Empowering the Youth Through Online Social Enterprise Income Generation: A Study in Malaysia and USA

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ABSTRACT

As Malaysia's economy becomes increasingly developed, the quality of its education improves along with income ranks. However, the issue of school dropouts is "a thorn in the flesh" that affects the rise in income and hence the quality of life in Malaysia. As such the dropouts need to be exposed to self-empowerment and systematic financial education in order to be independent and at the same time able to steer themselves away from the dangers of crime. Taking advantage of the current digital trend, most of the dropouts are familiar with the Information and Communication technology (ICT), the internet and mobile applications. This study recommends that for the next phase in their dealing with school dropouts, the Malaysian authorities should build a prototype of the business model of Social Enterprise that is successfully in operation in the United States. Nevertheless, some adaptation should be made in order to suit with the Malaysian context. In the final phase, the authorities could also work out spin-off businesses through provision of seed funds, including from interested private sectors, to these youths.

Keywords: Social enterprise, online income, youth, online social enterprise

I INTRODUCTION

Dropout problem among young people requires serious attention. This is especially so when it affects those in the Primary School level (Azmi and Hashim, 2014). "Dropouts" here is defined as young people who cannot continue schooling due to their inability to cope with the school system or rejected it in order to pursue alternative lifestyle.

The government has tried to deal with the problem through the setting up of a committee in the early 1970s. Murad Mohamad Noor, the then Director of Planning and Research Division at the Ministry of Education was appointed as chairperson of the committee whose 1973 report on dropouts contained proposals to be implemented (by the government) in stages.

Youth development and empowerment are vital stages in life for building the human capital that allows young people to avoid poverty and lead better, and possibly have a more fulfilling life (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010). When the students dropout problem is persists, the country such as Malaysia will face the challenge to implement lifelong learning concept which is critical in order to increase productivity and employment opportunities for its citizen besides enriching the soul and mind with knowledge quality (Azmi and Hashim, 2014). In developing human capital, the Malaysian government wants the access to educational opportunities to be opened as wide as possible. Therefore, it is important to provide the knowledge of science and technology to the students so that they will become talents as well as workers who can contribute to the national development (Azmi and Hashim, 2014).

The term Web 2.0 is often used interchangeably with Social Network, that refers to applications such as wikis, blogs, Internet-based networks, websites for sharing multimedia content, group radio and instant messaging, as well as older forms of online collaboration (Taylor-Smith and Lindner, 2009). The main purposes for using Social Network tools to promote online participation are to reach more people in the target group to encourage them to get involved, to facilitate viral marketing of the project, and to keep people interested, through regular updates and the chance to establish comparatively sustainable computer-mediated relationships (Taylor-Smith and Lindner, 2009). Furthermore, many Social Network tools are also free to use. However, this study is of the view that the dropouts can find an opportunity to generate income through keeping Social Network sites up to date and providing information that requires staff to perform their tasks and this needs to be factored into any estimates of resource consumption in using these tools. According to report produced by the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) in 2014, in terms of educational attainment, the survey conducted found one-third of users (33.7%) have attained a medium

level of education. Medium in this context, refers to the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Sijil Pelajaran Vokasional Malaysia (SPM/SPVM) and Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM). This is followed by low education group; primary school, secondary school, Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) (27.8%) and high level of education; diploma, advanced diploma, degree and higher degree (21.7%). Statistically, education is not a strong indicator of hand phone usage as most phones are made user friendly, especially smart phones.

During the last decades, the communication technology has been transforming one's lifestyle into "Digital Life Style", in which one can create, share, and enjoy multimedia information in his own personalized virtual space in mobile environment (Lee, 2003). In digital lifestyle aggregators, all communications will be done through multipurpose digital devices and mobile applications where more information is published digitally on the webs and more people will read them than from anywhere else. As a result, the secret of making money is in providing an integrated environment for users to use Internet such as instant messaging, built-in digital camera, image gallery, cell phone gateways, personal publishing, and web services easily and seamlessly (Charmonman and Chorpothong, 2005). Digital civil society offers easily accessible multimedia contents for diversified user applications, communication and information infrastructure to support such access from user, and intelligent user devices to deliver such digital contents in user friendly manner (Lee, 2003). Generating income through e-Commerce is using the Internet for selling and buying of products and services. It includes advertising and catalogs of products and services by the seller, ordering of the products or services by the buyer, checking of the buyer's credit by the bank, manufacturing or taking the products from the shelves to be sent to the buyer, transferring of money from the buyer's account to the seller's account, as well as providing after-sales services (Charmonman and Chorpothong, 2005). Other than e-Commerce, digital lifestyle makes our home, entertainment and learning available digitally such as e-Learning, e-News e-books and e-Government (Charmonman and Chorpothong, 2005).

