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Negotiating High Touch and High Tech Platforms to Promote Regional Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

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To make the world a better place (Davison et al., 2022), IS scholars are calling for research that investigates entrepreneurship in technology-based start-ups as a way to improve economic development and people's livelihood. Despite the potential benefits of studying "social entrepreneurship" and its growing presence in society, "there is little evidence that the latter [entrepreneurship] is a focus of IS researchers, who seem instead to be enchanted by the technology" (Davison et al., 2022, p. 2). Entrepreneurship research in IS may be useful to sustain and expand diverse developmental outcomes of digital platforms (Bonina et al., 2021). Thus, the purpose of our research is to understand *how a non-profit entrepreneurship incubator negotiated high touch and high tech platforms to promote a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem*.

To achieve the research goal, we study StartUpCo's, a pseudonym, efforts to promote a regional entrepreneurial ecosystem through building platforms. We situate platforms developed by StartUpCo at the center of the research to unpack the dynamics and interactions between StartUpCo, its partners, and the entrepreneurs it supports, as well as these actors' roles in shaping the entrepreneurial ecosystem. We are currently gathering data through interviews, participant observation, discussion boards, and secondary data sources, and are analyzing them using a grounded theory approach (Urquhart, 2013).

StartUpCo is a non-profit organization that strives to create a thriving culture of entrepreneurship in a mid-size college town. On July 1, 2021, when the NCAA approved a Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) policy, StartUpCo began helping a new set of entrepreneurs—student-athletes by connecting diverse actors, including universities, government bodies, and other companies. Our initial analysis of the data reveals some preliminary themes. First, StartUpCo developed a high touch platform, which serves as a local hub to connect entrepreneurs and other actors seeking to share or exchange information, products, or services. Second, an ongoing consolidation of a high tech core within the established high touch platform plays a vital role in effectuating the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. Third, by focusing on the link between the ecosystem and developmental outcomes, the ecosystem co-creates value for the launch of start-ups, while the start-ups inject innovation into the ecosystem, making the ecosystem more developed and sustainable.

References

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