the likelihood of them securing additional customers and thus revenue for their venture. Thus, frequent communication on SM was important for the participants to create and grow their ventures.

6.2.2 Network Expansion

Participants used SM to expand their networks and to reach more potential customers, partners, professionals in their industry (i.e. using virtual communities) and international contacts. Network expansion (broadening) refers to expanding one's network to include new contributors (Labrecque, vor dem Esche, Mathwick, Novak, & Hofacker, 2013; Moody & Paxton, 2009; Welch & Welch, 2004). Using network expansion to include new contributors provided the participants with new information and knowledge vital for future decision-making, enabling partnerships and alliances, and providing opportunities to expand the business. Network expansion allowed the participants to broaden their customer base and grow their ventures. It also allowed them to expand their suppliers and stakeholders and have the choice of picking what they considered the best from the alternatives. Hence, network expansion enabled participants to create a web of potential resources to access when they needed it. In this study, participants used SM to expand the number of contributors in their network through forming partnerships, professional alliances and by accessing international contacts. Participants reflected on how when contributors were associated with different areas than what was familiar for the participants (i.e. different areas of expertise), they also benefited from getting information that was new. This new information also influenced participants' future decision-making.

The first way SM supported network expansion was through partnerships. A few participants had partners involved in the venture who had different expertise to them. Through drawing on different areas of expertise, each partner opened up networks with their own area of expertise, which expanded the networks and also contributed to participants being associated with new areas of information. For example, one participant indicated that having business partners who

came from different areas of expertise was vital for the growth and scaling up of the ventures through each partner contributing to the venture by opening up his/her networks:

> What our belief was, if different people are coming up with different expertise, that will develop together and when we come together, it'll be a very a good relationship, and when it comes to future, when we're scaling up, it'll be easy to scale up because we have different-different expert areas (i.e. each partner comes with different domain knowledge)…. Now when it comes to a business, sometimes you might have all these expertise in one person. But again, if it can come from different, different people, you can [be an] expert. One person can expertise on one thing. Then it's gonna be more; the whole bond is gonna be more powerful and more value-adding. And actually all 4 of us, we are focusing on different networks also. My network is actually a marketing network (V10P10).

Another way that partnerships encouraged network expansion is by expanding participants' customer base, with the partners sharing their customer base with each other. For example, participant V4P3 commented that having partnerships enabled her to expand her networks and thus produce a customer base to draw on. She argued that:

> Partners If I didn't have, those already established relationship, I wouldn't have gone into business. I already had this comfort of knowing ok, so [I] have the networks ready. So it's [a] matter of just building from there. Those are the two solid relationships (referring to the partnerships) (V4P3).

In these examples, SM supported network expansion because it allowed different people with different expertise to come together, share their knowledge and contacts with each other through SM. SM enabled these networks to be expanded further between the participants and their partners by linking and sharing SM contacts with each other (as suggested by V10P10 in his previous comment).

The second way SM supported network expansion was by collaborating with professional alliances on SM platforms. Participants used a variety of SM platforms in an intentional way to target different audiences and to expand their networks (as discussed in Chapter 5). For example, a few participants used Flickr to engage with the professional photographic audience. They used SM to broaden their professional alliances by gaining access to a specific professional group of individuals who were able to advise and appreciate the products and services offered by the participants. Through this advice and appreciation, the participants' network expanded to include the professionally similar individuals as new contributors, which if not for SM, would not be accessible for them. In this regard, a participant stated:

> Because one thing is when you upload it on Flickr, it reaches out to a professional crowd; you have to construct your photo in a way that it carries all the information like one thing is you shouldn't be editing it too much. Because it's a professional crowd and you have to be very genuine. And Flickr also supports many forums where professional photographers interact, talk and share ideas. And those open discussions can always like give you a learning edge in something, every time you go by (V14P14).

SM has thus provided V14P14 with a way of establishing himself among his professional domain using online communities. This created a network for the participants among their professional communities. These professional communities in SM acted as alliances as suggested by the participant by referring to a 'professional crowd' and the participant specifying the guidelines that should be adhered to in interactions with this community (i.e. non-edited photographs).

Participants also used 'sharing' as a way of expanding their existing network. They discussed how, if their SM pages, posts and messages were shared by their audience. This naturally expanded the number of individuals who would see them, thus enhancing their exposure and led eventually to more engagement from the audience. Therefore, sharing on the SM platforms was the key to network expansion:

> It's just that I do my work and publish it and people see it, and then other people see it because they share it. So, that's how things happen (V22P22).

SM enabled network expansion through supporting sharing and establishing virtual communities; it also enabled this to occur within a shorter time span for participants than any other traditional media (i.e. newspapers, television and radio). Participants indicated how SM supported the rapid expansion of networks based on its ability to bring individuals together in communities (as well as its popularity among people and cost-effectiveness). Participants also indicated that they created SM content to be expressive and used generic content as a strategy to encourage the audience to share. This sharing, in turn, leads to network expansion. Participants discussed how creating expressive content on SM platforms was relatively easy, as the SM platforms had different fonts, font sizes, colours and ways of expressing content (i.e. images, words and video). Participants commented that they had to select the best way to communicate about their product/service and describe their product/service using text, audio or video. Some participants observed that they learned the process of creating expressive content through audience inquiries on SM:

> I have actually learned to express what I do; in a way that other person or the social media user would understand. It's like the questions that they have in their head I have never thought about. So through social media, I know what to say, what I want to say, and I know how to clear the doubts (V22P22).

Participants also used general content that appealed to a broader range of people. Some participants' posts were fairly generic such as motivational quotes to encourage SM sharing. This would attract attention and lead to others sharing their posts. Because the generic content was originally posted by the participant, it was connected to their venture. Therefore, it created awareness of the participant's venture and enabled network expansion, as potential customers

would look into their venture (or become familiar with the logo at the end of the motivational quote) and establish contact with the participant:

> Now we don't do it, but every day we were posting motivation quotes through our page for others (i.e. audience). That also got circulated through others' pages (i.e. audience shares it with their SM contacts) and that also got us some business. Like through contacts but what we did was like, let's say AK's (celebrity name-coded), one of his quotes and our tag line we posted it online, so others share it, and through that sharing people come back to our page to find what is this company. So that value was there…like on special days (i.e. religious and cultural celebrations) we change our page concept and all so yeah that's there. So that value was like, our activities in social media were [of] value for us (V30P31).

The third method of network expansion was by establishing international contacts on SM as new contributors. Participants discussed how, through establishing more international contacts, they could access international markets. This access was useful for participants to establish their ventures as an international business. Through using SM, participants in this study were able to easily maintain their networks online with less effort than meeting people face-to-face. By maintaining the contacts on SM, participants were able to network with their international contacts using SM. Therefore, when the need arises, they were able to use these contacts by communicating with them on SM. SM thus maintained the contact points for these networks, aiding the participants to expand their networks. For example, a participant illustrated how they expanded his network using SM to reach out to international contacts and gain financial support for his venture:

> With no money, I tried to connect with foreigners, more than locals, the foreigners helped me. They funded me. They provided me with the initial fund also. They purchased 20% shares also. All the things [I] did [using] Facebook (V6P5).

In the example of V6P5, the international network was approached for funding using SM. This suggested that the participant was able to obtain a global presence and the funds needed by using SM contacts. The use of SM to reach out to the global sphere by building channels of communications led to network expansion. Reaching the global sphere using SM was a widespread finding among the participants of this study, with many illustrating the role of SM in connecting individuals from different nations:

> So, in that way, social media is the key because in here, we might have access to whatever the newspapers and e-flyers and stuff. But let's say you go to UK; there you don't have contacts. Even though you have contacts, it will be hard to reach newspapers and E- flyers and stuff. You can't just tell him [i.e. a jounalist] that I need to get an article done…But still, there you have social media access. If you can do a good job on social media (i.e. SM content), you can reach people. So, in that way social media is the key when going international (V15P15); and

> Because I work with foreign universities and communication-wise, it was all on WhatsApp. So, any time of the day, for example, in Singapore, one of the main

universities I work with, and they would just send me a WhatsApp message sending me the requests for a call. So, all the calls were on WhatsApp as well (V4P3).

The findings of this section thus suggested that network expansion to include new contributors was important for participants to create and grow their ventures.

6.2.3 Showcase Shared Values

Participants in this study used SM to showcase their shared values related to their products/services and brand. Shared values were "guiding principles and normative values that are shared by groups or communities" (Kenter et al., 2015, p. 87). The participants emphasised the need to showcase their shared values to achieve the support from their community. Participants expressed shared values as a sense of belongingness with the others with whom they interacted. Participants expressed shared values as: "related to, think-alike, connect" (V31P32), "community" (V32P33), "mutual connection" (V16P16), "like-minded others" (V10P10) referring to common elements (interests, lifestyle, preferences and viewpoints) that bound individuals together. Participants reflected that SM was important for showcasing their shared values because it was a vital element for the participants and their micro-level ventures to obtain the support of their community in order to grow their ventures. Because their resources were limited with micro-level ventures, obtaining the support of their community was important for them to create, grow and sustain their ventures. This was especially the case during the inception phase of their ventures, where they needed to create awareness of their products/services offered.

Participants' shared values were associated with their product or service. The awareness created using SM, prompted more individuals from the audience to connect with participants because of their acknowledgement and support for the shared values with which their venture/product/service was associated. This acknowledgement and support was evident with the number of 'likes' and 'shares', which post related to shared values have obtained in SM. Owing to the use of shared values, collectiveness was established for the venture in which the community operated, providing participants with access to more resources, recognition and support from the community.

Through showcasing shared values using SM, participants could obtain the support of like-minded individuals who purchased their products/services and enabled them to generate revenue. It also enabled participants to gain competitiveness for their ventures as they became known for their distinctive products/services, appealed to a targeted audience and were able to differentiate participants' ventures from their competitors. For example, a participant who produced handmade shoes indicated how the participant's venture had gained competitiveness based on the fact that the employees were women in a fishing village (i.e. Negombo). The

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participant explained that most of the time, the fishermen were away fishing at sea and, consequently, the income that they received varied. Therefore, the participant said they provided the employees with flexible working arrangements (i.e. working from home) and hours (i.e. during the time the children are at school). The participant provided designs and resources to make the shoes, resulting in women in the fishing village, earning an income to support their families. This participant projected the shared value of buffering the income of a particular community for their family maintenance (i.e. wage, support and flexible employment). In other words, when the venture grows, it is good for the wider community as well. By using SM, the participant projected this social outcome of her venture, which in turn had gained her a competitive advantage by like-minded others connecting with her:

> I mean since we had this whole empowerment element to our business, we had a lot of newspapers coming in and talking about that side of the business. Not so much you know promoting the brand but just talking about and highlighting what we were doing for the community. So that way, yeah. But we never paid for any publicity. Our publicity was based on social media. Our business is 100% based on social media. We just attracted that kind of publicity by doing something; differently, I guess (V31P32).

Another example was provided by a participant who was involved in clothing designs using traditional artisan skills. In the process of designing clothing items using artisans, the participant created employment, recognition, and financial assistance to a community long-forgotten in Sri Lanka. This participant projected the shared values relating to continuity of the community's indigenous craft while providing them with recognition and an income. The participant explained how the venture was ultimately educating the customers using SM and selling the products using SM and attributed the competitiveness of the products to the cultural story behind the clothing item. This story attracted an exclusive market segment solely based on the shared values that are associated with her venture:

> Actually FB (i.e. Facebook) is to educate the customer, because my collections, all the pieces are all about the story behind. It's not just one piece. You are not just purchasing one piece from a random brand. Its artisan-made, and there is a story behind it. So that storytelling part, I'm doing through social media. Mainly Facebook, and even Instagram. So yes, storytelling is the main thing, I think, and this story sells my product (V34P35).

SM thus enabled the storytelling process, as indicated by V34P35, which was vital for projecting shared values. Storytelling and interpreting stories that people tell about themselves, others, products, and brands are essential in marketing (Cao, Gan, & Lin, 2010). Many of the participants indicated that storytelling was important for their ventures. For example, a participant who depended on storytelling for her products indicated the sourcing of the products, who was also involved in the process and what the product would mean to the customer. This contributed eventually towards their business being competitive:

Because mainly storytelling is one of like very key things in my brand, it's all about the story; it's all about the artisans' story, it's all about the inspiration and the story behind this thing. Plus, my clients, my customer base is. Also, they are well-educated people, and they really want to know the story behind it. Because they like to wear this ethical green story, they like to talk about it; they like to wear something with a story, rather than just wearing something just normal. This [is] all (storytelling) handled with SM (V34P35).

In the above example, storytelling was used to engage the audience and move the audience to action. Storytelling was well supported through the use of SM. Participants' storytelling on SM attracted their audiences to their shared values and made them connect with the larger picture of the product, brand or the venture as indicated with the above example of V34P35 where, in this instance, an "ethical green story" of her products made the audience connect with her venture.

Further, Figures 6.1 and 6.2 represented a few participants' SM based posts that projected how shared values of their ventures were communicated to the audience.[17] The post following (Figure 6.1) was made by a participant who was an agricultural consultant, specialising in organic products. The participant's post was made on a New Year's Day 2019 on SM using the participant's agricultural products to showcase a table arrangement for the New Year. Usually, a table layout on a New Years' day in Sri Lanka consists of traditional milk rice and sweets, which this participant has changed by portraying agricultural products. As the agricultural products were organic, the participant associated this with a shared value of "health" to the audience by using them in a SM post.

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[17] For the necessity of retaining the anonymity of the participants, the names have been edited. Please note permission to access the SM based information has been obtained from the participant, as per ethical guidelines. Any identification of pictures and details has been edited in the SM posts.
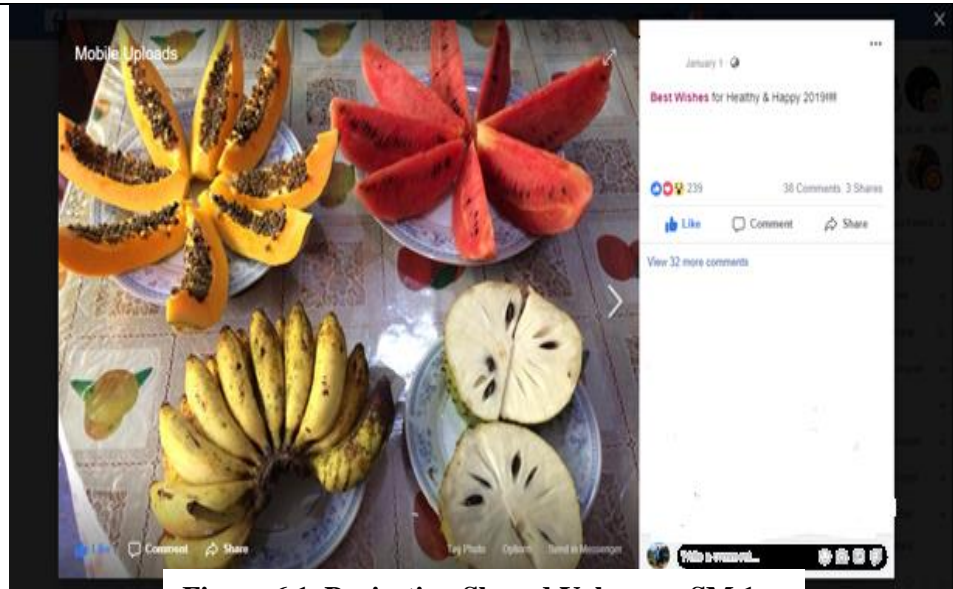
Figure 6.1. Projecting Shared Values on SM 1

This is an example of a post created by an agricultural consultant participant wishing everyone for the new year. The display of organic agricultural products represents the shared value of health that the participant wants to communicate using SM. This is an instance of connecting with the like-minded others.

Figure 6.2. Projecting Shared Values on SM 2

This is a participant who is a home baker representing the party-based atmosphere. The participant uses quality, healthy ingredients and freshly bakes the products. This post projected a shared value of health.

Figure 6.2 represents an example of a participant who was a home baker who organised a private Christmas party at their home. The participant used healthy ingredients with an emphasis on optimum quality for products that have been freshly baked, as opposed to food that had chemicals or additives that were readily available for consumption elsewhere. The participant targeted the higher end of the market and used SM to project these shared values related to health and freshness. Most of the participants' popular products have been represented in the picture. By using this post again, the participant reminded like-minded people to engage with the venture. Hence, using SM participants were able to project their shared values to create and grow their ventures.

6.2.4 Establishing Transparency

Participants in this study used SM as a way to establish transparency for their ventures. Transparency is related to the before-mentioned shared values, but as a core value, it becomes a focal point in how the participants' used SM. Transparency of information related to how much access (scope, accuracy and timelines) to internal-held information to which the audience was entitled (Australian Public Service Commission, 2019; Global Witness, 2019). Establishing transparency was important for the participants as the environment in which they operated (i.e. Sri Lanka), was well-known for corruption, bribery and unwarranted political influences (Shah, Murphy, & McIntosh, 2017; Sivakumar, 2014). Thus, ensuring transparency was important for the participants to gain a competitive advantage for their ventures. First, transparency in SM was achieved by participants creating visibility for their information and documents that they believed were important to the audience and sharing them on their SM platforms (usually free of charge):

> What we do is; we go, we push purely on transparency. If it's something that we figured out, that no one has, we still share our information for free (V16P16).

Participants also created transparency by sharing information and engaging in dialogue with their audience, which was a deliberate strategy used by the participants to portray the reliability and accountability of the venture. This is because transparency ensured they could assure the operational status of their venture and demonstrate that participants did not have anything to hide. This indication of an operational status of the venture was important as the majority of these ventures were virtual, with participants operating from a home office (and not a physical shopfront), and contact with customers occurring primarily through SM. Thus, participants stated that the audience needed to establish that they were corresponding with a valid entity. They achieved this by being transparent in their operations. This transparency, created through sharing information and engaging in dialogue with the audience, came in the form of admitting mistakes, honest responses to customer questions, providing product/service prices and

describing manufacturing practices. Further, by providing transparency, using comments and reviews submitted by customers, the participants were able to build trust with existing, new and potential customers. Customers were able to trust the information contained and estimate the value/quality of the product/service provided by participants.

Participants explained because transparency related to information being openly available on SM, it in turn, established trust. Trust in the online context was described as a "conviction that allows one party (i.e. customers) to willingly become exposed to another party (i.e. online retailers) after having taken the retailer's characteristics into consideration (i.e. socially responsible behaviour)" (Pavlou, 2003, p.106). In this regard, a participant stated how he had established a "massive amount of trust" by providing transparency. His example also suggested that trust established using transparency had gained more customers for a range of products/services:

> So, we did this video on social media mainly on Facebook and YouTube, and we targeted people who were subscribing through a magazine like Mashable, Wall street journal or whatever the piece of content that we think they will be inclined to be [an] entrepreneur/start-up their own business type of people. And we started to distribute that content to them. And we used that to build a massive amount of trust because they can see the face of people behind it; they can see what we do and because of the fact that everything [is] completely open, you can't dispute anything. And we have seen that happening right now. Like 30% of the people [who] purchased services from us, are now coming back and saying OK look you guys registered our business we are happy with that. Why don't you go ahead and do our accounting, taxes and auditing and all of that (V16P16).

