THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY AND SELF-PRESENTATION

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Abstract

This research paper examines how social media influences entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation. Social media provides entrepreneurs with a unique platform to showcase their ventures, interact with stakeholders, and present their desired selves to the public. This study analyzes the influence of social media platforms on the construction and portrayal of entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation. The theoretical foundations for the study were taken from the self-presentation, impression management, and identity construction on social media, this study investigates the way entrepreneurs brand themselves across social media platforms. For this purpose, we employed mixed-method approach, performing content analysis of social media profiles of entrepreneurs and interviews from the stakeholders. The findings of the study reveals that the entrepreneurs use content curation, visual, text, storytelling as techniques and tools to present and project their entrepreneurial identities. The analysis further reveals that the use of tools and techniques are the key strategies for entrepreneurs to capture the audience and to convey and convince them by keeping them engaged and expressing strong association with the audience. The findings of the study is an attempt to add the growing body of knowledge about social media, entrepreneurship and audience perception by highlight the challenges, opportunities and scope of the emerging social media platforms.

Keywords: self-presentation; social media; entrepreneurship; self-identity

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional communication and interaction channels are transformed and revolutionized by the advent of the social media platforms. Social media provides an effective and flexible tool to present our desired outlook across social media platforms. The reach, affordability, interactivity and access of the social media platform made these platforms an attractive ground for promotion of the entrepreneurs (Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Solo-Anaeto et al., 2017). A person may define his or her “entrepreneurial identity” as encompassing a set of central (e.g., strategic orientation, commitment to opportunity, control of resources) and peripheral attributes, which together form this person’s entrepreneurial identity (Brown & Starkey, 2000). With the advent and rise of the social media, people now have the tools used to create and project their identities in digital space (Jensen & Craig, 2016). Social networking platforms provides virtual space where one can construct their brands and create a unique business identity through carefully crafted profiles, exciting content, and intelligent interactions and share his or her desired entrepreneurial identities with a broad audience (Horst et al., 2020). By utilizing the social media platforms, the entrepreneurs can share and disseminate their

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entrepreneurial stories with mass audience while showcasing their knowledge and accomplishments. Entrepreneurs can promote their businesses, share their stories, and interact with new clients, collaborators, and investors using social media platforms' affordances and presence across globe (Brooks et al., 2023).

Different self-presentation techniques are used in creating and depicting entrepreneurial identity on social media. Entrepreneurs actively engage in impression management by carefully choosing and presenting components of their work lives that are consistent with their business identity (Marwick, 2013). They carefully select and distribute information that showcases their knowledge, enthusiasm, and dedication to their businesses. Photos, films, and infographics are examples of visual elements that draw the viewer in and present a captivating story (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). To foster good opinions and foster trust among their social media followers, entrepreneurs also use persuasive rhetoric, storytelling techniques, and brand positioning strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). While social media is an influential tool entrepreneurs use to create and express their entrepreneurial identities, it is crucial to comprehend how audiences perceive and react to these self-presentations. The way social media user interacts and react towards online entrepreneurial identities has significant impact on the way entrepreneurs present are promote themselves across the social media platforms. The social media users develop their understanding about businesses and entrepreneurs while acting as consumers. This understanding is influenced by content shared and the entrepreneurial image developed by the entrepreneurs (Tan et al., 2013). This understanding and perception of the social media user developed through interaction with the self-presentation identity of the entrepreneurial further leads to transform the consumer behavior towards the business and the product (Chitturi et al., 2008).

Due to mighty potential of eh social media platforms in terms of reach, cost effectiveness, self-presentation tools, and rapid communication, it is very relevant and crucial to study the interplay of self-presentation and construction of entrepreneurial identity on social media platforms and to examine the challenges and opportunities posed by the virtual world in rapidly changing environment. Hence, this study is an effort to explore the above stated relationships and to contribute towards our understanding about social media, self-presentation on social media, audience perception and construction of entrepreneurial identity on social networking websites.

As the social media platforms are attracting more and more users through the use of innovative and interactive technological enhancements, there are increased attention towards the impact of these interactive social media platforms on entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation. Social media platforms completely transformed the interaction patterns and information sharing (Nisar et al., 2019), hence affecting the traditional business models, communication strategies and promotional tools.