This study is inspired by Alive and Kicking's start-up and ongoing activities as a charity that makes sports balls in Africa, and how it has adopted the Lean Start-up principles in its growth. Alive and Kicking (A&K) is a Social Enterprise that manufactures balls in Kenya, Ghana, and Zambia to meet its objectives of providing balls for kids, jobs for adults and health awareness through sport (Ellarby, 2013). In the 21st century, social enterprise, broadly defined as businesses that trade for social purposes, has attracted considerable policy interest within the western world and beyond (Defourny and Kuan 2011; Kerlin 2009). Therefore, the researchers are going to explore how to empower the youth who are school dropouts through online income generation of social enterprise initiatives in Malaysia.

During the last five years, Otto-Rieke (2010) states that two out of three businesses in Germany work with a travel agency via online applications. Online offerings have gained market share in this sector, with standard services increasingly found and booked on the Internet. As travel volume rises, so does the potential for saving costs. While half of small- to medium-sized enterprises do without the services of a travel management company, 84% of businesses with over 1,500 employees do take advantage of such services (Otto-Rieke, 2010). Therefore, this could be a potential sector for the dropouts to generate income in Malaysia too.

The movement from free-market economics towards responsible entrepreneurship reflects the changing cultural context and interactions between society and entrepreneurship. The shift towards socially responsible entrepreneurship, accountable to society, reflects ethically and environmentally sustainable values (Rae, 2010). According to Burégio, Maamar and Meira (2015), a Social Enterprise architecture must be strongly coupled with Web 2.0 technologies to support the enterprise in reaching out to stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, competitors, and regulatory authorities. Unknown people (such as discussion group members) can also be stakeholders and can thus interact with the Social Enterprise. This is not the case with traditional (that is, non-social) enterprises, in which stakeholders must be known in advance (Burégio, Maamar and Meira, 2015).

The characteristics of new entrepreneurship such as social entrepreneurship clearly can be acknowledged due to its structure. Rae (2010) states that social entrepreneur has individual-team leadership within a social context; opportunities create multiple forms of value: financial, creative, social, ecological, socially connected and networked; collectivist and inclusive; ethically responsible, economically and environmentally sustainable; sensitive to resource stewardship; conservation and re-use; longer term sustainable growth and development; feminine

values: relational, collaborative, intuitive working which complement; masculine attributes of competition, and grassroots enterprise and resourcing.

The media environment is constantly evolving in the content which youth are exposed to and in the way this content is delivered. The new media forms such as chat rooms, E-mail, and many sites on the Internet demand interaction with the user, more engaging as the consumers will be able to step into virtual worlds in which their whole bodies, not only their eyes and ears, are involved (Brown and Cantor, 2000). Unfortunately, today's children and adolescents have been discovered as a lucrative commercial market segment where media can be used to persuade youth and affect their behavior (Brown and Cantor, 2000) and this including the school dropouts. Consequently, through the Social Enterprise, this study wants to encourage the school dropouts to take the opportunities of digital life styles to generate income without putting any barriers of the education background, age, gender, race, capital and geographical areas.

II   CURRENT ISSUES

In the primary schools, students are taught to master basic skills of reading, writing and calculating, while and scientific skills are promoted (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2011a). Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) is the first public examination taken by students at the end of Year 6 to see how far their achievement in acquiring the basic skills of writing, reading and mathematics before they move into secondary education (Othman & Md Salleh, 2005). There are five compulsory subjects tested in the UPSR -- Malay Language Comprehension, Malay Writing, English, Mathematics and Science subjects, while Chinese and Tamil are offered at the National Type Primary School (SJK). However, there are still a small number of students who left school because of their lack of interest in education. The percentage of dropout students in Primary School stage which follows the school system under Ministry of Education for the period 2006 to 2010 was at a rate of 1:32 percent (Wee, 2011).

Studies conducted by Rasinski and Pedlow (1994) find that vocational education can reduce the dropout problem. This effort coincides with implementation of Basic Vocational Education which provides opportunities for Year 6 leavers who fail to reach minimum achievement-oriented academics to remain in the school system where they will acquire within their means, interests and

potential some capabilities in the field of vocational training (Ministry of Education, 2011c). Basic Vocational Education program is introduced and implemented generally to prevent student dropouts at primary and secondary levels due to various factors such as slow learner, disciplinary problems, delinquency, socio-economic problems, and so on. It is designed to produce human capital that is skilled, critical, creative and innovative through the environment-oriented learning experience of the working world. Curriculum undertaken also led to the construction of identity, competence development and development of entrepreneurship vocational skills competency. Muhamed (2012, January 4) also believes that not all students are academically inclined and skilled students need to be trained in order to produce more skilled workforce. Vocational education with the right skills is a key element in any strategy to reduce the problem of low achievement among students (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007). However, the other challenge is when these dropout students are neither interested in academic nor vocational. They cannot stay focus in the classroom setting or workshop. They want to work only when they need the money. The rest of their time, they like to spend time playing futsal or hang around in the shopping complex with friends.