Trust established through being transparent was very important for the participants to gain a positive reputation. Participants in this study used SM proactively to create trust in their brand. The participants recognised the importance of ethical content and the ability to sort out issues related to the ethical use of their content to uphold their brand name. This meant that if their branding was associated with an unethical or inappropriate website, they quickly and proactively lodged complaints to the relevant SM platform to have it removed. One participant indicated how they dealt with ethical issues concerning photographs and how much support SM sites provided in resolving such issues:

> And Facebook, It's really easy. Even if you have something unethical, you can just complaint through Facebook. Like if our picture is going on a bad website or something, we can easily contact Facebook and take legal actions. If we use the copyright mark, we can claim our copyrights. So, it's easy (V27P28).

Participants considered addressing these ethical issues essential because if not, they could tarnish their brand name. The findings suggested a relationship between the trust of the customers and the reputation of a venture. They believed a tarnished brand name made people mistrust the venture-related content and products/services:

If something goes wrong, again, it can create the whole thing [to] go down. You can go to the place where you started, maybe even below. If something goes wrong, so that's why. Here you can create the name (i.e. reputation); you can destroy the name (i.e. reputation); anything can happen. So if it's a wedding or something, I have seen that happening. So that's why we are also concerned. Something goes with wedding photography, the album is lost, something bad happens like wedding photos being published without consent of the couple or published online on inappropriate sites. So, if that happens and, if that person makes a post somewhere, saying that these people are not good….and please share this thing online, and let people know, don't work with them. If that goes online, that's free again, anyone can express anything, anyone can share anything, so the whole rapport can go down (V10P10).

Another approach used by the participants to establish transparency was by showcasing user-generated content on SM. Participants used user-generated content on SM to create a work portfolio on SM. This portfolio included comments, recommendations and testimonials by the previous customers:

If I say like, say I work for one client, then I make a post on that through my social media, get their (i.e. client's) recommendations on my SM, people who were actually there when it happened (referring to an event that took place), they see it, and they will be okay this is the guy we saw [him] working, and this is what he can do. Slowly, slowly with these recommendations and posts I [can] create my portfolio (V14P14).

In terms of the general public, the SM comments, recommendations and testimonials were more important than the information communicated using official venture related communications:

And also people tend to rely on SM, people tend to rely on personal comments on SM, which can again either make or break a company. And sometimes you know when it breaks through SM it is difficult to make (V36P37).

Although official venture related information (i.e. website information) could be controlled by the ventures, the third-party information/comments and testimonials obtained through SM platforms could not be controlled as they were user-generated. Therefore, the tendency for the audience to trust the content on SM was more than any official sources. Thus, for the majority of the participants in this study, establishing trust on SM platform was a vital driver for their venture creation and growth. Findings of this study, thus, suggested that transparency established using SM was important for participants' venture creation and growth.

6.2.5. Continuously Learn the Novel Features of SM

Participants in this study discussed that to use a combination of SM tools effectively, they needed to continuously learn how to use their novel features. Because SM platforms constantly change with the inclusion of new and novel features on the platforms, it was important for participants to adapt to these changes and use them for the benefit of the venture. Hence, it was important for participants to keep up-to-date with changes by committing time for learning the new technological features and experimenting with these features. Continuous learning of the new technological features and experimenting with these features ensured that the participants

gained the full benefit of SM and they used SM a strategic way. Use of SM in a strategic way is important (Hitt et al., 2015; Steininger, 2019), as technologies by themselves are unable to create any value (i.e. without the activities of the entrepreneurs) (Steininger, 2019). Participants considered this important for them to continuously develop their own capabilities and skills and to stay ahead of the trends. To use SM as a resource, participants needed to commit to learning the new technological features that were added to SM platforms. To enable learning, participants read books and other resources and spoke with experts to gain knowledge of the new features. These experts were sometimes colleagues or the help facilities available online through SM. This learning process provided valuable insights by providing the information about "where to create content, whom to contact [and] what to do" (V10P10). These enabled participants to obtain a clear understanding of the SM platforms on which they needed to focus and how they could best use them to benefit their ventures.

Participants also commented on how they had committed their time to keep up with the changing SM spectrum. It was a competitive advantage for the participants to scan the marketplace developments in SM and to identify opportunities and capitalise on them. The constantly evolving nature of SM means that new platforms were often introduced. These new additions meant that participants felt they needed to join new platforms, thus increasing the number of SM platforms on which they needed to operate. However, the use of more platforms required a further time commitment from participants, which was challenging for them. This challenge was expressed as:

> You are completely engrossed in it, and you live and breathe it, if not you are not going to [be] competent with the frequency of the change, you will not succeed on SM (V16P16).

Therefore, to keep up with the rapidly changing SM spectrum and platform features, participants needed to manage their time effectively. They did this by using a different set of free software tools, including Hootsuite, Buffer, Tweet Deck, Social Oomph, Friendster, Follow wonk and Zoho social. These tools aided them in scheduling and managing SM-related activities. For example, Postfity and Buffer.com were popular among the participants. While Postfity enabled automating and scheduling SM activities free of charge, Buffer.com enabled integration across different SM platforms by allowing one post to be replicated across multiple SM platforms. Buffer.com also supported scheduling, performance measuring, and management of all accounts from one central point. Participants commented on how these software tools reduced the need to commit considerable time to duplicate activities related to SM.

Participants in this study engaged heavily in experimenting with SM platforms. This willingness to change and to take risks by experimenting were all considered important by the participants to grow their ventures. The experiments have provided them with an advantage in terms of

understanding the SM platforms and how different audiences and platforms can be used more efficiently and effectively for their ventures. One indicated that: "I have few tricks upon my sleeves" (V16P16), and another: "So the strategy we use is the 10 to 1 theory" (V11P12), and

> It started off like basic… I would just handle the page and put some random pictures and stuff like that and every time you hit a milestone like 1000 likes you put a post. But once you grow up, you realise that it's not what people are actually looking for. Like I have my own dedicated social media team which does the you know like put up a post during new year or something like that as well as the naming conventions of the albums to responding to personal messages to direct messages to attending to the customer queries and if there are any pictures reported which needs to be taken off immediately to looking into that (V19P19).

Similar to V19P19, for the participants in this study, experimenting with SM provided them with a set of tried and tested strategies. These strategies revolved around content distribution, audience selection, and SM platform specification. For example, one of the strategies that have evolved based on experimentation was "10 to 1 theory", explained by a participant as:

> So the strategy we use is the 10 to 1 theory. Basically what happens in that is we targeted the campaign for an example let's take quotes by Steve Jobs, so we post 10 of those quotes, and we put one post regarding the service we do. So basically what we are doing is from those 10 we are trying to attract people like come to our page and like it. And see what kind of other post we do. So how the algorithm in Facebook and Instagram work is... If you keep going into someone's account, it will... it will figure out that this person will always check on something like that and it will always show those people's posts on the top. So we are using the same thing. So by putting those motivational quotes and everything we want people to share and like them and all. And then when we put a post, that will always come on the top (V11P12).

This process (as explained by V11P12) made people 'like' their posts with motivational quotes and with the final post (11th post) containing their own services, participants attempted to attract the audience. They indicated that this was an experiment that they had conducted and was successful in their context. Thus, participants' use of SM as a continuous learning tool had resulted in better revenues for the venture.

6.3 Summary

This chapter described how the participants used SM to create and grow their ventures. It identified five main ways that participants use SM to create and grow their ventures, including: (1) frequently communicating with their audience; (2) expanding networks; (3) projecting shared values; (4) establishing transparency; and (5) continuous learning of novel features of SM. It explained that the constant connectivity and accessibility provided by SM enabled them to respond quickly to the audience. Through frequently communicating with their audience, participants could also generate new ideas, identify opportunities, support future decision making, improve their reputation, and position their ventures as reliable and accountable. It also

explained how participants used SM to expand their networks to include new contributors, which was important for participants to identify and pursue opportunities to grow their ventures. This was enabled through new contributors supporting them with access to novel information and knowledge vital for future decision-making, and supporting partnerships and alliances, which led to the growth of their venture. This chapter also discussed how participants used SM as a platform to showcase their shared values which provided them with the support that was necessary to grow their ventures. It also discussed how participants established transparency through SM, by making sure they showcased user-generated content, created a trusted brand by projecting ethical behaviour, created visibility for information and documents that are important to the audience, shared information and engaged in dialogue with the audience. Finally, this chapter discussed how participants used SM as a continuous learning tool, by participants committing the time to learn new features, keeping pace with the new changes on SM and experiment with SM.

The next chapter synthesises the findings in Chapters 5 and 6 with the academic literature to discuss how participants deliberately and strategically used SM as a resource to grow and create their ventures. It will identify five main SM strategies used by the participants for their venture creation and growth.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION: STRATEGIES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN MICRO-LEVEL VENTURES

7.1 Introduction

The findings presented in Chapter 5 suggested that participants used SM as a resource and the key reasons for using SM was for awareness creation, customer acquisition and marketing. It further suggested that SM, as a resource, had altered the traditional venture creation and growth process. This altered process has resulted in the emergence of adapted business models (i.e. bloggers and vloggers) requiring minimal infrastructure, which was different from traditional business models. It also explained how, through using SM, participants had established SM networks (customer networks, organisational networks, friends' networks and supplier networks) as a way of acquiring resources (information, knowledge and financial resources) for their ventures. Chapter 6 established how participants used SM for their venture creation and growth. This involved them communicating frequently, expanding their network to include new contributors, showcasing shared values, establishing transparency and continuous learning.

This chapter discusses the strategies adopted by participants in their use of SM to create and grow their ventures. These strategies demonstrate that participants used SM in an intentional way. The strategies were important because they enabled participants to use SM to achieve their venture goals, including to gain competitiveness and increase revenue and profits. These strategies were: (1) content management; (2) engagement; (3) handling reviews; (4) understanding and using the technical details and functionality; and (5) brand creation. Each of these strategies is discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes by discussing the strategic choices made by the participants in this study to create and grow their ventures.

7.2 Strategies for Using SM

Participants were motivated to use SM as a resource to create and grow their ventures due to its cost-effectiveness. This was particularly important as all participants owned micro-level ventures. These ventures were inhibited by the liability of smallness (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Guercini & Milanesi, 2016; Hagen et al., 2019; Kale & Arditi, 1998; Ko & Liu, 2017). How SM supported overcoming this liability was discussed in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2). However, to gain benefits from SM, participants needed to use it strategically. This section will outline the intentional strategies that study participants used to optimise the benefits gained from their use of SM.

Examination of participants' use of SM reveals five main strategies vital for their venture creation and growth: (1) content management; (2) engagement; (3) handling reviews; (4) understanding and using the technical details and functionality; and (5) brand creation. The main strategies identified were enacted with the use of sub-strategies, represented in Table 7.1. A common theme across all of these main strategies is that SM was used to strengthen social interactions with their audience.

Table 7. 1. Current Study Suggested Five Strategies for SM Use
Source: Study Data

Strategy One: Content management	Strategy Two: Engagement	Strategy Three: Handling reviews	Strategy Four: Technical details/ functionality	Strategy Five: Brand creation
Frequency. Quality. Relevance. Tailoring the language. Platform-specific content creation.	Engagement as a process.	Appropriate communication style when responding to reviews. Response time. Living breathing testimonial creation.	Understanding the algorithms that SM platforms use. Having contingency plans.	Interactive information sharing and transparency. Selecting an appropriate SM platform for the venture.

7.2.1 Strategy One: Content Management

The first strategy was content management. The majority of participants mentioned content management as a necessity in their use of SM and were keen to create content which was multisensory and interactive. SM content represents any posts, videos, pictures, white papers, blog articles that can be shared with the customers and the public. This study's findings suggested that, unless this content was created well, it would not communicate messages appropriately to the audience and establish engagement that was expected by participants. For the participants, posts were the most popular content on SM. The findings of this study suggested that multi-sensory and interactive posts (i.e. videos and opinion polls) were more likely to generate engagement from the audience. Participants thus created multi-sensory and interactive SM content with the intention of educating, entertaining and capturing the interest of the audience. This finding corresponds with claims in the literature that multi-sensory and interactive posts that generated engagement on SM were more likely to receive 'likes', comments, and 'shares' (Barger, Peltier, & Schultz, 2016) and created social interactions (Sachan, Contractor, Faruquie, & Subramaniam, 2012). Therefore, making SM content multisensory and interactive was essential for an entrepreneur seeking rich social interactions.

Participants used user profiles on SM for content management. By understanding the profiles of users, participants were able to generate more revenue. In this study, SM user-profiles helped

the participants to improve their understanding of their customer segment by recognising their preferences. For example, using SM user-profiles of the individuals, participants were able to identify their interest, lifestyle, their work-related information. Recognising this information related to lifestyle and interest made it easier for the participants to promote specific content to the individuals. For example, for an individual who loves music, participants can promote clothing items which have music-related text or images. Thus, this understanding was important for the participants to customise and personalise the content according to their target audience to generate more revenue.

Through the use of SM, participants also found new ways for content management by reflecting their unique perspectives of their brand in their posts. For example, the findings presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.3) illustrated how participants integrated marketing, products/services, culture, and personal branding to create a strong brand image. Thus, the SM content was useful because it was a mechanism for communicating their brand, which could drive engagement on SM and support long-term relationship building. This was important for increasing their revenue. This supports claims by Ahmad, Musa and Harun (2016) that good and valuable content would drive engagement in SM, leading to customer actions that were profitable for a venture. Profitable customer actions with the SM engagement also supported the ventures to transform into value networks (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998; Xu & Saxton, 2019; Zadeh, Zolfagharian, & Hofacker, 2019), where the venture depends on the mediating technology to link customers.

This study revealed that participants managed content in a variety of ways: frequency, quality, relevance, tailoring the language and platform-specific content creation. These emergent concepts from the data corresponded to a content strategy, which acted as a plan for coordinating, creating and distributing a venture's content (Aboulhosn, 2019; Hootsuite Inc, 2019). Each of these concepts (sub-strategies) related to SM content management will be discussed below.

- Frequency

The first emergent concept (sub-strategy) found in this study related to content management is frequency. Frequency indicates the regularity or the rate of creating new or updating content on SM. For the participants in this study, it was essential to update their SM content frequently to retain the interest of their audience:

> The main focus or the main purpose of online presence is to attract the customers. You just [have] to make sure that you somehow do something and create awareness, create a sort of distraction in the customer's general online behaviour by frequently creating different content (V36P37).

Frequently updating content supported ventures in establishing stronger relationships with their audience and encouraged the audience to purchase products/services offered by the venture. This was because when content was updated frequently, it created more social interactions, particularly if the content was novel. Participants reflected on how, to ensure frequency, they often posted content created by others, as well as their own content. This is in accordance with claims by Herhold (2019) that there is an increasing tendency of people to share SM content created by others (i.e. which they consider novel) than their own content on SM. Study participants claimed that, through sharing others' content (as well as their own), they could post more frequently and generate higher levels of interaction between themselves and their audience. Thus, frequency is a crucial component in establishing social interactions (Neumeyer, Santos, Caetano, & Kalbfleisch, 2018; Wang & Wang, 2013). It also helped establish stronger relationships because of the increased interactions between participants and their audience. It was also clear that, through enabling social interactions and stronger relationships, frequency influenced audiences to purchase products/services from ventures. In this study, participants enabled frequent interactions with their audience by using new or updated content, which captured the interest of their audience.

Through frequently updating and posting novel content, participants attempted to increase the 'amount of time' spent interacting with their audience, resulting in stronger social interactions (Neumeyer, Santos, Caetano, & Kalbfleisch, 2018; Wang & Wang, 2013). Frequent updates ensured participants that the necessary messages were communicated with their audiences. Frequency of updating enabled regular and consistent interactions with customers and the ability to constantly remind them about the entrepreneurial venture. The regular and continuous communication also strengthened the social interaction ties[18] between customers and participants. This occurred because regular communication ensured continual information sharing between participants and their audience and enhanced the frequency of interactions between them. It also facilitated the establishment of reciprocal relationships whereby participants shared their information regarding their products/services with their audience and their audience shared valuable information (i.e. product reviews) with the participants. This corresponds with the claims made in the literature suggesting that the strength of social interaction ties was dependent on a combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, intimacy and reciprocal services that characterise it (Carolis & Saparito, 2006; Granovetter, 1985). Therefore, through frequently updating and posting content, participants capitalised on the 'amount of time' spent interacting with their audience, ensuring the establishment of

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[18] Social Interaction ties are channels for information and resource flows (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). They can be strong or weak ties (Granovetter, 1983; Shu, Ren, & Zheng, 2018).

stronger social interactions. It was also clear that strong social interactions made it easier for participants to attract more customers and to generate revenue.

- Quality

The second emergent concept (sub-strategy) identified in this study related to content management is quality. Content quality was important for participants as it led to strengthened social interactions. Quality refers to the condition of images (assessed by aspects of contrast, blur, 'noise' (i.e. image distortion), and posts (purposeful and well developed) that are posted on SM. The quality of the content was assessed using customer reviews and verifications. For example, participants in this study determined that quality of content leads to enhanced interaction between them and the audience, with high-quality posts receiving more 'likes', 'shares' and 'views'. This study's findings suggest that the quality of SM content strengthens social interactions. Quality of the content influences programmability of SM (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018), thus enhancing the ability of SM to prompt and get users to participate in creative and communicative activities associated with SM.

In this study, participants explained ways that they have attempted to establish the quality of their SM content. Some participants indicated the need to provide high definition clear pictures and videos by professional photographers/videographers to ensure the details of the product were appropriately captured. They asserted that this indicated the quality of the content. This is because, unless the product was appropriately captured, the SM audience would not see the details of the product, the colours and the exact functionality. Quality SM content provided this understanding to the audience and elicited their interest in purchasing produces/services. Participants also claimed that, unless the pictures and videos were associated with appropriate clarity, the audience will not interact with the content:

> So basically initially we launched; we pushed on Facebook quite a lot. So We actually like did a... For example, we set up a page; we actually did a professional shoot of the food items that we offer. Then we hired some graphic designers to work on some graphic elements, and then we created a series of... Basically we created a marketing campaign with these photographs so, the initial one lasted for a month. So we had to like line up like 30 photographs. We used those to create a buzz around our café, even though it's a very small one in Colombo, with the use of social media we were able to you know bring in a lot of customers (V5P4).

Further, the quality of content also encompassed variety (not providing the audience with the same images and the same content) and originality of content. This corresponds to creating original content that uses unique visuals or a novel concept, sharing links that may interest the audience about novel findings of the industry (i.e. the health advantage of consuming organic vegetables) and images as a way of increasing social interactions on SM. This novelty and

variety in the content created intimacy by assuring connectedness to the content. The need to use high-quality content on SM was also essential for participants because it attracted the audience and encouraged them to interact with them. Participants claimed that this ultimately led to revenue generation through conversions (i.e. converting the audience to a customer). This supported claims by Clarke (2019) that content quality, obtained by writing understandable content, using visuals and creating landing pages for the right audience, could drive conversions. In this study, understanding the importance of content quality, participants used professional services (i.e. photographers and content creators) to maintain the quality of content to ensure continuous SM interaction and revenue generation.