The Construction of Entrepreneurial Identity on Social Media

Social media platforms provides an excellent opportunity to the entrepreneurs to create and share their brand identities to the audience across globe. According to studies, entrepreneurial persona cannot be shaped or developed without utilization of the social media (Acar, 2008; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017). Entrepreneurs actively engage in impression management by carefully choosing and presenting components of their work lives consistent with their business identity selected (Marwick, 2013). The "entrepreneurial self" on social media is partly constructed by identity narratives and lifestyle branding (Horst et al., 2020). Social media is a strategic tool used by entrepreneurs to promote their skills, experiences and identities. It helps in the development of a unique and recognized corporate identity. By posting textual and visual content on social media platforms, businesses can manage their brand image and create a positive impression on target audience (Koe Hwee Nga & Shamuganathan, 2010; Morris et al., 2002). By carefully selecting and curating their content, enhancing their
image, attracting stakeholders, and opening up new business opportunities, entrepreneurs may establish an appropriate and significant social media presence (Müller et al., 2016). Entrepreneurs select and share content with diligence, demonstrating their expertise, passion, and commitment to their businesses. Infographics, videos, and other visual elements captivate the audience and tell an engaging story (Levy, 2016).

**Theoretical Perspectives on Entrepreneurial Identity and Self-Presentation**

Theoretical foundation for this study is taken from literature about impression management, self-presentation, and social identity. Through this theoretical lens we investigated the formation and creation of the entrepreneurial identity over the social networking platforms. Impression management is about how people utilize strategic tools to select, create and present their desired self on social media so that other can see them in their desired self (Marwick, 2013). Impression management put great emphasis on selection of the content to share and to the presentation of the content in a specific and desired manner to yield and developed required projection of the self. Moreover, according to Wang et al. (2020), this well-crafted self-presentation aligns with the entrepreneur’s objectives and targets to brand the self-image on social media. To attract the audience and to maintain trust and credibility, the entrepreneur employed persuasive language, visuals, storytelling techniques and brand positioning techniques (Hussain et al., 2021).

The theory of social identity posits that members of a particular social group maintain a sense of self by sharing certain mutual characteristics that binds them in a group (Turner et al., 1979). Here in our study, the social identity phenomenon prevails in connection with entrepreneurial community. The theory asserts that adhering to the principles, practices, and norms of entrepreneurship and to follow the established norms that helps entrepreneurs to create their entrepreneurial identities. It highlights how social comparison, identification, and categorization impact the self-presentation patterns of the entrepreneurs and define their identities (Dutton et al., 1994).

The self-presentation hypothesis holds that people or social media users in our case are involved in purposefully manipulating their image in order to make an appropriate kind of impression on other people considering different variable by assessing their environment (Goffman, 1959). Entrepreneurs use self-presentation strategies to carefully control their public image on social media platforms in order to build their reputation, attract investors, creating brand loyalty and establish credibility (Palalic et al., 2021). This can be done through selecting and highlighting the certain features, experiences and accomplishment along with ignoring the certain others so that desired image can be created and presented to the audience (Chen et al., 1998).

By employing the theoretical perspectives like impression management, social identity, and self-presentation theory, we may get better understanding about the self-presentation, entrepreneurial identity, and impression management through the usage of strategic communication on the social networking websites.

**Audience Perceptions and Responses**

The evaluation by the audience affects the self-presentation and impression management pattern over the internet and social media platforms. Often social media users realign their portrayal of the self in a more attractive and acceptable manner to become more acceptable to the respective audience (Vogel et al., 2014). The users of social media networking websites form opinion about entrepreneurial identities based on the content shared and presented (Trusov et al., 2009). This interaction through virtual platforms of social media between entrepreneurs and potential consumers can have impact on behavior, support, investment and decision making towards that particular entrepreneurial venture (Chitturi et al., 2008) as the social media platforms are one of the major determinants in decision making of the consumers...
that are using social media (Shahbaz Aslam et al., 2021). This decision making and engagement of the audience can be influence significantly through understanding of the audience needs and transform or present the entrepreneurial identity aligned with these lines and expectations of the audience.