This study aims to understand the issue of school dropouts in Malaysia and explore the avenues for their income generation through digital lifestyle that is prevailing in society. The study is expected:

a) To assist youth in self-empowerment through Social Enterprise.
b) To contribute towards improving the existing policies on youth.
c) To provide a model of financial education to citizenry especially the young people through Social Enterprise.

The changing nature of entrepreneurship is an outcome of a process of learning and adaptation. Rae (2010) suggests that educators play a major role in defining and informing the new entrepreneurship through research, innovative learning and co-creation of knowledge with new era entrepreneurs. He believes, to understand the new entrepreneurship such as social entrepreneurship, it is important to relate it to different contexts of how people learn, innovate and develop new era enterprises, and what new business models they develop to create value. There is increasing convergence between 'mainstream' entrepreneurship as it moves towards the new era paradigm and social entrepreneurship,

which has informed and created new insights into the potential for responsible entrepreneurship (Rae, 2010).

Many entrepreneurship programs have been developed as an intervention mechanism in promoting youth entrepreneurship (Awogbenle and Iwuamadi, 2010). Among the focuses of the programs are creating employment opportunities for self-employed youth as well as the other young people they employ; bringing alienated and marginalized youths back into the economic mainstream and giving them a sense of meaning and belonging; helping to address some of the socio-psychological problems and delinquency that arise from joblessness; helping youths develop new skills and experiences that can then be applied to other challenges in life; promoting innovation and resilience in youth; promoting the revitalization of the local communities by providing valuable goods and services; and capitalising on the fact that young entrepreneurs may be particularly responsive to new economic opportunities and trends.

In the United States of America, the advocates of positive youth development have argued that participation in organized activities facilitate optimal development and therefore policymakers should provide more opportunities for American youth to be involved in such activities (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). With reference to that, the researchers strongly believe that this study will succeed with the significant support from Fulbright programs which had been active for decades around the world. And now with the full support from Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) – Fulbright grant, the study will facilitate positive adjustment in our dealing with the problem.

From the study finding, it is the intention of the researchers to introduce an outreach program that will help the school dropout youth to acquire self-empowerment, financial literacy, and become good citizens. With heightened interest in opting for Social Enterprise around the world, Malaysian authorities such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and Ministry of Human Resource must have a master plan to deal with this challenge in transforming the school dropouts to become digital entrepreneurs. New business paradigms and models can only be initiated if policy makers themselves have the appropriate knowledge and exposure, and understand the competitive advantage of Social Enterprise over their traditional business competitors.

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Social science researchers continue to use the tried and true methods of social psychology and sociology such as content analysis, surveys, and experiments when conducting researches (Brown and Cantor, 2000). However, the evolving media environment and digital civil society require that these methods be adapted to accommodate what we have come to know about the processes being studied and the difficulties in studying some of these phenomena such as Social Enterprise using standard methods (Brown and Cantor, 2000).

This study adapts qualitative approach and analysis to explore how the school dropouts perceive the digital civil society, financial education and Social Enterprise as a mode of income generation. At the end of the day, they can be a good citizenry and contribute in helping other dropouts. Furthermore, variations in Social Enterprise around the world are in part due to their connection with specific socioeconomic conditions within their context (Kerlin, 2009).

When studying the Social Enterprise in Spain, Moreno-Romero (2015) has implemented Kerlin's institutional framework (2013) that analyzes the five major elements that influence the conformation of country-level Social Enterprise models: A rich mix of cultural, local, regional and global hierarchies (including social classes) and political-economic histories, the type of government, the stage of economic development, the model of civil society and international influences.

In this study, the five major elements in Kerlin's Social Enterprise framework would be used to guide the researchers to construct the open-ended semi-structured questions when conducting individual interviews and focus group discussions. It also involves close engagement with Social Entrepreneurship, Social Innovation and Digital civil society learning during this period. This study is exploratory and reflective informed by multiple discourses of Social Enterprise from policy, education, media and practice where the researchers are acting as a speaker, educator, reviewer of refereed papers, and engaged participants working with right financial educators, entrepreneurs and business support professionals. As a cultural movement, Social Enterprise is manifested in such discourses, which make explicit significant governing ideas, concepts, phrases, assumptions and values. Among the factors to the discourse included are political and government policy, close-to-government organizations, academic research, and

other Social Enterprise entities in Malaysia. Direct engagement with school dropouts and entrepreneurs at educational, networking events and other encounters should also contribute to this study.