- Relevance

The third emergent concept (sub-strategy) in content management identified in this study was relevance. This study's findings revealed that content relevance was associated with the importance, currency and significance of the content, as well as its suitability for the target audience. Of these factors, the suitability of the content was the most prominent consideration for participants. Suitability of the content ensured that the content was popular among the associated audience (Dijck & Poell, 2013). This finding suggested that participants needed to create and post content relevant to their target audience; that is, it should be targeted/appeal to the shared value system of the community where the venture resides.

This finding suggested that participants needed to create and post content relevant to their target audience; that is, it should be targeted/appeal to the shared value system of the community where the venture resides. Study findings also suggested that if content appealed to that, then ventures would gain popularity among the audience and gain followers on SM, ultimately resulting in more revenue for the venture. Participants ascertained the relevance of the content through the number of 'likes' and 'dislikes' obtained. For example, "the first phase is actually getting more 'likes'. That's our first thing. Then we go into conversions. Understanding when we have 100 000 people are they responding to us" (V7P6).

Relevant content supported creating a shared value community and reduced the need for ongoing SM management. Participants suggested that posting relevant content appealed to the shared values of their audience and could encourage conversions. Participants' goals and intentions were ascribed to their SM community. These goals and intentions were commonly shared among their SM community and understood as universal community-based shared values, referred to as the cultural, societal and communal type of shared values in literature (Kenter et al., 2015). Participants were thus very interested in catering to the audience with 'what they preferred to see' or 'playing by ear'. These similar values brought individuals together. This is consistent with previous work suggesting that shared values naturally bring

people together resulting in exchange of information, learning and knowledge creation (Carolis & Saparito, 2006; Coleman, 1994; Creech, Laurie, Paas, & Parry, 2012). In this study, relevant content was also important to participants because it adds value to the brand. Participants indicated if relevancy was maintained, the reach factor was considered to be extremely high as it brought people together through their shared values (i.e. a community). This created a stable customer base for the ventures to draw on; participants were able to target their customers easily using the shared values of the venture and participants could easily retain this customer segment (i.e. already in the shared value-based community) with less effort as they were already bound with the shared values that the venture had projected.

- Tailoring the language

Tailoring the language was the fourth emergent concept (sub-strategy) in content management found within this study. Through tailoring the language, participants were able to relate and appeal to the shared value system of a community. This is important because the language of expression is an essential component of shared values that build relationships (Carolis & Saparito, 2006; Coleman, 1990; Creech et al., 2012). Tailoring the language also ensured programmability, which prompts and gets the users to participate in creative and communicative activities associated with SM (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018). This study found that adapting and tailoring communication according to the audience's needs and preferences was important for gaining and retaining more customers. Tailoring the language was crucial for the participants in this study because the majority of SM communications were in written form where the tone of expression and use of words mattered. Through tailoring language, participants also considered how they could best capture their audiences' attention. One example given was writing simple posts that could be easily understood by their audience. It was clear that this was important in gaining an avid following and encouraging their audience to purchase their products/services. This supports claims in the literature that the use of language and communicating to the audience in a consistent manner was important for gaining followers, converting audiences into customers and ultimately revenue generation (Payne, 2014).

Participants in this study also used culturally-accepted words and language that was familiar to the community (i.e. social-cultural interpretation of linguistic patterns) when communicating on SM. Participants believed that it was important to use language that was familiar to the community, was culturally-sensitive (so it did not offend the community members) and thus would tap into people's emotions. An example was a locally produced aphrodisiac. The acceptance of, and a conversation regarding, aphrodisiacs was a culturally sensitive issue in Sri Lanka; therefore, the language used was vital in clearly expressing the message to the related target audience in a subtle manner. The language used did not explicitly indicate that it was used

for sexual purposes, but its use was implied in a culturally sensitive manner. If the language of expression on SM was appropriate, participants indicated that inquiries would be made by the customers, as the use of language had ensured they were not offended; they also claimed that this often resulted in revenue. If the language deterred customers, none would feel comfortable to get in touch with the participants to purchase the products. This related to the nature of the social-cultural interpretation of linguistic patterns in SM, which indicated "how communities constitute themselves through shared values where it is not just the interaction that matters but the shared meaning" (Zappavigna, 2012, p. 5). Social-cultural interpretation of linguistic patterns not only linked the language to individuals, but it also considered the shared meanings that a community established with the language. Therefore, participants claimed it was important to tailor their language as it enabled them to retain existing customers and to gain more customers through their communications.

With the use of SM, participants attempted to belong to the SM community by embracing a culturally-shared sense of what was worthwhile and meaningful. In this study, communication using SM occurred in two ways: language and emoticons (emoji's or emotion icons on SM). Emoticons represented physical actions or facial expressions (i.e. a happy face, sad face, running or a dancing emoji) in communication, and acronyms (i.e. LOL: Laugh Out Loud and XOXO: hugs and kisses). Participants argued that it was vital that they kept pace with the trends and used emoticons (emojis) and other styles of expression to communicate effectively with their SM audience. When a culturally-shared sense of what was worthwhile and meaningful was shared, it connected the participants towards that SM community and helped them belong to that specific community because it was 'speaking their language'. This articulation of their language was a skill that the participants in this study believed that they needed.

To belong to the SM community and to benefit from the community, participants had to clearly communicate and tailor their language accordingly. Participants indicated they gained ideas for clear communication and tailoring language based on customer interactions. A few participants indicated clear communication was learned from customers as they asked frequent questions on SM. These questions and inquiries provided clues for them to understand the way that they need to tailor the language for SM and express the message more clearly. Participants found it an advantage to have this information expressed clearly and upfront on SM by adopting the appropriate language.

- Platform-specific content creation

The sixth emergent concept (sub-strategy) related to content management was platform-specific content creation. Platform-specific content creation refers to participants considering the technical capabilities embedded or supported by the SM platforms and creating the content

accordingly. All SM platforms do not have the same technological capability; therefore, one item of content cannot be replicated across all platforms. This requires extra effort from the participants to target the content (customise the content) according to the technical capabilities of the SM platforms. This corresponds to incorporating new content strategies where the content needed to be tailor-made to the medium (Holland, 2016). If this customisation did not take place, the content might not be displayed according to what the participant anticipated, thus reducing the social interactions from the audience. Hence, developing customised content, which maximised social interactions, targeted towards specific SM platforms, was considered essential.

The findings of this study suggested that customising content enabled participants to optimise their social interactions on SM. For example, on Instagram, videos needed to be filmed 'square'[19] and of shorter duration. On Facebook, for example, videos needed to be 'square', because they are accessed with mobile phones and as most people do not watch with the sound turned on, production of words without sound was a necessity. When uploading content to YouTube, the audience required videos with faces, people talking, and audio. This suggests that, for different SM platforms, different SM-based technical specifications, diverse audiences, different purposes and various protocols existed. This supported the findings of a previous study regarding the importance of customising content to specific SM platforms, with suggestions regarding how to tailor-make the content for three widely used SM platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) (Holland, 2016). For example, for Facebook content needed to be interactive, while providing images and links to make the audience active. For Twitter, it required content that grabbed attention quickly, within the word limit of 140 (usually 100 characters for content and 40 for hashtags and links). LinkedIn was focused on demographics consisting of more technical and niche content, which was short and pertinent catering to the busy, professional audiences. Hence, making sure the content was customised to that platform was essential in using SM. In this study, by using tailor-made content for the medium, participants ensured that the content was optimised for interacting with the audience. Unless this tailor-made content was used; the audience would not have the social interaction the participants expected. For example, in the case of Twitter where the word limit is 140 characters (including the hashtags) if the participants' message was longer than 140 characters the participants would need to post it as two separate messages. In this case, the effects of having one message with all the details was no longer possible. Thus the anticipated social interaction would also be curtailed because some individuals in the audience would only view part of the message. Through creating and posting tailor-made content and thereby enhancing/optimising social

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[19] Videos filmed on mobile phones are either filmed using landscape (horizontal) or vertical (square) and that square is more popular on Instagram and Facebook.

interactions, participants could also expand their networks. Creating content that was most appropriate for a specific platform, participants could generate more interactions with the posts, with their audience sharing them with their own networks. This sharing of content led to participants gaining more followers on their SM pages, which expanded their networks by adding new contributors. This is in line with findings of previous studies that suggest including new contributors broadens the networks (Labrecque et al., 2013; Moody & Paxton, 2009; Welch & Welch, 2004). Through acquiring more contributors/followers, and thus broadening their networks, participants were able to obtain resources such as information and knowledge, as indicated in Chapter 5.

7.2.2 *Strategy Two: Engagement*

The second strategy used by the participants in their use of SM was engagement. Participants in this study made a conscious effort to use SM to engage with the public, particularly customers. Engagement was identified as a strategic requirement for establishing and sustaining competitive advantage and predictor of future business performance (Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2013). Engagement was a user-initiated action, where parties communicated with one another and demonstrated an interest in the co-creation of value (Khan, 2017). Co-creation was a process that actively involved customers in a new product or service development, which could be a source of competitive advantage for ventures (Lorenzo-Romero, Constantinides, & Brünink, 2014). Co-creation can be a source of competitive advantage because user views were considered in the production process, with products created based on users' needs. Creating a product that addressed users' needs enhanced the likelihood of customers purchasing it, thus generating higher revenue for ventures and providing a competitive advantage as opposed to the competitors. In this study, SM facilitated the engagement and co-creation process by functioning as an interactive platform connecting participants and their customers.

In this study, engagement was a two-way process promoting programmability (Dijck & Poell, 2013; Enli & Simonsen, 2018), whereby the participants and customers interacted (using comments, posts and user-generated content) to co-create their SM content. Although ideally, co-creation dealt with a new product and service development (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2014), in this study, co-creation dealt with SM content development and this content was used as a feed-forward mechanism for product and service development. This co-creation of SM content provided the participants in this study, opportunities to create new products/services or changes to the existing products/services, based on the customer feedback and views. However, unlike the definition of co-creation which emphasised customers active involvement in product/service development (Brodie et al., 2013; Khan, 2017; Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2014), in this study, co-creation of content did not get the customer directly involved in the product/service process.

Instead, participants adjusted or created new products/services based on co-created SM content (i.e. feedback and views of the customer). In this study, co-creation also involved the customers sharing their product and experience ideas on SM and participating in open discussions about product/services and sometimes voting for them on SM platforms. However, the value of co-creation of content was still a source of competitive advantage for participants' ventures, as the feed-forward mechanism of SM content was used in the development of their future products/services.

In this study, the engagement process for participants contained a high level of interaction. The level of social interaction (interactivity) created through engagement was prominent in the relationship between the customer allowing the participant to be intimate with them using personalised interactions (i.e. messages, uploading photos and comments). This engagement process made the customers more comfortable in dealing with the participant, and they naturally establish strong social interaction ties with the participants. Participants in this study viewed engagement to be a process. Considering engagement as a process, participants wanted to engage with the customers more frequently using less time-consuming content with short, sharp and focused messages to retain their attention and to remind them about the venture constantly. This sub-strategy is discussed in the section that follows.

- Engagement as a process

The participants' engagement process comprised of three stages: the 'pre', 'during' and 'post' stages, which occurred over time using different methods. During the pre-stage, the aim was to generate interest or start a conversation with the audience/brand community. For example, about two days before an event/product launch/introduction of a service, posting on SM indicating its coming (pre), referred to as 'sneak peek views' by some participants. These sneak peek views according to the participants, usually contained an entertainment factor and created hype among the audience. By providing pre-event posts, the participants in this study believed the interest of an individual could be captured. This is referred to as starting a conversation (York, 2017). The interest created using the pre-event process, in the individuals' mind, started a rapport, made them aware of a product or service being launched and made them curious about gaining more details. Inspiring inquisitiveness and a need for further information in potential customers, they were pushed to create social interaction with the product or service by either 'liking' or 'following' SM pages of the venture. During the event, participants took group photographs, uploaded photos, indicated the location during the event/product launch and after the event/launch (post-event) within a short time-span (i.e. one day), posted the photos and the videos of the launch. This created an awareness in potential customers about the event and displayed the product/standard of the event or service attributes available. Post-event

participants' engagement was based on the feedback about a product, reviews and testimonials, which acted as a seal of approval. This attracted more customers as it was third party endorsement or information obtained from actual individuals.

The engagement found in this study was a combination of two-way communication on SM and a co-creation of content on SM. This process combination is represented in Figure 7.1. The majority of the customer engagement in the current study was created through 'likes', 'posts', 'shares' and comments on the SM brand communities. During the engagement process, the customer 'reacts', 'comments', 'shares' and 'posts' content on participants' SM platforms. Identifying the importance of this interaction with the customers, participants listened and responded to the content by responding to customers by either commenting, thanking or sharing the user-generated content on their SM pages. Further, the participants in this study sought customers' recommendations using comments (for their future products and service developments) and sometimes had vote-seeking posts to identify the customer trends and their ideas which could also be included for future product and service developments. This feedback obtained from the customers, thus, was included for the participants' next cycle of production or services as constructive feedback.

Youth entrepreneurs' engagement process	1. Pre-process: Sneak peek views and teasers creating excitement, entertainment and hype 2. During: Photographs and tagging the location 3. Post-process: Results, outputs, feedback and co-created stories			
SM Interactions from the customers (concurrent process)	Customer reacts to the content using emotions and expressions (Like, surprises, love, XOXO)	Customer comments on the content	Customer shares the content	Customer posts user-generated content
Co-creation of Content				
Youth entrepreneur listens and responds to the content (Concurrent Process)	Youth entrepreneur reacts to customer content emotions and expressions (Like, surprises, love, XO)	Youth entrepreneur responds to customer content (comments)	Youth entrepreneur shares content with followers using the user-generated content	

Figure 7. 1. Engagement as a process of Co-Creation of SM Content
Source: Study Data

7.2.3 Strategy Three: Handling Reviews

The third strategy used by the participants in their use of SM was handling reviews. Reviews assisted participants to establish trust in their ventures. Reviews were user-generated content considered to be authentic by the participants because they had a strong level of trustworthiness associated with them. Reviews were thus important for customers and potential customers to develop confidence and trust in the youth entrepreneurial venture, corresponding with the claims by Labrecque et al. (2013), indicating that reviews were vital for the consumer-venture online relationship. Trust is also an important construct in network governance, which is considered critical for the quality of the resource flows (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Chiu et al., 2006; De Paula et al., 2019; Giurca & Metz, 2018; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Pérez-Macías et al., 2019). As reviews were fundamental to establishing trust, the participants were keen to take steps to ensure reviews were handled appropriately. The findings of this study suggested that these reviews came in different formats: customer reviews, ratings, and testimonials which acted as recommendations.

Reviews used by the participants were a way of projecting the public impression of the venture and/or its products/services on SM. Participants in this study considered reviews on SM important for developing business and sustaining their venture because they provided valuable insights into their products and services and gave them the opportunity to continue the venture and address concerns. So, although participants considered reviews to be a double-edged sword and a "make or break" (V10P10), they were seen as an integral part of allowing customers to create content and have a voice and express their views about products and services. Through providing a voice to the customers, participants were able to support customer decision-making and make strong connections with them. These reviews, in turn, had its effect on improving product sales and support online marketing strategies. These findings are in line with studies which suggests that SM reviews could be used for profitable relationships for ventures and customers (Barger et al., 2016; Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011). The findings of this study also supported studies that had found that reviews have statistically significant effects on brand awareness/associations, brand loyalty, and perceived brand quality (Barger et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2011); as also in this study, participants argued that reviews were pivotal for branding. The key emerging concepts related to handling reviews indicated by the participants were using the appropriate communication style when responding to reviews, short response time and 'living, breathing' (i.e. real life) testimonial creation (i.e. participants posting customer-created testimonials).

- Appropriate communication style when responding to reviews

The first emergent concept (sub-strategy) in handling reviews in this study was the

communication style when responding to reviews. Communication style refers to the way an individual user interacted and exchanged information with others because it is understood to affect how people create and sustain their social/communication networks (Alvernia University, 2018; Cho, Gay, Davidson, & Ingraffea, 2007; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). SM is a two-way conversation; the communication style adapted by the participants mattered to them handling the reviews. The communication style adopted by the participants in handling the reviews mattered because it reflected their ability to maintain ties already established with their audience (by projecting themselves as a person helping another) and led to the creation of more ties (based on the impression that was created with the communication style used in the reviews). Participants preferred to maintain an appropriate communication style (i.e. tone and words being professional but helpful) when responding to reviews to build authenticity and rapport. This appropriate communication style adopted by the participants made the audience more open to sharing their resources with the participants (as discussed in Chapter 5) and to interact with them.

Using an appropriate communication style was a survival factor for the participants as both positive and negative reviews could be provided by the public without any control. Findings indicated reviews obtained from the SM audience could be positive or negative. When responding to the reviews, participants were concerned about using the appropriate communication style and tone so that their responses were well-received. In particular, they were concerned with handling the negative reviews appropriately so that it did not have a negative effect on their product/service or the brand. The manner in which both positive and negative reviews were acknowledged and handled required an appropriate communication style to maintain future interactions or establish strong ties. This appropriate communication is similar to the communication style that projects 'willingness to communicate'; a communication style defined as a degree to which an individual is inclined to initiate communication with different people (i.e. friends and customers) in various social settings (i.e. chats and blogs) (Cho et al., 2007). Using the appropriate communication style thus was a crucial element for the survival of their ventures, as both positive and negative reviews could be provided by the public without any control.

- Response time

The second emergent sub-strategy in handling reviews was response time. Response time was important for the participants because it acted as an indicator of social presence for the venture. Response time related to the elapsed time between the user's review and the response provided by the participant. SM enabled communication with people in real-time, providing the participants with the ability to see what the users were thinking, feeling, doing and saying at any

given moment about their brand, service or products. Because of the real-time interactivity, the response time taken to provide instant response was crucial in handling reviews. This response time was also associated with the online SM etiquettes (for example, netiquette – a blended word to describe acceptable online behaviour). If the response time was delayed, this made customers write bad reviews on SM. This corresponded to the element of immediacy found in the literature, which indicated the importance of accelerated pace and speed of responses (Frauke & Hermida, 2015; Perez, Waite, & O'Gorman, 2016). Higher social presence with response times was associated with more positive and effective outcomes (Tu & McIsaac, 2002). Timely and prompt handling of reviews on SM thus was crucial for participants in this study.

Prompt responses were associated with the element of care and availability of the participants to solve a customer issue or provide help. If the participants did not respond within a shorter response time, they believed it reflected a negative attitude for the customers, which resulted in them being irritated and writing negative reviews. Associated with the prompt response time was demonstrated care for customers and availability, which were factors that influenced the establishment of trust in the relationship. The majority of participants' ventures were virtual ventures, which lacked the legitimacy that a physical storefront would provide. This meant that being responsive was important for establishing that the venture existed and was focused on customer service. Another vital point to note about review response times found in this study was that each SM platform was associated with a different response time, based on the norms associated with SM platform accessibility and use, and the level of instant communication the SM platforms provided. For example, participants suggested a two-hour response time on Facebook was the norm while on Twitter it was maximum of 30 minutes.