Developing an understanding about perception and reaction of the audience is essential for examining the implications of entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation so that it may be realigned in accordance with the changing environment. There are studies that established the active relationship between the audience engagement towards businesses and products through their social media presentation (Higgins & Gulati, 2006). How an audience perceives an entrepreneur's identity affects the way they judge the entrepreneur's authority, sincerity, and credibility to make decisions (Higgins & Gulati, 2006). How the audience perceives the entrepreneurial identity through social media helps entrepreneurs to redefine and reposition their branded outlook to become more acceptable to the audience and to gain support, more engagements and to enhances and expand their venture. The sharing of content might need a careful oversight as every member of the audience group might interpret the same content in different ways. Some people may find motivation after interaction with entrepreneurial achievements while some may get the opposite reaction, which needs to consider while creating and sharing the content so that the audience remain favorable (Wang et al., 2020). The audience that fall in comparison might get envied about the displayed entrepreneurial self (Higgins & Gulati, 2006). This phenomenon can be handled through careful selection and presenting the content and story in a favorable manner and it may affect the evaluation by the audience about entrepreneur's integrity and trustworthiness (Santos et al., 2023). The research studies about entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation put great emphasis on audience responses and perceptions. By analyzing the response and reaction of the audience, we can gain deep insights about influence of the entrepreneurial identity on stakeholders, and potential consequences on the success of the entrepreneurial venture.

**Empirical Studies**

Social media and how social media provides battleground to present the entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation remains one of the most engaging research areas since last two decades. Hussain et al. (2021) while studying the self-presentation patterns on social media platforms discovered evidence of utilizing of social media by the businesses and entrepreneurs to advertise their brands and to portray their products and services in an attractive manner. The most effective tools employed by the entrepreneurs are the visuals elements and storytelling that are used to share and demonstrate the knowledge, disseminate information, maintain credibility and formation of the entrepreneurial identities. Secundo et al. (2021) done an extensive analysis of the available literature on social media and outlined a way forward for social media, entrepreneur's identity and self-presentation.

The literature review highlights our growing understanding about social media, self-presentation, entrepreneur's identity and the utilization of social media as an entrepreneurial platform. Through a variety of self-presentation strategies and the usage of textual data and visuals, entrepreneurs use social media platforms to establish and share their brand identities. The way in which entrepreneurs express themselves passionately and successfully is influenced by the opinions and responses of social media users. Empirical research have provided a thorough understanding of the strategies employed by entrepreneurs on social media and the potential effects on their entrepreneurial identity and financial outcomes.

**Research Questions**

1. How do entrepreneurs strategically construct and present their entrepreneurial identities on social media?
2. How do audiences perceive and interpret entrepreneurial self-presentations on social media?
3. How do social media strategies influence entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation outcomes?
4. What are the implications of social media use for entrepreneurial success and stakeholder relationships?
5. How can entrepreneurs effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with social media use in shaping entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation?

2. METHOD
The interplay of the social media, entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation has been investigated using a mixed-methods approach. By combining quantitative and qualitative data collecting and Analysis techniques, this methodology enables a thorough knowledge of the phenomenon. The essential elements are outlined in the method below:

Data Collection

Online Surveys
We conducted online surveys targeting entrepreneurs who actively use social media platforms. The survey captured demographic information, social media usage patterns, self-presentation strategies, and perceptions of audience responses.

Interviews
We conducted semi-structured interviews with a subset of survey participants to gain more in-depth insights into their experiences with social media, entrepreneurial identity construction, and audience perceptions.

Content Analysis
Analyzes entrepreneurs' social media profiles and posts to identify self-presentation strategies, visual framing techniques, and the alignment of the presented identity with audience expectations.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive Analysis
Analyzes survey data using descriptive statistics to examine the frequency, distribution, and patterns of self-presentation strategies and audience perceptions.

Correlation Analysis
We analyzed correlation to explore the relationships between social media usage patterns, self-presentation process, and audience responses.

Regression Analysis
Regression analysis assessed the impact of different self-presentation strategies on entrepreneurial outcomes, such as customer engagement and stakeholder support.

Qualitative Analysis:

Thematic Analysis
Analyzes interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses using thematic Analysis to identify key themes related to entrepreneurial identity construction, audience perceptions, and social media challenges and opportunities.

Interpretive Analysis
Interpreted and analyzed the visual elements of social media profiles and posts to understand how entrepreneurs utilize optical framing techniques to shape their identities and engage with audiences.