Table 1. Details of the Research Methodology Process

Initial Research Design	i. The researchers study previous researches on the topic from the literature reviews. The study is designed to ensure the data can be collected from the right samples.
Data Collection	i. A focus group discussion will be conducted with 10 participants who are school dropouts in each session in order to understand the real issue. From the school dropouts in the focus group discussion, the researchers shall use snowballing sampling to identify other participants for individual interviews. ii. Focus group discussion shall also be conducted with participants specially chosen from the related agencies with the knowledge and information on school dropouts. iii. The data from related agencies and Ministries will be used to understand the sample. This information will be used to triangulate and support this study's objectives. iv. The researchers will repeat the same focus group discussion and interviews with the participants in USA..
Expert Reviews	i. Experts shall be drawn from Malaysia and USA. ii. Later, the researchers will conduct two focus group discussions with successful Social Enterprise in USA and interview the experts in USA in order to understand and learn how they do it successfully with the school dropouts. The researchers are interested to explore what drives dropouts in USA to generate income through digital initiatives while encouraging social enterprises locally.
Data Analysis	i. This is a very important part. The researchers' knowledge, expertise and experience must be solid to interpret the data and construct the findings. ii. The researchers seek to understand the phenomena (Social Enterprise) in context-specific setting (digital civil society). iii. The quality of the study must be based on data rigorousness, validity and reliability, credibility, transferability and trustworthiness to reflect the interpretivist (interpretivism) conceptions. iv. Triangulation is a strategy used in order to control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are
	incompatible with this alternate epistemology.
Conclusion	i. All the data being collected from Malaysia and USA will be triangulated during the analysis process. The theme emerged from the data will be interpreted and a proposed Social Enterprise model will be constructed for school dropout further development.

Brown and Cantor (2000) propose that research conducted with the public interest in mind, such as this study on school dropouts, should be peer-reviewed, critiqued, and made accessible in a timely way to all stakeholders, including other researchers, parents, teachers, youth service workers, and policy makers. The researchers hope this study would help especially the young school dropouts in the development of their economic self-reliance through digital social enterprise activities. This not only complemented the efforts of government in educating good citizenry, but also contributed toward promoting positive digital civil society among the youth.

This study is current, very critical and cannot be ignored as its potential impact is huge on the economy as well as political stability of the country. The dropouts might not have good formal education, degree or qualification, but in today's scenario where digital civil society is the trend, they can lead their lives comfortably, healthily while distancing themselves from criminal activities. They are generally exposed to the Internet and mobile applications despite their family's economic difficulty which denies them ready access to the technology. However, they must be taught on how to empower themselves with the talents and skills that they could acquire, and from there, proceed seriously to improve themselves. Social enterprise and financial education could significantly help dropout youths to generate income and thereby improve their livelihood.

IV CONCLUSION

As of now there is no legislation (Act) on Social Enterprise in Malaysia that could guide the process of promoting this outreach program compared to, for example, Australia (Barraket, 2015), Spain (Moreno-Romero, 2015), United States of America and United Kingdom (Sepulveda, 2014). The findings of Barraket's study (2015) show that Australian social enterprises are less likely to see public investment in core services, which is a contrast to other countries, such as the United Kingdom, where in the recent past government commitments to 'growing' social

enterprises were seen as concomitant with public sector spending. Youth are surrounded by media environment with the massive exposure to the same kind of content in their everyday lives (Brown and Cantor, 2000). For that reason, the researchers believe that communication and multimedia industry in Malaysia specifically and globally in general could provide a platform for the dropouts to generate income by assisting in:

a) appropriate channels and skills training for the dropouts through mobile application access point,

b) financial education exposure through business model canvas workshop for the dropouts,

c) social interaction where dropouts can be trained to have entrepreneurial mind and attitude, and

The long-term attitude or behavioral change, rather than short-term effects, is often the true focus of this research interest, rendering the research design incapable of uncovering the all important impact of culture, education systems and implementation (Brown and Cantor, 2000). For these reasons, the researchers anticipate the need for more longitudinal, observation and participatory studies that look at multiple media sources (such as smart phone, desktop and laptop) in digital civil society and how the dropouts manage their self-empowerment.

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