- 'Living, breathing' testimonial creation

The third emergent concept (sub-strategy) in handling reviews found in this study is what can be described as 'living, breathing' testimonial creation to ensure authentic real-time social interaction for the participants. Testimonials were formal statements testifying the quality of a product or service (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2019), which provided authenticity by establishing the trust of the customers (Blanchard & Horan, 2007; Casson & Giusta, 2007; Chiu et al., 2006; Thompson, 2018). Testimonials acted as the most trusted and pure ways of demonstrating the venture's values and product-related information. Hence, customer testimonials were considered a treasured piece of validation for the products or services provided by the participants, to which the audience could relate and that could not be disputed as being authentic, nor disparaged as just contractual computer-generated fraudulent comments. For testimonials to be considered a treasured piece of validation it needed to come from a

customer, with whom the target market could identify and access details about (i.e. linked to the customers SM pages or having contact details), written in a genuine style using clear, coherent, short expressed in a pertinent manner, which reiterated the claims made about the products or service. It needed to focus on how it beat the competition and this factor was valued highly by the participants in this study. Participants indicated testimonials could also include videos, voice recording and photos, which could enhance reliability and create added trust. Findings in this study further confirmed that, for a venture to expand and grow using SM, it was essential to gain the trust of the public. Customers' of a product or a service seemed to provide an excellent resource for doing so; thereby, testimonials were invaluable in creating trust.

7.2.4   Strategy Four: Understanding and Using Technical Details/Functionality

The fourth strategy used by the participants in this study and their use of SM was the understanding and use of technical details/functionality of SM. Functionality and the technical details contained in SM platforms were the key technological mechanisms that helped interact with the audience, referred to as the 'affordances' (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Leonardi, 2017; Livingstone, 2008; Smith et al., 2017; Suthers, Chu, & Joseph, 2008). Affordances were a "concept that marries the material features of the technology with the subjective goals and perceptions of its users, such that the same technology may provide different affordances to different users" (Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015, p. 106), indicating that different users use SM platform functionalities differently according to their goals and perceptions, which resulted in different outcomes. As technical details/functionality were fundamental in creating interactions with the audience, understanding these technical details/functionalities were essential for the participants to establish strong social interactions in line with their goals and perceptions. This highlighted the importance of participants understanding and using the technical details/functionality of SM in order to maximise the benefits that it could provide for their ventures. Hence, understanding technical details in SM and using the functionalities of SM, increased and strengthened the social interactions between participants and their audience. It also enabled them to gain more customers over the long run. The technical details and functionality of SM platforms were highlighted as a crucial element for participants. They were enthusiastic about the technical aspects associated with SM platforms and were keen to understand the algorithms and establish contingency plans for undisrupted use of SM. Each of these concepts is discussed in the section following.

- Understanding the algorithms that SM platforms use

The first emergent concept (sub-strategy) in technical details/functionality found in this study was understanding the algorithms that SM platforms used. SM algorithms were a way of sorting SM posts in a user's 'news feed' based on the relevance it had to the user rather than the

published time or the number of posts (Barnhart, 2019). This suggested that the relevance of posts, according to the algorithms of specific SM platforms, was of most importance (rather than the number posts per se). This was because SM algorithms prioritised which content users saw in their 'feed' first based on the likelihood that they actually wanted to see it, taking into account the user's previous interactions with similar posts, user's interest, activity and interactions on the platforms (Hopper, 2018). This suggested that only relevant posts were valuable for participants, as this was what their audience would see on their pages (with irrelevant posts potentially lost). However, it was also important to note that different SM platforms had different algorithms (Warner, 2018). For example, Facebook, with its changes in algorithms in January 2018, prioritised meaningful interactions (i.e. content that received the most engagements - reactions, comments and 'shares'). To make this algorithm work, Facebook maintained historical engagement data with friends, posts and newsfeeds (Warner, 2018). This meant that it was critical that participants understood the algorithms used in each SM platform.

Understanding the algorithms on SM was necessary for the participants to get the best reach for their content. Understanding the in-built algorithm of an SM platform provided participants with the ability to use that SM platform most beneficially for their ventures to create strong ties with the existing customers. It also assisted in expanding their networks, with existing customers sharing and interacting with the relevant posts by 'liking', 'commenting' and 'sharing' them on their SM platforms. This finding supports the claim that 'sharing' and interacting on SM platforms expanded individuals networks (Chiu et al., 2006; Leonard & Onyx, 2003; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). When existing customers shared content related to the venture on their SM page, they shared the venture-related content with their own SM contacts, who might share it with others. This naturally led to the expansion of the participant's networks to include new contributors as those individuals would further attempt to connect with the venture. Even when existing customers 'liked' or 'commented' on participants' posts, these were displayed to customers' SM contacts. Participants reflected on how this led to individuals being interested in the product or service and further explored ways that they could connect with the participants' ventures.

- Having contingency plans

The second emergent concept (sub-strategy) in understanding and using technical details/functionality was related to having contingency plans to enable the SM platform to be operational at all times. SM is an online platform not owned by participants; this suggests that the continuous operation of the SM platform depends on third-party companies. This reliance on a third-party company made participants prepare contingency plans to mitigate the risk of them being locked out of their accounts and being unable to access their SM accounts. This

contingency planning was required as SM platforms were the storefront and customer touchpoint for the majority of the participants in this study. If, in any circumstance, these SM platforms were blocked, or access was restricted by the third-party company, this would result in the participants' ventures becoming non-operational and the customers being blocked and neglected. In such circumstances, where the customers could not contact the venture and obtain a response, the customers tended to mistrust the participant and associated the venture as a fraudulent entity. Because participants' ventures relied on SM to operate, being blocked out of SM and thus being inaccessible to their audience had a major negative impact on their ventures, thus highlighting the necessity for participants to establish contingency plans.

By having contingency plans in place, participants ensured continuous operation of their venture, thereby retaining the trust of customers. For example, in SM platforms to create a venture related page, it needed to be associated with an administrator, who was usually the participant. Participants were prepared for blocked access to SM by using multiple administrator accounts and linking them to the venture page. This meant that, in the event where one administrator profile was blocked, the other administrator accounts could be used to carry out the venture tasks without disruption. Participants' use of contingency plans was associated with having a 'back-up person' to handle the SM; they also ensured that the backup person had the necessary skills to operate SM effectively and were aware of how to handle the followers, comments and inquiries.

It was clear that establishing contingency plans to ensure their venture's SM profile was running continuously and they could be responsive to their customers was important for creating and maintaining customers' trust. Trust was proposed as the singular most important cornerstone of a relationship and therefore of a network (de Klerk, 2012; Valenzuela et al., 2009), which ensured the stability of existing business relationships (Ulaga & Eggert, 2006). Hence, by establishing contingency plans, participants attempted to establish this stability of the business relationship with customers.

7.2.5   Strategy Five: Brand Creation (Using a Collaborative Strategy)

The fifth strategy used by study participants was brand creation. In this study, participants used SM extensively for brand creation, with findings suggesting that this required a collaborative strategy. Collaborative strategies promoted the expansion of the range of SM platforms used for a venture and consequently expanded the number of stakeholders related to the ventures through interactivity and openness (Vernuccio, 2014). These collaborative strategies thus extend relationships that emerge as a consequence of direct (strong) and indirect (weak) ties (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Han, 2006; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002; Kalish & Robins, 2006; Kiss & Danis, 2008; Newbert et al., 2013; Nielsen, 2019; Ruef, 2002; Tim et al.,

2000; Brian Uzzi, 1996; White, 2018). These ties are important for the participants as they influence resource flows. Participants' SM branding was accomplished by interactive information-sharing and transparency, and through selecting which SM platform was most suitable for their ventures. A brand is a unique identification (name, symbol or associated features) constructed for the goods or service of one seller (American Marketing Association, 2018; Guerrero, 2019). A brand thus creates an idea or an image in an individual's (audience's) mind when thinking about specific products, services or ventures, and this idea usually is a combination of the practical usability aspect and emotional aspects (Lannigan, 2017; Yan, 2011). This was useful when interacting with the SM audience. In this study, participants established their brands as a combination of marketing, venture branding, personal branding and organisational culture. This combination was easier to achieve using SM platforms (as discussed in Chapter 5).

The unique combination of branding conducted on SM platforms enabled the participants to 'start a conversation' with the audience and interact continuously with them. Through interacting with their audience and establishing a reputation for their brand, participants could establish brand loyalty, build trust and, ultimately, increase their revenue. This corresponded to personal branding created on Twitter for the journalism community to enable the creation of market value for their work. This market value for the journalist community was gained by creating a personal brand where they became news and opinion hubs, which increased their followers and enabled them to create market value for their media outlet and themselves (Brems, Temmerman, Graham, & Broersma, 2017). The collaborative strategy proposed in this study comprised of two fundamental sub-strategies: interactive information sharing and transparency, and selection of which SM platform was most suitable for the ventures. These sub-strategies are explained below.

- Interactive information sharing and transparency

The first emergent concept (sub-strategy) in brand creation found in this study was sharing interactive information and transparency. Many participants used SM as a way to share interactive information. By supporting the process of sharing interactive information, participants made a conscious decision for their ventures to be known or the brand to be recognised by the SM audience and consequently creating brand loyalty. This, in turn, expanded their existing networks to include new contributors. Interactive information sharing was the transmission of information for sharing (Ariel & Avidar, 2015), which extended one's network to include new contributors, corresponding to expanding the network (Labrecque et al., 2013; Moody & Paxton, 2009; Welch & Welch, 2004). Participants in this study were daily users of SM, and they wanted to share their venture-related and personal events, information and

perspectives with their SM audience and get the audience to interact with them. For example, participants took a picture of the workplace and uploaded it as a post on SM. According to them, this provided the audience with a look 'behind the scenes', allowing the audience to get to know the business and build trust so that they might choose to become a customer. This awareness means the audience is also pushed to interact with the participant. Another example of representing the human connection side of the venture used by the participants in this study was to introduce a new employee who had joined the venture, or interview a customer. Participants were of the view that interviewing a customer would be one of the best ways to build trust in a product/service offered by them and engage an interactive audience.

Sharing interactive information and creating transparency has also deemed to be financially beneficial for many of the participants in the long-term. Transparency refers to information being openly available on SM. Transparency supports the trust-building process by establishing cooperative behaviour where exchange or combination of resources take place (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). This cooperative behaviour was essential for the growth of the ventures, especially in resource-restricted environments. An example was a participant who was able to capture an entirely new segment of users based on interactive information sharing and transparency (see Section 6.2.4). This participant had helped make government policy regarding company registration more transparent and freely available in a presentation supported with documents outlining specific steps. As a consequence of this interactive information sharing, many companies had reached out to the participant to register their companies. The participant explained this was a benefit obtained for his venture because of the trust gained, as a result of the initial transparency of information. The ultimate benefit obtained through transparency and gaining trust was that the participants were able to gain more easily new customers for their ventures. This was a winning situation for most of the participants because as a result of these associations, their business contacts expanded for the venture while contributing to the establishment of the brand. Sharing interactive information, thus, expanded the network while the transparency of the information shared built trust. This was important for enabling venture growth and success.

- Selecting an appropriate SM platform for a venture

The second emergent concept (sub-strategy) in brand creation discovered in this study was the selection of appropriate SM platforms for a venture. Selecting an appropriate SM platform for a venture was vital for the participants to reach the target audience, expand their networks and optimise their social interactions. Mere presence in all SM platforms was not a necessity for a venture. Selecting which SM platforms to use for the growth of the ventures was an informed decision because "there isn't a go-to platform" (V16P16). Such selection was based on the

availability of the target audience for the product or service on a particular SM platform. Participants in this study believed different platforms had different propensities of people actively in it. For a brand to be known by the target audience, the participants had to make their presence within that platform. If they had selected the appropriate SM platform and created the presence, then more individuals would interact with the participant because they were available on that SM platform. Selecting an appropriate SM platform, thus, is a strategic decision that the participants needed to make to optimise their interactions with the audience.

Participants believed that Facebook was most effective in terms of the products or services that targeted the mass market. If it was a niche market segment, then the user activity was tracked, and Google Ads were used to capture them. If it was a product related to a specific skill set or a particular profession, it was very likely that this audience was available on LinkedIn. Further, the younger generation was mostly found on the SM platforms Snapchat and Blab. Most of the Asian housewives were active on Pinterest. However, the participants suggested that if it were a generic product and if the individual were starting their venture, then it was more effective to use Facebook because the chances of finding the target market on Facebook were higher than on any other platform. Apart from the SM-based audience presence, the study findings also indicated that there were industry-based preferences for SM platforms (explained in Chapter 5).

Consequently, participants also indicated that based on the location (region) in which the target market resided, SM platforms needed to change. However, the photographic community being linked to Flickr was the exception in this case. Participants within the photographic community believed that irrelevant of the region, the presence of the international photographic community resided within this platform. Therefore, with the appropriate selection of the SM platforms, participants were able to reach a broader audience who were interested in their product/service, thereby expanding their network and obtaining an optimal level of social interactions. By selecting an appropriate SM platform, participants thus ensured border reach, which expanded their network.

7.3 Internal, External and Management Factors Relating to SM Use

Based on the above discussion relating to strategies used by participants in this study, three stages under which the strategies could be categorised had been identified: what should be done before using SM, what should be done while using SM, and how to maintain a business using SM (summarised in Table 7.2). These strategies have been further grouped into three categories. First, the internal factors of SM (i.e. algorithms and platform-specific content creation), which were inbuilt and specific to an SM platform. Second, external factors, which were the factors that were not restricted to internal specifications of an SM platform but would be essential for a venture to reach its audience (i.e. selecting an appropriate SM platform). Third, management

and administrative factors, which were imperative internal venture-related aspects in managing SM (i.e. having contingency plans). Internal factors are represented with an (I); external factors are represented with an (E) and management/administration factors are designated with an (M).

Table 7. 2. Internal, External and Management Factors Relating to SM Use [20]
Source: Study Data

Before SM Use	Expected Outcome: Effective use of SM for the venture
Selecting an SM platform for the venture is crucial (M).	
Using SM	Expected Outcome: Gaining more customers, building trust and establishing brand loyalty
Understanding the algorithms that SM platforms use (I). Having contingency plans (M). Interactive information sharing and transparency: as a way of building the brand (E). Platform-specific content creation (I).	
Maintaining SM impact	Expected Outcome: Growing the business, repeat customers and credibility
Content quality (E). Handling reviews (E). Frequency of content (E). Creating engagement (E). Living breathing testimonial creation (E).	

7.4 Strategic Choices when Using SM

The five main strategies that have been discussed in this chapter were mapped with the participants and their choices of these strategies. They have been represented in Table 7.3 and discussed further in this section. Strategy One: Content Management (CM); Strategy Two: Engagement (E); Strategy Three: Handling Reviews (HR); Strategy Four: Understanding and using Technical details/functionality (UT); and Strategy Five: Brand Creation (BC).

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[20] I: represent internal factors, E: represents external factors and M: represents management factors.

Table 7.3. Participants Strategic Choices When Using SM[21]
Source: Study Data

Sector	Participant Numbers	Strategies Used				
		Strategy One: CM	Strategy Two: E	Strategy Three: HR	Strategy Four: UT	Strategy Five: BC
Creative	Majority of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V10P10	X	X	X	X	X
	V11P11	X	X	X	X	X
	V11P12	X	X	X	X	X
	V13P13	X	X	X	X	X
	V14P14	X	X	X	X	X
	V16P16	X	X	X	X	X
	V19P19	X	X	X	X	X
	V20P20	X	X	X	X	X
	V21P21	X	X	X		X
	V22P22	X	X	X	X	X
	V27P28	X	X	X	X	X
	V30P31	X	X	X	X	X
	V31P32	X	X	X	X	X
	V37P38	X	X	X	X	X
Food and Beverages	Majority of the participants used content management, understanding and using technical details/functionality and brand creation.					
	V1P1	X			X	X
	V23P23	X	X	X	X	X
	V26P26	X				
	V35P36	X	X	X	X	X
	V5P4	X	X	X	X	X
	V8P7	X	X	X	X	X
Retail	Majority of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V3P2	X	X			X
	V9P8	X	X	X	X	X
	V9P9	X	X	X	X	X
Education	Majority of the participants in this sector used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V15P15	X	X	X	X	X
	V18P18	X	X	X	X	X
	V4P3	X				X

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[21] Please note as the main strategies suggested in this chapter had sub-strategies associated, even if a participant used one sub-strategy, the participant was contemplated to be using the main strategy.

Consultancy	All of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V6P5	X	X	X	X	X
	V39P40	X	X	X	X	X
Software	All of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V12P13	X	X	X	X	X
	V7P6	X	X	X	X	X
	V24P24	X	X	X	X	X
	V38P39	X	X	X	X	X
Apparel	All of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned.					
	V29P30	X	X	X	X	X
	V25P25	X	X	X	X	X
	V34P35	X	X	X	X	X
Travel	Except for strategy four: Understanding and using technical details/functionality, all other strategies were used by the participants.					
	V32P33	X	X	X		X
	V36P37	X	X	X		X
Medical	Most of the participants were using content management, engagement and brand creation strategies.					
	V17P17	X	X			X
	V28P29	X	X			X
	V2P1	X	X		X	X

7.4.1 Creative Sector

Creative sector participants gained most out of their SM strategies. The nature of the creative sector meant that participants were able to capture their final products, process and showcase their products' uniqueness using SM. This also helped them create engagement on SM and aided their capacity to understand and experiment with the technologies and functionalities on SM. In the creative sector, the majority of the participants used all of the strategies mentioned. Only one participant (V21P21) did not use Strategy Four: understanding and using the technical capabilities and functionalities.

The participants V13P13 and V10P10 were heavy users of all of the strategies. This may be because their ventures were dependent on SM for their customer interactions and engagements. They used a variety of SM platforms in combination. V11P11 and V11P12 were partners in their venture. They depended heavily on these strategies to publish their services. They had good technology skills (as one partner was educated in information technology) and were able

to illustrate what worked for their venture. This additional knowledge made them experiment to identify what strategies work well for them and how it worked for them.

V14P14 was a participant who has understood the value of networking for the venture and had used strategies to expand this network continuously. V14P14 was also keen to engage in industry-based SM platforms, share knowledge and also build a reputation among the professional community. V14P14 maintained the work portfolio on SM, and the participant's main revenue generation was based on SM. V16P16 had started the venture with the minimum infrastructure. This participant's business model was based on SM platforms and the services provided by the venture was SM based. V16P16 managed the business and communicated with the customers exclusively using SM. This venture had shown rapid growth and created incubators. V19P19, V20P20, V30P31 and V22P22 had used all of the strategies similar to the majority of the participants in the creative sector and had succeeded in growing their ventures.

V27P28 was a participant whose venture was related to child photography. The participant used all of the SM strategies to establish this uniqueness in the venture. V21P21 owned a manufacturing venture, which manufactured customised products. These products were costly, and a product that lasted a lifetime. The product had a longer lifetime, so it made it more important for V21P21 to use all of the SM strategies, to make the best use of their existing customers, and attract new ones. V31P32 also had a unique product, while the uniqueness was based on the shared value system that the participant showcased with the product. These strategies have supported the participant to showcase shared values to the audience. V31P32 suggested that without SM, there would not have a venture at all.

7.4.2 Food and Beverage Sector

The majority of the participants in this sector used strategy one: content management; strategy four: understanding and using technical details and functionality; and strategy five: brand creation. Fewer individuals used strategy two: engagement and strategy three: handling reviews as some of them were focusing on selling their products to the already existing customers (V26P26).

V1P1 used strategy one: content management and had a good understanding of the technical/ functionality (strategy four); V1P1 capitalised on this strategy for the venture. The participant adopted strategy five: branding to gain more customers and grow as an international business venture. V5P4, V8P7, V35P36 and V23P23 were ideal participants for this study, with their business ventures depending on SM strategies. Their products were sold using SM; they represented the uniqueness of their products using the content management strategies (strategy one) their main business touchpoint was SM (adopting strategy two: engagement). They also

used all of the strategies mentioned in this chapter to grow their ventures. For example, participant V23P23 had a strong connection with SM that the participant indicated the customers would exactly want what was displayed on SM. For this participant, these strategies meant the growth and survival of the venture.

V26P26 had a family-owned venture and was known among the locals in their area. The participant had created Sri Lanka flavours combined with Western foods. However, their strategy related to use of SM was limited to strategy one: content management, where they were interested in displaying the new menus, and new food ranges introduced to the audience. However, as V26P26 already had a segment of customers that purchased their products daily, V26P26 did not see the need to expand SM strategies.

7.4.3 Retail Sector

The retail sector in this study was represented by three participants, V3P2, V9P8 and V9P9. All three participants used all of the SM strategies for their ventures. V3P2 had a unique product range based on coconut shells, which V3P2 was selling to the international market. V3P2 adopted all of the strategies giving priority to content management (strategy one), especially to describe the product as an eco-friendly option to a market (i.e. this customer segment was not used to coconut-based products). V9P8 and V9P9 were partners in a delivery service-based venture, where the participants managed all of their venture operations using SM. They adopted all of the strategies mentioned as they dealt with multiple products that required different strategy combinations.

7.4.4 Education Sector

The majority of the ventures in the education sector used all of the strategies mentioned and this supported the growth of their venture. However, one participant (V4P3) had outsourced their SM management and had not adopted many SM strategies. For this venture, although V4P3 had obtained the benefits of SM, as a strategy, V4P3 was unable to explain its use further. V4P3's venture was an international venture targeting a niche segment of the audience. V15P15's venture was at the inception level. However, the business model of the venture was SM based. Thus, they used all of the strategies mentioned. V18P18 was another international education-based venture which has reached a high growth level by adopting all of the strategies catering to a niche market segment similar to V4P3.

7.4.5 Consulting Sector

The consulting sector was represented by two participants in this study, V6P5 and V39P40. Both of these participants used all of the strategies. V5 is an international venture supporting SMEs with consultations. V39 was a consulting venture that supported the farming and

agricultural community with organic products. For V39P40's venture, shared values and uniqueness were showcased by adopting these strategies.

7.4.6 Software Sector

All of the participants used all of the SM strategies for their ventures. V7 was a product-based software venture. V7P6's use of SM was extensive, while their software products were SM based. V12P13 owned a customised software development venture. V12P13's interactions with the customers, their engagement with the stakeholders, and marketing their products were handled using SM. V24P24 was another participant who had all of their software services on SM. V24P24's venture operations were dependent on SM; the participant experimented with SM and acquired customers using SM. Thus, all of the strategies in this study were used. Similar to V24P24, V38P39 had all their operations on SM and was running an international venture.

7.4.7 Apparel Sector

All participants in this sector used all of the SM strategies for their venture creation and growth. V25P25 owned a venture, which targeted blue-collar-workers and provided them with professional clothing. This venture uses SM extensively and has also been experimenting with new features and functionalities associated with SM to gain more value for the venture. The main strategies used in this venture is engagement (strategy two) and handling reviews (strategy four) which was essential for the venture to gain its competitiveness and to retain their customers. The success of adopting all of these strategies resulted in the venture increasing their SM based customers. V29P30 is another example of a participant who had extensively used these SM strategies. V29P30's venture was completely operational online using SM. V34P35, on the other hand, used SM strategies as a means of projecting the uniqueness of their venture and to project the story beneath the venture. This showcasing and storytelling adopted in promotional methods meant that all of the strategies were used.

7.4.8 Travel Sector

The travel sector in this study was represented by two participants, V32P33 and V36P37. Both of these participants were running in-bound travel ventures. Their target audience was international clients. V32P33 had established partnerships with other ventures abroad to make the business a success. These partnerships were established and maintained using SM. V36P37 was a participant who had lived abroad for a long time and had established networks which were maintained using SM. The success of these venture partnerships, networks and customer awareness was dependent on them adopting four SM strategies (strategy one: content management; strategy two: engagement; strategy three: handling reviews and strategy five: brand creation). Both the participants' ventures were thus extensively using SM for both

internal and external operations of the venture. However, both the participants had not engaged extensively in the fourth strategy, understanding and using the technical details/functionality.

7.4.9 Medical Sector

The medical sector remained the sector that least adopted the strategies. This sector was guided by a set of privacy laws that made their interaction with SM to be at a minimum level. Thus, SM strategies, such as handing reviews (strategy three) were not used in this sector. The survival of these ventures was dependent on adhering to information privacy laws; thus limiting their SM use.

V2P1's venture used strategies to manage the content (strategy one), to suit the audience by considering the language and how best to communicate the messages. However, the participant's engagement with the audience was limited. V2P1understood and used the technical features/functionalities of SM (strategy four) effectively, to manage the venture while branding products (strategy five) to meet the international market. This has made the venture grow. V17P17 was another medical venture at the inception stage, at this point of time, V17P17 used strategies related to content management (strategy one), engagement (strategy two), and brand creation (strategy five). V28P29 was an owner of another medical venture which was just starting to use SM, and the participant had already adopted three strategies similar to V17P17.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesised the findings in the previous chapters and discussed them in light of the strategic use of SM for participants' ventures (i.e. youth entrepreneurial ventures). The chapter focused on understanding the intentional strategies that participants in this study considered in using SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth. Five main strategies were identified: (1) content management; (2) engagement; (3) handling reviews; (4) understanding and using the technical details and functionality and (5) brand creation. These strategies and the sub-strategies were discussed in this chapter. Further, these strategies comprised of a set of phase-based activities (before using, while using SM and maintaining SM) involving internal, external and managerial/administrative aspects. Finally, this chapter discussed the strategic choices made by the participants in this study to create and grow their ventures associated with their respective sectors. The final chapter presents contributions of the study, and key implications of this study for both theory and practice.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the key findings of this study. It revealed that participants used five main SM strategies to create and grow their ventures. These strategies were: (1) content management; (2) engagement; (3) handling reviews; (4) using technical details/functionality; and (5) brand creation. Together these strategies were useful for participants to create and grow their ventures as they enabled them to gain more customers, build trust in their ventures, establish brand loyalty, create repeat customers and gain credibility for their ventures. These strategies represented strategic choices made by participants to specifically create and grow their ventures, with participants making conscious decisions to adopt all, or some, of the strategies to achieve desired outcomes.

This chapter summarises the key findings and outlines the key contributions and implications of this study. It summarises research findings, explains the theoretical and the practical contributions of this study, and identifies the implications for research and practice.

8.2 Summary of Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore youth entrepreneurs' use of SM to create and grow their ventures. The main research question that guided the study was:

- Main RQ: Why and how do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

To address this primary research question, two sub-questions were posed:

- Sub RQ 1: Why do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?
- Sub RQ 2: How do youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth?

The study findings suggest that SM has provided new opportunities for youth entrepreneurs in developing nations. Most of the participants predominantly used SM to market their ventures to customers and gain their involvement in co-creation of SM content. SM supported the marketing activities of, and awareness creation about, their venture. It also enabled them to acquire customers. A novel finding of this study is that SM use has altered the traditional venture creation and growth process by supporting participants to: target and track user

activities to discover and exploit opportunities; redefine venture capital by reducing business costs and overhead costs; integrate marketing, products/services, organisational culture and personal branding to create a strong brand image; and convert the customer into a brand ambassador by using their reviews and testimonials. Further, the use of SM in ventures resulted in the emergence of altered business models (i.e. bloggers and vloggers) that required minimal resources and were different from traditional business models. SM also supported participants to establish online networks by adding members of their existing networks as SM contacts. Participants then maintained and grew their networks on SM, which provided them with instant access to their contacts. These networks comprised of customer networks, organisational networks, friends' networks and suppliers' networks. These networks enabled participants to access resources such as information, knowledge, finances and revenue.

Findings also revealed how participants used SM to create and grow their ventures. A novel finding of this study is that SM was a key and cost-effective resource for participants in their venture creation and growth process. Its cost-effectiveness made SM more lucrative to participants than traditional media as it enabled them to operate their ventures within restricted resources prevalent in developing nations. This study identified five main ways that participants used SM as a resource. First, participants used SM to communicate frequently with their audiences in order to establish relationships with them. These relationships were useful for participants to generate new ideas, identify opportunities, inform future decision-making, improve their venture's reputation, establish reliability and accountability to the public, increase their revenue and retain customers. Second, participants used SM to expand their networks to include new contributors and to obtain new information and knowledge that was vital for future decision-making, and maintaining partnerships and alliances for the growth of the venture. Third, participants used SM to project shared values with their audience to gain an avid following and enhance their revenue. Shared values were especially important for the participants whose products and services were associated with unique shared values (i.e. health projected through organic food productions). By projecting their shared values on SM, they gained a competitive advantage and recognition from the community. Fourth, participants used SM to establish transparency to gain the trust of their audience and improve the reputation of their venture. Fifth, participants were able to use SM effectively by continuously learning about the novel features of SM. Continuous learning enabled participants to keep up to date with new trends, experiment with new updates on SM platforms and decide on the best strategies to use with their ventures' SM.

This study also revealed that, when using SM, participants adopted five main strategies which were vital for their venture creation and growth. First, participants used content management to

elicit and maintain their audience's attention on their venture. Second, participants used engagement to interact with their audience, particularly consumers, and engage them in the process of co-creating SM content. Third, participants used SM to receive reviews of their products/services and carefully handled these reviews to ensure their response was well-received. Fourth, participants valued understanding and using the technical details and functionality of SM platforms, including the algorithms associated with different SM platforms, as this enabled them to communicate effectively with their audience. Finally, participants used SM to create their brand and to promote their venture. Overall, by considering these strategies, what is evident is that participants used SM in a well-planned manner, with participants intentionally making choices about their use of SM for their venture creation and growth. Furthermore, these strategies enabled participants to use SM in a resource-restricted environment. These strategies identified suggest how SM, a resource that is available for the participants in a resource-restricted environment, can optimise their venture creation and growth. It suggests the ways that they need to make strategic choices associated with SM. It provides insights into how these strategies can be applied to other ventures in resource-restricted environments.

8.3 Contribution of this Study

This study has made significant contributions to the literature on entrepreneurship, strategic decision-making and computer-mediated communications in five ways and made a contribution to practice in three ways. These are discussed in the sections below.

8.3.1 Contribution to Theory

- Contribution 1: SM assists youth entrepreneurs to operate within resource restrictions to create and grow their ventures in developing nations.

The first contribution to theory this study makes is through demonstrating how youth entrepreneurs can use SM to create and grow their ventures within a developing nation that faced severe resource restrictions. Developing nations provided a different set of challenges to youth entrepreneurship, namely restricted-resources and immature legal, political and financial institutions where corruption, bribery and unwarranted political influences were norms (Shah et al., 2017; Sivakumar, 2014). These challenges created uncertain business contexts in developing nations and acted as constraints to entrepreneurship and innovations (Vuong et al., 2016), by limiting venture growth. The majority of developing nations struggled with similar challenges (Shah et al., 2017; Sivakumar, 2014), especially with resource-restrictions that inhibited the growth of ventures. Resource-restrictions in developing nations took different forms. The most common resource-restrictions faced by developing nations were: a lack of adequate start-up capital, competition from the established ventures, a lack of employees with the right skills and

the difficulty in finding an affordable and adequate facility to start ventures (Linna, 2013). However, an under-explored area in the literature was how youth entrepreneurs, or entrepreneurs more broadly, could operate within these resource restrictions to create and grow their ventures.

This study has revealed how youth entrepreneurs can use SM to create and grow their ventures with restricted resources. It demonstrates that they can use SM to frequently communicate with their audience and establish and grow their networks. Frequent communication allowed the participants to make their touchpoints easier, stay relevant with what was happening and act on it faster than their competitors. Thus, frequent communications supported the participants to minimise the intense competition they faced by acting on opportunities faster than their competitors. Frequent communication on SM also enabled participants to receive information directly from their customers. Participants also used information about customer preferences to generate new ideas that 'fit-to-market' and supports brand loyalty and advocacy. Through using, SM participants were able to establish and grow their networks. Growth of their networks provided access to partnerships, which then supported ventures with start-up capital. These partnerships allowed different people with different expertise to come together as partners and share their knowledge, finances and contacts with each other through SM. Using SM allowed participants to also operate their ventures with minimal infrastructure, as they operated in a virtual environment and minimised their operating costs. Participants replaced the need for a shopfront or physical business presence with SM. Participants used SM to connect with their customers and used their home addresses as their physical location. This removed the need and cost of renting business premises for most of the participants, as the majority of the participants in this study were unmarried and lived with their parents who covered their living costs. This supported the participants to overcome the difficulty in finding adequate facilities to start their ventures. Using SM also enabled participants to access and recruit employees with necessary skills, when required, in a cost-effective manner. Participants reduced staffing costs because they had access to a pool of employees through SM. The nature of their ventures meant the work varied, with a high requirement for staff during production and a low requirement during other times. Therefore, most of the participants only required the staff on an *ad-hoc* basis. To recruit staff when required, participants used SM to source suitably-qualified and experienced staff. SM thus, ensured the participants had access to the employees with the right skills, as and when needed.

- Contribution 2: SM as more than a marketing tool for entrepreneurial ventures

The second contribution to theory this study makes is by demonstrating that SM is more than just a marketing tool[22] for micro-level youth entrepreneurial ventures. This study found that SM helped participants to recognise opportunities, reduce business and overhead costs, convert customers to brand ambassadors for their products and services and establish networks vital for venture success. First, SM supported the discovery and exploitation of opportunities for ventures by opening up global business opportunities. Participants used SM to identify opportunities by following other ventures, particularly their competitors, to obtain information regarding their products (type and variety) and costings. This targeting and tracking maintained their awareness of significant people (i.e. competitors) and events (i.e. industry-specific exhibitions) and was thus particularly useful for targeting both international and national markets. Second, SM redefined venture capital by reducing business costs and overhead costs. In typical venture capital, 80% of the money invested went into the infrastructure necessary to grow ventures, including fixed asset, working capital, manufacturing, marketing and sales (Zider, 1998).

In this study, SM redefined traditional venture capital through participants using SM to promote their ventures in a cost-effective way as opposed to using traditional media, by replacing the need for a shopfront or physical business presence with technology and by reduced staffing costs by accessing a pool of employees through SM. Third, participants converted their customers into brand ambassadors for their products and services. SM opened up two-way communication between participants and their customers, with customers being able to leave reviews, feedback, testimonials and engage in word-of-mouth marketing. Through customer reviews, audience could gain a positive insight into the participants' products and services as reviews were third-party content considered more trustworthy than official venture communication. This is similar to the competitive advantage that could be obtained using value networks discussed by Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998), where the ventures rely on mediating technology to link their customers. However, the concept of value networks discussed by Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998) has not been further established afterwards in the entrepreneurial or strategic management literature. Finally, SM enabled participants to establish and maintain networks which were essential for gaining resources, information and advice in a timely manner. In a typical venture, most contacts are accessed using face-to-face meetings and accessing the contacts were more official than what was provided via SM messages.

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[22] SM is typically portrayed as solely a marketing tool in the entrepreneurship literature (see Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020).

- Contribution 3: SM is a platform for building shared communities that support business ventures

The third contribution to theory this study makes is by suggesting that SM is a platform that can be used to build shared values between a venture and SM-based communities. The literature emphasises the importance of SM communities for information and knowledge sharing (Chiu et al., 2006; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009). It also suggests that shared values have a tendency to bring individuals together (Chiu et al., 2006; Kenter et al., 2015; Posner, Kouzes, & Schmidt, 1985). The novel contribution of this study is by suggesting that SM can be used to portray shared values between a venture and SM-based communities, demonstrating that this SM-based community provides entrepreneurial ventures with many benefits, such as easy access to a customer base, customer retention, increased revenue and competitive advantage. In this study, participants used SM to showcase their shared values related to their products/services and brand and reach a larger audience. Through appealing to the shared values of a community, participants could elicit greater interest in their venture and gain more SM followers. Participants emphasised the need to showcase their shared values to gain support from their community. These shared values provided participants with a sense of belongingness with others. The use of shared values also facilitated the establishment of a sense of "collectiveness" for the community in which the venture operated, providing participants with access to more resources, recognition and support from the community. Participants also obtained the support of like-minded individuals who purchased their products/services and enabled them to generate revenue. This shared value was also instrumental in gaining competitiveness for their ventures as they became known for their distinctive products/services, which appealed to a targeted audience and were able to differentiate participants' ventures from their competitors.

These communities created a stable customer base for the ventures to draw on. Consequently, within this shared community, it was easier for the participants to retain customers as they were already attracted to the shared values. This shared community was vital for participants and their micro-level ventures to obtain the support of their community in order to grow and sustain their ventures, as they had limited resources. This was especially the case during the inception phase of their ventures, where they needed to create awareness of their products/services offered. The findings of this study suggest that, as many ventures attempt to create their online presence using SM, shared communities can provide ventures with a distinctive advantage in retaining and gaining more customers based on their shared values.

- Contribution 4: SM as enables trusted micro-level ventures

The fourth contribution to theory this study makes is by suggesting SM can support the creation of trusted micro-level ventures through transparency. Although micro-level ventures are popular

among the youth, studies on micro-level ventures are limited (with the exception of Chigunta et al., 2005; Davidsson & Wiklund, 2001; Friar & Meyer, 2003; Harms et al., 2007; Odhiambo, 2013; Okurut & Ama, 2013; Oseifuah, 2010; Otieno et al., 2011; Pillai & Ahamat, 2018). This study addressed this gap through demonstrating how micro-level ventures could overcome the 'liability of smallness' (Aldrich & Auster, 1986; Bruneel et al., 2012; Kale & Arditi, 1998; Krackhardt, 1996; Steffens et al., 2009) through using SM. In particular, the findings of this study suggest that youth entrepreneurs can use SM to elicit trust in their ventures through being transparent in their interactions. In this study, transparency was achieved by participants making information and documents on their ventures available on their SM platforms. Participants also created transparency by sharing information and engaging in dialogue with their audience, which was a deliberate strategy used by the participants to portray the reliability and accountability of their venture. Therefore, transparency assured the audience the operational status of their venture and demonstrated that the participants did not have anything to hide. This indication of an operational status of the venture was important as the majority of these ventures were virtual, with participants operating from a home office (and not a physical shopfront), with contact with customers occurring primarily through SM. Thus, participants were keen to inform the audience that they were corresponding with a valid entity that could be trusted. They achieved this by being transparent in their operations. Establishing transparency was particularly important as participants operated in Sri Lanka, a country that is known for corruption, bribery and unwarranted political influences on business operations (Shah et al., 2017; Sivakumar, 2014). Therefore, for a venture to succeed, it was essential that it should be trusted.

- Contribution 5: SM as a mechanism for strategic business decisions

The fifth contribution to theory this study makes is by suggesting that SM is a mechanism for strategic business decisions. Although SM supports ventures in different ways, the role of SM in ventures and in an entrepreneurial context is under-researched (Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Turan & Kara, 2018), with only a few studies evident (Fischer & Reuber, 2014; Fischer & Reuber, 2011; Mumi et al., 2018a; Nambisan, 2018; Smith et al., 2017). Recent studies have examined the need for entrepreneurship and SM-based research (e.g. Mumi et al., 2018a; Olanrewaju et al., 2020), although only a few studies exist that have empirically tested this interaction using SM spectrum as a whole. This highlights the need for empirical research into entrepreneurship and SM, with Liu, Zhu, Serapio & Cavusgil (2019a) and Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca (2020) arguing this was a new and upcoming research area. Specifically, there is a need for understanding of entrepreneurs' motivations for using SM and how they use SM as a valuable resource to create and grow their ventures. This study contributes to this literature by suggesting that SM is a mechanism for strategic business

decisions and identifies SM strategies that the participants have used to create and grow their ventures.

This study found that participants purposefully used SM to manage their venture operations and make decisions regarding their ventures. First, participants' use of SM showed that they managed their SM content strategically. They created content which was multisensory and interactive with the intention of educating, entertaining and capturing the interest of their audience. Participants also used user-profiles on SM for content management. SM user-profiles helped the participants improve understanding of their customer segment by recognising preferences. This understanding was important for the participants to customise and personalise the content according to their target audience to generate more revenue. Thus, participants' management of SM content ensured the optimum level of interaction with their audience. Second, participants used SM to manage their SM engagement with the public, particularly consumers. The engagement process adopted by participants also included SM content co-creation with customers. This co-created content was used as a feedforward mechanism for product and service development. SM engagement based co-creation process involved customers sharing their product experiences and ideas on SM and participating in open discussions about product/services and sometimes voting for them on SM platforms. This co-creation of content provided participants with a competitive advantage as they were able to recognise opportunities to create new products/services or change existing products/services based on customer feedback and views. Third, participants used SM based reviews strategically to establish trust in their ventures. Reviews played a pivotal role in developing consumer confidence and trust in the participants' ventures. Reviews projected the public impression of the venture and/or its products/services on SM. Fourth, participants used SM strategically for branding their products/service/ventures. They used a collaborative strategy in branding. Their branding on SM consisted of making interactive information, projecting transparency using reviews and sharing inside information on SM to the audience and selecting the most appropriate SM platform to create their brand. This branding strategy supported participants to retain the interest of the audience and to interact continuously with them. Through interacting with their audience and establishing a reputation for their brand, participants could establish brand loyalty, build trust and, ultimately, increase their revenue.

8.3.2 Contribution to Practice

- Contribution 1: SM opened up new opportunities in the global marketplace

The first contribution to practice this study makes is by suggesting SM opens up new opportunities in the global marketplace for youth entrepreneurs in developing nations. Many individuals in developing nations use Internet technologies (Jain, 2018; Poushter et al., 2018).

They can access digital media and have the digital literacy to do so (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018b; Ministry of City Planning Water Supply and Higher Education, 2018). In this study, participants used SM to access the global marketplace in a more cost-effective way than using traditional media and traditional business models. In doing so, SM opened up the global market for participants by connecting them with individuals and organisations that were located elsewhere. The awareness and visibility in the global market created through SM were important for them. These findings provided insights into how other youth entrepreneurs could use SM to participate in the global market. This is important for youth entrepreneurs who aim to grow their ventures as international business ventures, with limited resources using SM.

- Contribution 2: SM has led to the emergence of novel business models

The second contribution to practice this study makes is the recognition of how SM has led to the emergence of novel business models (i.e. bloggers and vloggers). These novel business models were dependent on the concept of creating value by mobilising resources and activities to resolve a particular problem (i.e. lack of information or how to fix something). Thus resembling the value shop model discussed by Stabell and Fjeldstad (1998). However, in this study, the majority of the resources that were usually mobilised in these novel business models were information and influence. Through using SM, participants were able to create and grow their ventures in a cost-effective way that enabled lower overhead costs, a more accessible consumer experience, the ability to use digital marketing for their ventures and establish an *ad-hoc* team in a timely manner that responded to business need. These findings provide insights into how other youth entrepreneurs could use SM to create ventures using novel business models.

- Contribution 3: Selection of SM platform for ventures

The third contribution to practice this study makes is through highlighting the importance of youth entrepreneurs selecting carefully the SM platforms on which they operated. The SM presence created by a venture should be considered an important decision that involves consideration of industry, target market (age, profession, and the country) and the market segments (general public, niche) in which the venture operates. For example, in this study, ventures related to photography found Flickr to be a value-sharing and constructive feedback platform where like-minded users (industry-specific-users) were engaged. This study's findings reveal that SM platforms were different and this highlights the importance of youth entrepreneurs carefully selecting their SM platforms appropriately to gain the maximum benefit and being mindful in how they engaged with these platforms and the other users, depending on the nature of their business.

8.4 Implications of the Study

This study makes four implications for research and two implications for practice. These implications will support youth entrepreneurs in growing their ventures. They are discussed in the sections following.

8.4.1. Implications for Research

This study suggests four main areas for future research. The first area relates to understanding SM based business models. The findings of this study suggested that SM had changed the way youth entrepreneurs interacted with consumers and how they maintained their networks with stakeholders. The study also found that SM had led to the emergence of novel business models. These business models did not require a physical storefront but did require lower overhead costs, the use of digital marketing for ventures and an *ad-hoc* team responding to venture needs. Future research could undertake an in-depth exploration of these novel business models gain a comprehensive understanding of them and how they have changed traditional business models.

The second area of future research relates to the notion of using SM as a strategic tool for micro-level ventures. In this study, participants used SM as a resource for their ventures; they used SM in an intentional, strategic manner. It identified strategies that participants adopted in their use of SM to create and grow their ventures and achieve desired outcomes, such as increased revenue. Study findings also suggest that SM could be used to track competitors in order to achieve a competitive advantage. Future research could specifically focus on how SM can play a strategic role in ventures and enable the achievement of a competitive advantage for micro-level ventures. This would enable the micro-level ventures to reap the benefits of their agility and also overcome the intense competition that they faced with other larger companies.

The third area of future research relates to SM-based branding. The branding process identified in this study suggests a crucial combination of the participant's branding (personal branding), its interrelationship towards the venture specific branding (product/ service/ venture branding) and the organisational culture. This branding required a combination of the participants' professional (venture- related information) and personal (the participants' personal information). Most of the participants in the current study were of the view that they were required to showcase themselves on SM as an "all-rounder" with a professional and personal blend of information on SM. Further studies need to be conducted to gain understanding, from a marketing perspective, how the entrepreneur combines personal information, product/service/venture details and the organisation culture-related branding on SM platforms and its consequences to individual entrepreneurs.

A final area for future research relates to action research on the implementation of strategies suggested in this study and evaluating their effectiveness. The strategies that were identified in this study were based on the entire spectrum of SM used by the participants. For action research, a single SM platform-based study was suggested for simplicity and ease of comparison of the strategies among different industry sectors. Such research would provide more insights into the effectiveness of these strategies. Further, these strategies were identified based on micro-level ventures and their use of SM. Hence, it would be interesting to see how these strategies were applicable in the SME context. SMEs are better resourced (more employees and financial resources) than micro-level ventures. Thus, further studies are required to apply these strategies based on action research to SMEs to examine the suitability of these strategies for larger-scale ventures and to identify the corresponding changes that are required.

8.4.2. Implications for Practice

The first implication for practice of this study is, highlighting the need for supporting SM use in ventures with appropriate legal frameworks. Owing to the proliferation of SM, this study suggests that it is a necessity for ventures to create a presence on SM. The extensive use of SM meant it would be a future requirement of a nation to support these SM-based business activities with an appropriate legal framework. For example, legal frameworks of banking institutions should support online transactions. Currently, in the Sri Lankan context, participants are unable to obtain funds using applications such as PayPal because Sri Lankan banking policies do not support them. Further, consumers' engaging with online transactions should also have a way of recovering their payments if they do not obtain the product/service. A legal framework, therefore, needs to have ways of validating online payments and supporting consumers and ventures in this process. This legal framework needs to have policies and procedures to follow, and in the event of infringements, there should be judicial actions that can be taken by the businesses as well as the consumers. The legal frameworks should also support the international transactions in which participants engage. Many participants in the study were unable to expand their ventures because they did not have direct methods of costing international clients. This restricted the growth of their ventures. While the conditions of transacting online business supported by a legal framework were the norm in many developed nations, these policies were unknown in developing nations, such as Sri Lanka. Therefore, future research needs to consider how the use of SM for business purposes can be supported with appropriate policies and legal frameworks. Further, this area of research will ultimately be important for governments and the broader society as it could support a wider basis of economic growth.

The second implication for practice of this study is to highlight the importance of SM-based continuous learning. Study findings suggest that to operate and handle SM effectively, youth

entrepreneurs need to undertake continuous learning. Continuous learning refers to constant learning to expand knowledge and gain new skills in response to the changing environment and new developments (Emma, 2018; ExploreTalentlms, 2014). SM changes were continuously taking place; so keeping up with the latest developments was critical, but challenging, for many participants in this study. It was clear, however, that adapting to these changes was important for any venture that uses SM. Developments in SM usually facilitated more innovative, novel features that were used to reach SM audiences. By learning these features, participants in this study were able to gain more revenue for their ventures, ultimately leading to the growth of the ventures. Facilitating continuous learning and adaptation and avoiding short-sightedness could push venture forward by encouraging participants to learn new skills. Future studies are required to ascertain the topics and attributes needed in continuous learning of SM and suggest ways that youth entrepreneurs could approach and embrace these.

8.5 Limitations of the Study

The study contains some limitations. Several of these limitations are common in qualitative studies, while some are inherent in the research design. Careful thought has been given to ways of accounting for these limitations and to methods of minimising their impact. This study selected 40 participants, although it is a sufficient sample for a qualitative study, it is limited in numbers. The sample was also specific to youth entrepreneurs (aged 15-29) who were from a particular location (Western Province). This specific nature means the findings are not generalisable. However, the purpose of a qualitative study is not to generalise the findings but to provide more detailed information and explanations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, rather than attempting to generalise the findings, the researcher was more concerned about the transferability of the findings and strived to provide an in-depth overview of the lived experiences of the youth entrepreneurs. This transferability was obtained by providing the interview protocols, detailed descriptions about the context and background of the study. It was anticipated that this could result in the application of the findings to other similar contexts much easier.

The task of analysis also ultimately rests with the thinking and choices made by the researcher. This study acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity being continuously engaged with and interpreting the data. Thus, the researcher's bias may have affected the analysis process, although rigorous journaling and member checking was conducted to minimise such effect. To further minimise the subjectivity the coding schemas, coded transcripts and documents and the process were regularly checked by the research supervisors (i.e. using NVivo, the project was shared with the supervisors to provide their feedback). Potential bias during the analysis process

was eliminated by de-identification (explained in Section 4.7). Therefore the association of transcripts to the individual was not possible.

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APPENDIX A

OVERVIEW OF STUDIES CLOSEST TO UNDERSTAND HOW SOCIAL MEDIA IS USED BY YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS

A.1 Introduction

This appendix represents the branches of studies that were considered closest to the topic under exploration: social media use by the youth entrepreneurs. The closest branches of the studies were strategic entrepreneurship, digital entrepreneurship followed by social networks and entrepreneurship, social media adoption, virtual communities, and social identity.

A.2 Summary of Studies Closest to Exploring Youth Entrepreneurs Social Media Use

The closest branches of research for the current study are strategic entrepreneurship and digital entrepreneurship. Strategic entrepreneurship studies were useful for this study to understand the role of strategies, resources and social networks in venture creation and growth. Examining strategic entrepreneurship also indicates the importance of strategies to manage ventures in resource-constraints environments. It also aids in examining the important strategic decision making of the entrepreneurs. On the other hand, digital entrepreneurship studies were useful for this study to understand how the environment has changed for entrepreneurs with the use of digital technologies and to understand the benefits it provides. The most recent and most applicable studies indicating the recent trends in digital media entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship are discussed in this section.

Studies on strategic entrepreneurship consider how entrepreneurship as a process could benefit from using strategies. Seminal work by many authors indicates the value strategy could provide for entrepreneurship (Hitt, Ireland, Camp, & Sexton, 2001). Thus strategic entrepreneurship is considered a combination of opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking activities with small ventures being strong on opportunity-seeking activities (Ketchen Jr, Ireland, & Snow, 2007; Paek & Lee, 2018). A study by Mathews (2010) also suggests the strategy is successful based on the choices that are made by the entrepreneurs in terms of their resources, activities and routines together with their recombination.

The second closest branch of studies related to digital entrepreneurship is concerned with the use of digital technologies as a way of promoting entrepreneurship (Ebrahimi, Ahmadi, Gholampour, & Alipour, 2019; Giones & Brem, 2017; Song, 2019; Steininger, 2019; Yin &

Liu, 2019), with some studies suggesting that its appropriateness within the resource-constraint environments and the need for policies to support digital entrepreneurs (Nambisan, 2018; Ngoasong, 2018; Sahut, Iandoli, & Teulon, 2019). Understanding the need for digital entrepreneurship, few recent studies also suggest the need for entrepreneurship research to integrate with information system literature (Shen, Lindsay, & Xu, 2019; Steininger, 2019). Another study identified resource networks established by entrepreneurs as vital for their digital ventures (Srinivasan & Venkatraman, 2018). However, recent studies have suggested the need for integrating digital entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship (Kraus, Palmer, Kailer, Kallinger, & Spitzer, 2019; Shen et al., 2019). A recent conceptual study was found which integrated media entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship and suggested such convergence could contribute towards the success of the ventures by contributing to the development of visions, exploitation of opportunities, management of people, establishment of networks, enhancement of creativity, and facilitate strategic planning (Horst & Murschetz, 2019).

Apart from the studies mentioned above, studies related to social networks and entrepreneurship remains are another branch of literature applicable to this study. These studies suggest that local networks (family and friends) play an essential role during early stages of entrepreneurial activity, and other regional, national and global level networks help entrepreneurial activities at later stages (Casson & Giusta, 2007; Smith et al., 2017).

Three other categories of research are considered related to the current study: (1) social media adoption; (2) virtual communities; and (3) social identity. Studies related to social media adoption (Bolton et al., 2013; Boyd, 2007; Gavino, Williams, Jacobson, & Smith, 2019; Huang, Hsieh, & Wu, 2014; Kapoor et al., 2018; Penni, 2017; Turan & Kara, 2018; Vaterlaus, Barnett, Roche, & Young, 2016; Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2011), are considered relevant for the current study as they relate to how SM has changed business ventures by changing the traditional methods of reaching consumers. These studies suggest the need for understanding the adoption of SM among Internet users and young people, explaining that they use of SM is both a personal and a professional level (Bolton et al., 2013; Boyd, 2007; Ensign & Jacobs, 2019; Gavino et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2014; Penni, 2017; Turan & Kara, 2018; Vaterlaus et al., 2016; Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2011). These studies also indicate traditional methods of reaching consumer-oriented markets are less likely to produce insights that guide marketers' future targeting and positioning strategies (Barns, 2016; Crammond, Omeihe, Murray, & Ledger, 2018; Eggers, Hatak, Kraus, & Niemand, 2017; Hassan, Nadzim, & Shiratuddin, 2015; Karimi & Naghibi, 2015; Turner & Endres, 2017). Entrepreneurial strategy supports SMEs (small and medium enterprise) activities (Balocco, Cavallo, Ghezzi, & Berbegal-Mirabent,

2019; Gans, Stern, & Wu, 2019), SM has been used for marketing by gaining attention (i.e. creating controversy of a product so that people will talk about it), interest (i.e. displaying pictures of a product), desire (i.e. giving promotions) and action (i.e. having a clear ordering process) (Hassan et al., 2015). These studies indicate that some ventures use SM as a driver for their marketing strategies (Karimi & Naghibi, 2015).

The second category of research includes studies related to virtual communities. These studies were vital for identifying the networking elements that exist within the online virtual environments and how they interact within the online environment (see Ardichvili, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Chiu et al., 2006; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009; Sankaran & Demangeot, 2017). These studies propose how social interaction ties, trust, the norm of reciprocity, identification, shared vision and shared language influences individuals' knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Ardichvili, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009). Virtual community-based studies recommend a set of community-related outcome expectations and personal outcome expectations that can engender knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Ardichvili, 2008; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009). Further, they also suggest these virtual communities facilitate collective learning in ventures and knowledge management (Crammond et al., 2018).

The third category, social identity-based studies, are relevant to understanding youth entrepreneurs and how they establish a social identity on SM platforms, which leads to building trust, reaching for support and interactions for individuals, venture and the community. The social identity based studies (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Guan & So, 2016; Ito, Davidson, Jenkins, Lee, & Weiss, 2008; Lipizzi et al., 2013) suggest that individuals who have a stronger social identity with a given social group perceive more significant social support from a group, which in turn predict higher self-efficacy of engaging. They also propose young individuals' social media identity can provide essential opportunities for self-reflection and self-realisation, and for expressing some of the conflicts and crises that characterise this age group (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Guan & So, 2016; Ito et al., 2008; Lipizzi et al., 2013). For youth entrepreneurs, such opportunities for self-reflection and self-realisation, and expression of conflicts will be extremely valuable for portraying themselves on SM and for the general awareness creation among SM users. Further, these studies advocate community building and social identity creation within the SM environment important for ventures and individuals (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Guan & So, 2016; Ito et al., 2008; Lipizzi et al., 2013). This social identity can have consequences such as building trust, reaching for support and interactions for

individuals, venture and the community as a whole (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Guan & So, 2016; Ito et al., 2008; Lipizzi et al., 2013).

Based on the previous studies mentioned above, it is evident that studies considering how entrepreneurs use SM are limited. Only a single study which has empirically tested this integration was found (Mumi et al., 2018). However, based on the conceptual studies (Mumi, Ciuchta, et al., 2018; Nambisan, 2018; Smith et al., 2017), it could be suggested that the need for studies examining this integration is a necessity. Further, studies have begun to examine the use of SM for entrepreneurship as a current and upcoming research area as evident by the call for papers by Liu, Zhu, Serapio, & Cavusgil, (2019) and Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, and Mercieca (2020). Therefore, the current research explores the interaction between the youth entrepreneur and SM aiming to understand how and why youth entrepreneurs use SM for their micro-level venture creation and growth. It will consider the youth entrepreneurs' use of SM to understand what they achieve by using SM, what strategies they use, and their motivation towards using SM for their ventures.

Additionally, this study extends the research stream on SM and applies it to the literature on entrepreneurship, specifically to youth entrepreneurship and strategic entrepreneurship. In contrast to the existing SM literature that primarily focuses on the use of SM as a marketing tool, this study advances the understanding of the SM phenomena by proposing that youth entrepreneurs' use of SM could help them recognise an opportunity, acquire resources in the venturing process, and establish social networks vital for entrepreneurs' resource mobilisation . Apart from this, in this study, SM will be considered a valuable resource for entrepreneurship, especially in resource scarce environments. The way that youth entrepreneurs use SM for their venture creation and growth will thus reveal valuable strategies related to how SM could become a strategic resource for entrepreneurs in a resource-constraint environment. This understanding would help future entrepreneurs to develop successful strategies on why one could use SM, what are the benefits of this and different ways of applying it for different outcomes. By examining the micro-level ventures, this study also contributes towards a less researched area in entrepreneurial venture specification. Further, this study examines the interaction between the youth entrepreneur and SM using a developing nation's context, extending the research stream to include developing nation's perspective.

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APPENDIX B

PHASE ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

B.1 Introduction

Phase one, SM based online interviews were vital for building the rapport. They further, contributed to getting a rough date and time for the formal interview sessions. All the online interview recordings were identified with the date and the unique combination of Venture-Participant Number (VP number). All recordings were transcribed for the analysis process. The SM based interview questions used are represented in Figure A.1.
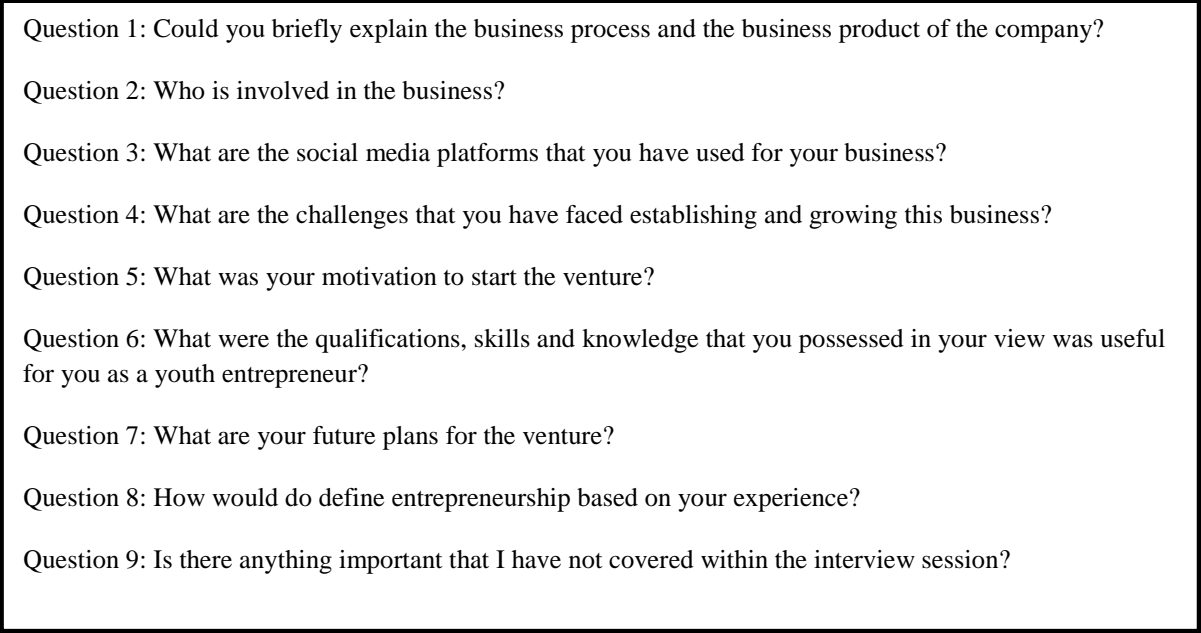

Question 1: Could you briefly explain the business process and the business product of the company?

Question 2: Who is involved in the business?

Question 3: What are the social media platforms that you have used for your business?

Question 4: What are the challenges that you have faced establishing and growing this business?

Question 5: What was your motivation to start the venture?

Question 6: What were the qualifications, skills and knowledge that you possessed in your view was useful for you as a youth entrepreneur?

Question 7: What are your future plans for the venture?

Question 8: How would do define entrepreneurship based on your experience?

Question 9: Is there anything important that I have not covered within the interview session?

Figure B.1. Initial Online Interview Questions

APPENDIX C

PHASE TWO INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

C.1 Introduction

The formal interview session contained questions which started off with the general issues and ended with general questions while the mid-section of the interview contained more in-depth questions. This sequencing of questions provided a sandwich effect for the study and was appropriate for ending the interview with a positive note. However, some of the areas were combined and the sequences of the questions were interchanged based on the flow of the interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for the analysis process.

Few themes needed to be covered within the interview session which was the following.

1. Awareness of online social media
2. Defining online social media as viewed by the entrepreneurs
3. Convergence or separation of online social media contacts as personal and professional
4. Traditional media Vs Online social media
5. Online social media management
6. Categorising online social media contacts
7. Online social media value measurement
8. Advantages and disadvantages of online social media
9. Work-life balance
10. Activity – Modelling/ Mapping the network structure

The above grouping was what was needed for the researcher to ask the questions and guide the phase two interview sessions. The same categories were used in the interview transcripts to group things up according to the order they appear on the transcript. This provided organisation of content and ease of navigation. The question and the prompts that were under each of these sections are represented below.

Awareness of Online Social Media

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1. Are you aware of online social media?

Do you use online social media for your venture?

If so, describe the online social media that you use?

Do you use any of the social media for business? If so how?

Defining Online Social Media as Viewed by the Youth Entrepreneurs

2. How do you interpret online social media? (based on the usefulness that you have gained for your venture and your experience with it)

Convergence or Separation of Online Social Media Contacts (Personal, Professional)

3. How would you classify online social media used in your venture? (personal, professional)

4. What do you use online social media for?

5. Do you use them individually or in conjunction /linked?

Traditional Social Media Vs Online Social Media

6. How have you used traditional social media and online social media at different stages of your venture?
    a. How did you find your business opportunity?
    b. How did you select your business model?
    c. Did you use different social media at different stages of the venture development?

Management of Online Social Media – Skills, outsourced

7. How do you manage the different online social media that you use?

Online Social Media Contacts and Organising and Grouping them

8. Do you have all your contacts in one group or have you categorised them?

If so, how and what are the circumstances that you will use each group for?

Online Social Media – Value Measurement?

9. How would you measure the value derived from these online social media interactions?

10. Could you give an example of a scenario(s) where the value was derived from such interactions with social media for your venture?

Work Life Balance and Contingency Plan

11. How do you manage your work-life balance?

12. What contingency plans do you have for your venture in the event say you are not well for some time?

Any Other

13. Is there anything important that I have missed that you would like to add?

Activity- Mapping the Social Network Structure
Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media
Any Other –Web site Vs. Social Media

APPENDIX D

QUALITATIVE NETWORK MAPPING

D.1 Introduction

This appendix contains the network modelling activity samples. Network modelling was conducted at the end of the face-to-face interview sessions and was valuable in obtaining more insights to youth entrepreneurs' SM based networks and their contribution towards their ventures. The explanations made by the entrepreneurs while doing the activity was audio-recorded and transcribed, along with their respective interview transcripts.

D.2 Activity –Mapping the SM network structure

The activity which was to map the SM network structure was an initiative that the researcher decided to take as a visual representation of the venture based networks that the youth entrepreneur considers essential for his/her venture.

The researcher asked the participants to indicate suppliers, family[23], friends, organisations customer links and any other networks that the entrepreneur had on SM platforms and asked to represent whether they were considered strong or weak by the participant as applicable for his/her venture. The researcher requested the participants to provide a rationale for representing weak or strong relationships. This proved to be a valuable addition in understanding participants' SM networks. Following shapes and colours were used while additional notes were also made.
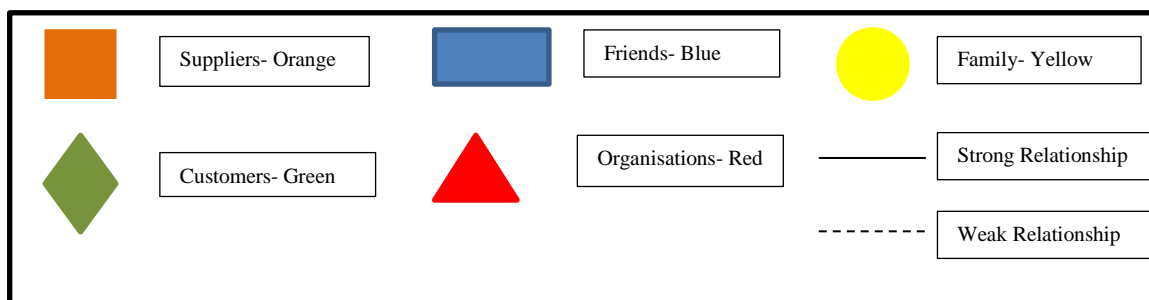

Figure D.1. The Symbols Used for the Network Mapping Activity

All participants considered in this study performed the qualitative network mapping, although; initially, the researcher had doubts regarding how successful and practical it would be. This method proved to be beneficial in providing some additional insights into how participants made and sustained their networks using SM.

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[23] Please note that the family network was established and prominently maintained as an offline network. Thus, the findings on SM networks have not discussed the family network.
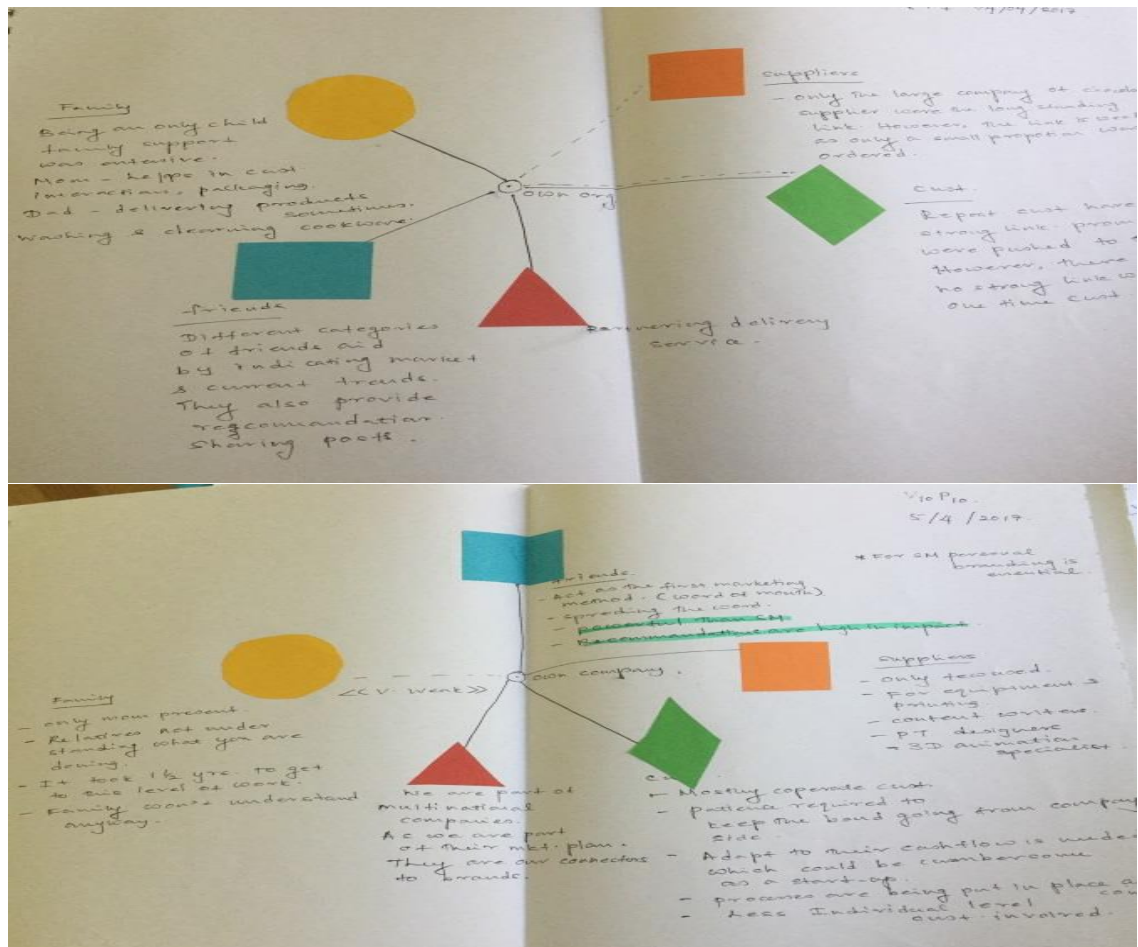
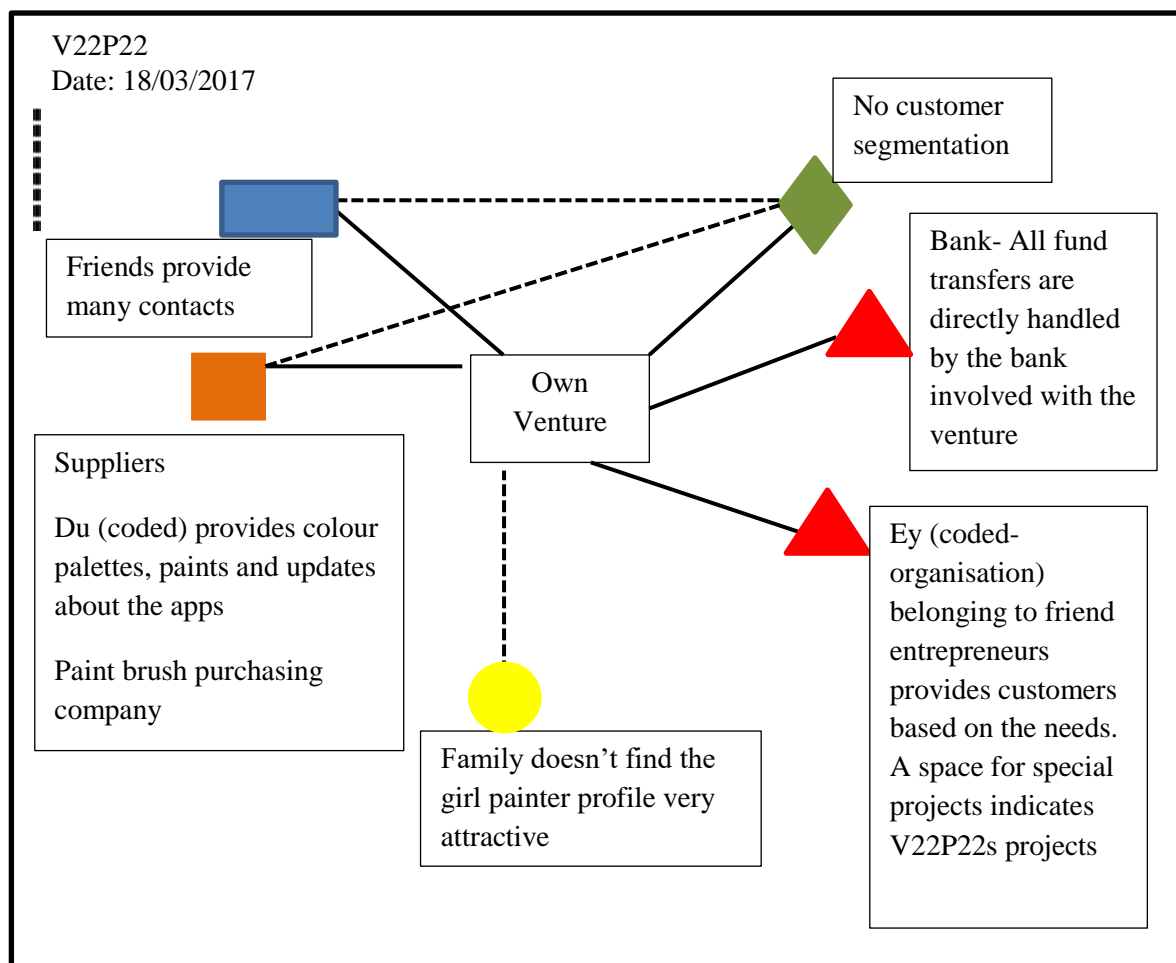**Figure D.2. Sample of the Network Mapping Activity (Written Document)**

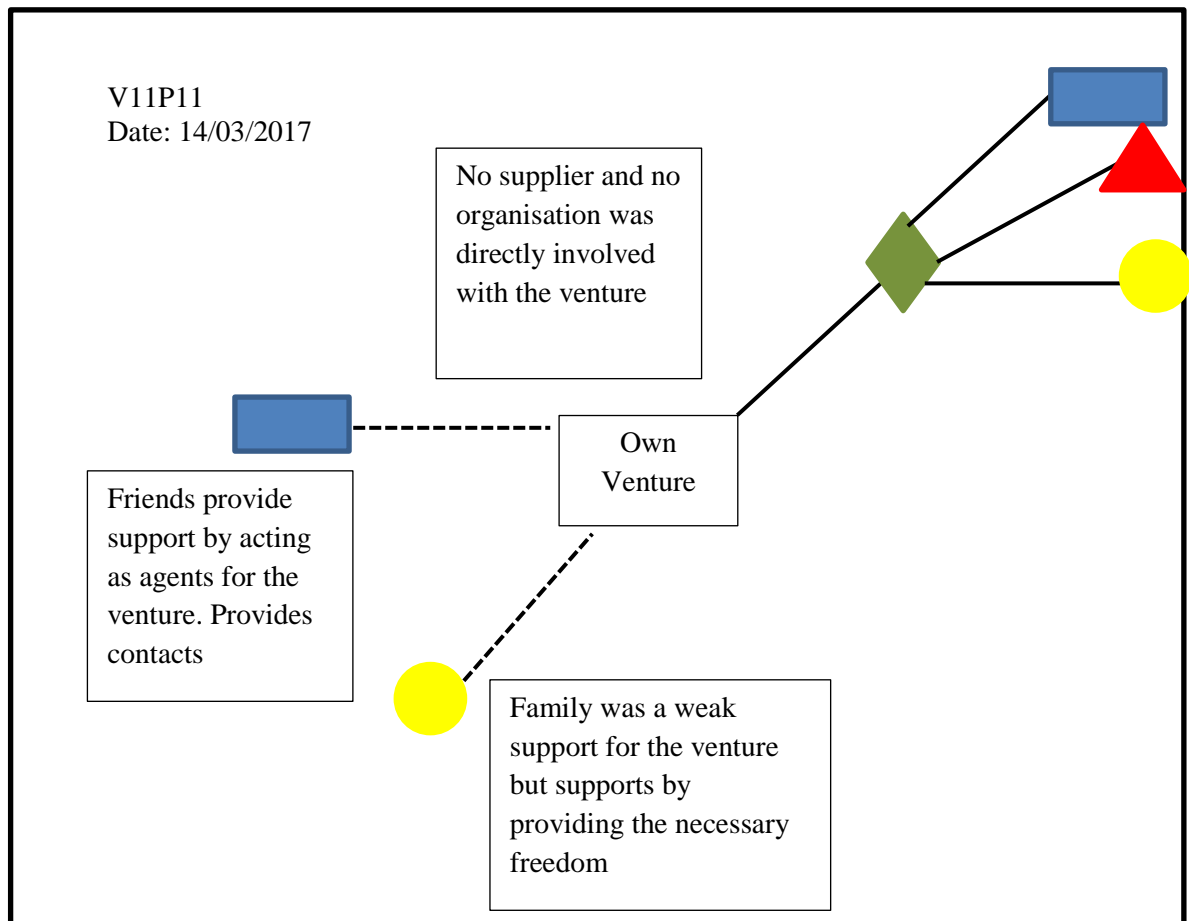**Figure D.3. Sample of the Network Mapping Activity (Digitalised)**

Within the figure:

V22P22
Date: 18/03/2017

No customer segmentation

Friends provide many contacts

Bank- All fund transfers are directly handled by the bank involved with the venture

Own Venture

Suppliers

Du (coded) provides colour palettes, paints and updates about the apps

Paint brush purchasing company

Ey (coded-organisation) belonging to friend entrepreneurs provides customers based on the needs. A space for special projects indicates V22P22s projects

Family doesn't find the girl painter profile very attractive

Figure D.4. Sample of the Network Mapping Activity (Digitalised)

The figure contains the following text elements:

V11P11
Date: 14/03/2017

No supplier and no organisation was directly involved with the venture

Friends provide support by acting as agents for the venture. Provides contacts

Own Venture

Family was a weak support for the venture but supports by providing the necessary freedom

APPENDIX E

MAPPING OF SOCIAL MEDIA USED BY ENTREPRENEURS

E.1 Introduction

This appendix represents areas related to what are the social media youth entrepreneurs use? This appendix shows the categorisation of specific social media platforms and their use based on the participant responses (See table D.1)

Table E.1. Participants SM Use
Source: Study Data

Social Media Platform and Relevant Quotes	Category/ Purpose
Facebook	**Social Networking Services**
Facebook, basically we are using as to get some publicity for our work and keep engaging with our users and customers and giving them new knowledge about what's happening in mobile space and kind of things such as technology in Sri Lanka start-ups arena kind of things (24P24).	Publicity, Engagement Knowledge sharing – Industry
In the context of the formats, Facebook allows more content and more like expressing manner. (V20P20).	Expressive nature of the content
Facebook becomes a better marketing platform because you can run campaigns and you can target more people in a more particular way. In Facebook, you can target particular people, location, interests. Because they have likes and dislikes system so can target that (V20P20).	Tool for targeting marketing campaigns
What we do is daily we upload one post, and we boost it every day for 5$ and so that targeting our target audience which is obviously the high-end consumers, who live in Colombo, age from like18 to 45 years old. And we have seen, like a great impact because on the days that we just post a boost and sorry, on a day we just post one post, and on a day that we post and boost the post, there's a huge difference (V23P23).	Impactful campaigns
And that's how most of the clients find me because there are these questions pages, where people ask hey where can I find an artist like this? Then so many people link me, so that's where most of the clients actually find me (V22P22).	Customer acquisition through linking
So that's the major thing that we started a FB page and initially, it was like a trend like if we have a business we have to have a Facebook page and also those like intentional, impulse decision like we need to have a Facebook page (V30P31).	Following a trend
Regardless we have a big following. So whenever we post something we usually, how it works is, we post pictures of the products and then we get inquiries, from customers, interested parties. And then we ask them for their details, like shoe sizes, if they are not sure, we have a size chart that we provide them with… (V31P32).	Inquiry-based two-way communication platform

So, I use Facebook mainly because of the reach, it has access to, I mean I don't know the numbers exactly but billions and millions of people are using Facebook every day and also you can, it's inexpensive and also you have this option, you have Facebook ads, so the targeted ads; that is useful because it's like analytics side component is there, so you can track, like, who is viewing and how much money you spending so, it's like very effective to use (V32P33).	Reach, inexpensive, advanced tracking
The first thing I think is that it is necessary to communicate product awareness saying we have a product like this, the benefit of this. So, the communication I think is the most important thing and getting connected to people through likes. I think that is important as this is a new product (V3P2).	Awareness creation tool
So all the information about the business, how to contact me, what's on the menu and things like that is on Facebook. So Facebook captures most of this audience I would say. Especially if you take the people who are in the 50s 60s range as well (V8P7).	Business visibility Reach
Because things started on Facebook. Because very frankly it was my university period right. No money. I tried to connect with foreigners very frankly more than locals [it was the] foreigners [who] helped me. They funded me. They provided me with the initial fund also. They purchased 20% shares also. All these things because of Facebook (V6P5).	Foreign investment opportunities
So right now they get Facebook messages saying I want this, this particular code. So then they build up a conversation like where do you stay? Ok, we can send it like..if you buy above 5000 the delivery is free (V25P25).	Customer acquisition
LinkedIn	**Social Networking Services**
LinkedIn is something that we will use for perhaps to hire potential employs. And to also target consumers with maybe high net worth and so on. (V17P17). LinkedIn is mainly for professional people, office. So we can directly go into director level. CEOs (V11P12).	Recruitment, High-end customer acquisition Approaching high-level individuals in organizations based on their profiles
We primarily use LinkedIn. LinkedIn as a paid service to generate some leads….Because our market is primarily B2B sales LinkedIn is more useful (V18P18).	Lead generator for B2B
Instagram	**Media Sharing**
And Instagram, because there is an option for pictorial representation, maybe like 1 image I can put off like a summary of the event or something. (V19P19).	Representation uniqueness – picture based
Instagram is an image or several images and a little description. So basically Instagram is like a showcase. (V20P20), When we want to showcase some of our work like user interfaces kind of things so we use Instagram. Because it's mainly photo-based social media. So, we publish our user interface, logos and things within it on Instagram (V24P24).	Portfolio
But then again, I have linked Facebook to Instagram. So, Instagram is a platform where I can directly use the pictures, tag them. Say the place; this is what I did. And I can link them both to Facebook and Twitter (V22P22).	Cross-platform compatibility

Instagram is still like; I guess it's a higher-end; it seems like a higher end, higher spending market. It's certainly less hostile outside. But it's also; we have a pretty good reach on Instagram (V37P38).	Reaching the higher-end market segment
But if you take Instagram, you get the younger generation who are really active on it. And people who, especially the people who are from 13 into like 30, 35, that age who are really active on Instagram and especially who follow trending topics and things like that (V8P7).	Active younger generation targeting tool Prolonged visibility
And with Instagram, the thing is there's this new thing called Instagram stories. So it pops upright on the top of your newsfeed (V8P7).	Promotions
Customers get through to me on Facebook and Instagram. That is my two main social media (V35P36).	Customer Acquisition
Instagram for the photography part we are promoting photography, and we used to promote working culture, when we are hiring people, we want to get some good people on board. So we wanted to give the idea of how [the] working culture in V10 (Coded) [is] and what is happening within the company. (V10P10).	Promotions Aiding the recruitment process- portraying the company culture
We usually do live updates because if we are doing shooting at a particular place we put up a picture or with some people it is more or less like to let people know that we are working on this type of things, that is the focus of Instagram (V11P11)	Live status updates
So the strongest would be social media because I normally use like a lot of like..say from Facebook to platforms like Instagram you market something like photography and it goes a long way. Like people show it to each other and you see contact details and you get a call saying that I saw your picture and I want to know your rates. Therefore, like business really is escalated there (V14P14).	Reach Business Acquisition through inquiry
In Instagram, their algorithm is made like if it is good you get featured (V20P20).	What is good gets the priority.
My business gives out a product, huge products which always relates to images, picture and all that. So I need a way to publicize things. So that's why I use Instagram (V22P22).	Better for image related ventures
Twitter - Hashtag relevance is important	**Microblogging**
Therefore, we use Twitter to publicize about our upcoming app and features and everything to connect with the users. We use the relevant hashtag with it like EXEB (Coded) for last year. That gets most users through twitter (V24P24).	User Interaction
And after that twitter just goes faster (V19P19).	Speed of transmission
Twitter it's. Basically we can contact people more like more personal way. Like Facebook has become this corporate stage while Twitter has become more personal like you can see all the celebrities all the brands kind of way. It's cool. It's a good way to keep people in contact with the real clientele (V20P20).	Personal level interaction, Presence of important people on the same platform
I use Twitter, but people do find me as a hey @V22 (Coded) can you do this for me so then I respond. So it's …there's no publicity per says it's just direct questions (V22P22).	A tool of inquiry

And Twitter actually, because a lot of these adventure travel agencies are using Twitter to communicate. So, I thought if they are using Twitter, there must be, like, the adventure travel community must be using Twitter, so that's why I'm just trying to, like, but I'm not very active on twitter (V32P33).	Following industry trends- belonging to a community
YouTube	**Media Sharing**
We use YouTube like we want to give users a guide about how this thing works. What are the features, in that case, we have created a video about applications, and we upload those videos to YouTube. So that's how we use YouTube (V24P24).	Demonstration purposes
Other than that, it's going to be platforms like YouTube, where a lot of people sort of reach out to find more information on how to solve their own problems. So we can have introductory videos of the product and the system on YouTube. (V17P17).	Information sharing and Problem-solving tool
YouTube it is like this only if a client asks me to do a time-lapse video, I do the time-lapse video for the painting, and I publish it (V22P22).	Advance features to showcase creativity
YouTube, now, Sri Lanka is catching up with the Youtube channel. They still don't believe it as a, that we can start a channel on YouTube. As, bit, the current generation we know that next marketing tool will be YouTube. So we started creating our page, to a, our Youtube channel to a better level that in future, once we are using it to earn money, we have built up our place. So that's why we started putting our videos and getting subscribers, not in a bigger manner but we are still telling people to subscribe us (V30P31).	Trendsetter –leading to the business generation
Yeah a lot of equipment, like, actually I self-learned. I haven't gone for any classes or anything, so I got YouTube and all the tutorials, so the things they use, most of them are not even possible to purchase them here (V35P36).	Learning tool
Once we do activation videos we evaluate them, we are evaluating our activations sometimes we do a video with the photos and the snapshots, and then we present it to the client, and also we upload it in our page as well and our Youtube channel as well (V30P31).	Product testing ground
Blogs- WordPress and Blogger	**Blogs**
What happens with blogs is actually there are quite a lot of blogs in Sri Lanka. And most of them are targeted to the technical field. And so if I can feature on those blogs. There are different people, even my friends who are doing blogs, and there are many famous sites such as RM.lk (Coded) and stuff which are like technically oriented. So I think I can have a higher reach to people who are engaged in tertiary education through sites like this, blogs like this. So I think even blogs would be a really effective platform to market my business (V15P15).	Capturing a specific audience
WhatsApp , Viber and Skype	**Voice Over IP**
Mainly for contacting purposes I use WhatsApp and Viber. Because it opens up this space for international clients as well rather going through normal phone lines (V20P20).	A cheaper mechanism to reach international clients
Skype and Viber, I use to communicate with the customers and the agent in India. So Viber, all my official calls are done through Skype,	International reach, cost-

so to save cost because it's cheaper and Viber also the same thing. And also, WhatsApp; I use WhatsApp with the Indian clients, the end clients. So, when I send them the quotes I drop them a text via WhatsApp and ask them have you seen the quote because it's inexpensive (V32P33).	effectiveness
We have a group of travel agents in one particular group. WhatsApp group. We exchange information we share videos, e-flyers and all that amongst that group. And it makes it so much easier for them also to market it (V36P37).	Internal Group Communication
Snap Chat **- Dependence on the phone connection considered negative**	**Media Sharing**
Snapchat we just use it for behind the scenes stuff. Snap Chat is for like limited corporates. Because it has to be tied to a phone, so you can't reproduce stuff. If we could, we would love to use Snapchat for that (V37P38).	Back-end work
Google Tools	**Document Sharing Services**
Google tools all the tools we are using. Including Google sheets and Google sites also. Hangout also google. The reason was social media is less cost. It helps us to connect with more people (V6P5).	Cost-effective
Google provides all kind of features [like] enterprise business tools. That means all [the] things including Google hangout, chat and Google plus. Because our business is completely online if my clients use any kind of offline excel sheet or something we can't communicate as it does not support real-time information. But if they use Google sheets we can access it in real-time (V6P5).	Connecting with others Supports businesses by providing an integrated toolset.
Flickr	**Media Sharing**
I like Flicker because it is professionally like the photographer's platform for showing their work and unlike Facebook, you can't exactly right click and save the image. So there is like a less chance of plagiarism (V14P14).	Professionalism Plagiarism minimised

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

F.1 Introduction

This appendix displays the participant consent form used for the formal interview session. All of the participants have signed the agreement represented below.

School of Business

UNSW
AUSTRALIA

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM
Youth Entrepreneur
Influence of online social media on micro-level youth entrepreneurial firm creation and growth
Dr. Saskia de Klerk, Dr. Daniel Prior, Gayathri Ranasinghe

1. **What is the research study about?**
   You are invited to take part in this research study. The research study aims to explore, understand and describe the ways in which youth entrepreneurial micro level ventures in service and manufacturing sector in Sri Lanka has utilised online-based social media during different phases of the creation and growth of their ventures. You are invited because you are/were a youth entrepreneur who has experienced the process of venture creation and growth and the researcher needs to understand how online social media has been used within this process.

2. **Who is conducting this research?**
   The study is being carried out by the following researchers: **Dr. Saskia de Klerk, Dr. Daniel Prior and Gayathri Ranasinghe, School of Business, UNSW, Australia,**

3. **Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**
   Before you decide to participate in this research study, we need to ensure that it is ok for you to take part. The research study is looking recruit people who meet the following either or both of these criteria:
   - You are born between 1980-1998
   - You are a youth entrepreneur owning/part of a micro level youth entrepreneurial firm (annual turnover of less than or equal to Rs.15 million (approximately 0.10M. USD) or the venture has less than 10 employees are expected.

4. **Do I have to take part in this research study?**
   Participation in this research study is voluntary. If you do not want to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the study at any stage.

   If you decide you want to take part in the research study, you will be asked to:
   - Read the information carefully (ask questions if necessary);
   - Sign and return the consent form if you decide to participate in the study;
   - Take a copy of this form with you to keep.

5. **What does participation in this research require, and are there any risks involved?**

   If you decide to take part in the research study, you will be asked to participate in a face to face interview session initially. Sometimes as follow-up mechanism you may be asked few details through email. You will be asked questions about the online social networks used within the different phases of the firm, use of online social networks in the future for your firm and how it has already been used during the establishment phase of the firm. To ensure we collect the responses accurately, we seek your permission to digitally record the interview using an **Audio recorder**. The **anonymity** of your responses will be maintained using coding to de-identify you. Also in **publications** related to the research names or identifiable words will not be used.

   We don't expect the questions to cause any harm or discomfort, however if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study you can let the research team know and they will provide you with assistance.

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If you decide to take part in the research study, the research team we will ask you to *few questions*. It should take approximately **one hour** to complete the task.

We don't expect the *interviews* to cause any harm or discomfort, however if you experience feelings of distress as a result of participation in this study you can let the research team know and they will provide you with assistance.

6. What are the possible benefits to participation?
We hope to use information we get from this research study to benefit other youth with entrepreneurial intentions who will be starting micro level entrepreneurial firms while as a result of this research we expect few policy changes towards micro level youth entrepreneurial firms.

7. What will happen to information about me?
By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using information about you for the research study. We will keep your data for seven years. We will store information about you in a softcopy form (non-identifiable) format at *the university workstation and hard drive of the researcher*. Your information will only be used for *research purposes*.

8. How and when will I find out what the results of the research study are?
The research team intend to publish and report the results of the research study in a variety of ways. All information published will be done in a way that will not identify you.
If you would like to receive a copy of the results you can let the research team know by sending an email to gayathri.ranasinghe@student.adfa.edu.au. We will only use these details to send you the results of the research.

9. What if I want to withdraw from the research study?
If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. You can do so by completing the 'Withdrawal of Consent Form' which is provided at the end of this document. Alternatively, you can ring the research team and tell them you no longer want to participate. Your decision not to participate or to withdraw from the study will not affect your relationship with UNSW Australia.
If you decide to leave the research study, the researchers will not collect additional information from you.
The research team will destroy any information about you that was collected during your participation in the study.

10. What should I do if I have further questions about my involvement in the research study?
The person you may need to contact will depend on the nature of your query. If you require further information regarding this study or if you have any problems which may be related to your involvement in the study, you can contact the following member of the research team:

Research Team Contact Details

Name	*Roshini Gayathri Ranasinghe*
Position	*PhD Candidate*
Telephone	
Email	

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Support Services Contact Details

What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the research study?
If you have a complaint regarding any aspect of the study or the way it is being conducted, please contact the UNSW Human Ethics Coordinator:

Complaints Contact

Position	UNSW Human Research Ethics Coordinator
Telephone	
Email	
HC Reference Number	

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Consent Form – Participant providing own consent

Declaration by the participant

☐ I understand I am being asked to provide consent to participate in this research study;
☐ I have read the Participant Information Sheet or someone has read it to me in a language that I understand;
☐ I understand the purposes, study tasks and risks of the research described in the study;
☐ I understand that the research team will audio record the interviews; I agree to be recorded for this purpose.
☐ I provide my consent for the information collected about me to be used for the purpose of this research study only.
☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received;
☐ I freely agree to participate in this research study as described and understand that I am free to withdraw at any time during the study and withdrawal will not affect my relationship with any of the named organisations and/or research team members;
☐ I would like to receive a copy of the study results via email or post, I have provided my details below and ask that they be used for this purpose only;

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email Address: _____

☐ I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep;

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

Declaration by Researcher*

☐ I have given a verbal explanation of the research study, its study activities and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher Signature*

Name of Researcher (please print)	**Gayathri Ranasinghe**
Signature of Researcher	
Date	

*An appropriately qualified member of the research team must provide the explanation of, and information concerning the research study.

Note: All parties signing the consent section must date their own signature.

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Form for Withdrawal of Participation

I wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in this research study described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** affect my relationship with The University of New South Wales. In withdrawing my consent I would like any information which I have provided for this research study withdrawn.

Participant Signature

Name of Participant (please print)	
Signature of Research Participant	
Date	

The section for Withdrawal of Participation should be forwarded to:

CI Name:	Dr. Saskia de Klerk
Email:	
Phone:	
Postal Address:	School of Business, UNSW Canberra, Northcott Dr, Campbell ACT 2612, Australia

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