The study findings are integrated from quantitative and qualitative analyses to understand the research questions comprehensively.

3. DATA ANALYSIS
By employing this mixed methods research approach, the study captured quantitative data on self-presentation strategies, impression management, audience perceptions, and entrepreneurial outcomes, as well as qualitative insights into the experiences, motivations, and
challenges entrepreneurs face in constructing their identities and navigating social media platforms.

Research Question 1: How do entrepreneurs strategically construct and present their entrepreneurial identities on social media platforms?

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Presentation Strategies Employed by Entrepreneurs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content Curation</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Storytelling</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Elements</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows the mean and standard deviation scores for different self-presentation strategies that are employed by the entrepreneurs on social media platforms. The analysis reveals that entrepreneurs construct their self-presentation through the use of content curation, personal storytelling, and visual elements on social media platforms. The mean scores indicate the average usage level for each strategy, while the standard deviations show the variability among respondents.

Research Question 2: How do audiences perceive and interpret entrepreneurial self-presentations on social media?

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience Perception of Entrepreneurial Self-Presentations</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table displays the mean and standard deviation scores for audience perception of entrepreneurial self-presentations on social media. The data indicates that, on average, audiences perceive these self-presentations to have moderate authenticity and credibility. The mean scores reflect the average perception, while the standard deviations indicate the variability in audience perceptions.

Research Question 3: How do social media strategies influence entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation outcomes?

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation between Social Media Strategies and Audience Engagement</th>
<th>Correlation Coefficient (r)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual Elements</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table presents the results of a correlation analysis between using visual elements in self-presentation strategies and audience engagement. The correlation coefficient (r) 0.55 indicates a positive and statistically significant correlation. This suggests that incorporating visual elements into self-presentation design is associated with higher levels of audience engagement. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the relationship is unlikely due to chance.

Research Question 4: What are the implications of social media use for entrepreneurial success and stakeholder relationships?

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regression Analysis for Predicting Entrepreneurial Success</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Presentation</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table presents the regression analysis results to predict entrepreneurial success based on self-presentation strategies. The beta coefficient (β) of 0.42 indicates a significant positive
relationship between self-presentation strategy (e.g., content curation, personal storytelling, and visual elements) and entrepreneurial success. The p-value of less than 0.001 suggests that the relationship is statistically significant, indicating that effective utilization of these strategies on social media is associated with tremendous entrepreneurial success.

Research Question 5: How can entrepreneurs effectively navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with social media use in shaping entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation?

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic Analysis to answer this research question. The responses were examined for common themes and patterns related to navigating the challenges and opportunities of social media use in shaping entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation.

Three main themes emerged from the Analysis:

1. **Strategies for Managing Challenges**
   There are various approaches to navigate the challenges that are associated with the social media usage. These strategies included:

   - **Regularly monitoring online reputation**
     In order to quickly answer unfavourable or misleading comments or questions about services or products etc., entrepreneurs regularly monitored and maintained their online profile.

   - **Engaging in online discussions**
     Entrepreneurs actively participated in online communities and were involved in talks to build credibility, establish leadership, answering queries and address customer concerns related to the business and products.

   2. **Adjusting self-presentation strategies:** By improving self-presentation technique in response to feedback and market changes, entrepreneurs showed flexibility by making sure their entrepreneurial identity remain updated and in line with the demands of the audience.

   - **Leveraging Opportunities**
     Entrepreneurs highlighted social media platforms' opportunities for shaping and developing entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation. These opportunities included:

     - **Global reach**
       Social media allowed entrepreneurs to extend their reach across geographical boundaries, enabling them to connect with a diverse audience and explore new markets across globe.

     - **Targeted marketing**
       Entrepreneurs leveraged social media's targeting capabilities to identify and reach their specific target audience, tailoring their self-presentations to resonate with their intended market segment. Social media provides greater accuracy to select and target the most relevant audience based on several filters including but not limited to age, gender, location, profession and education etc.

     - **Networking and collaboration**
       Social media platforms provided enhanced networking opportunities with fellow entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and potential partners hence enabling partnerships and knowledge-sharing without considering time and distance as boundaries.

   3. **Learning from Challenges**
      Entrepreneurs recognized that there are challenges and setbacks in self-presenting using social media. However, they viewed these challenges as learning opportunities and shared insights gained from their experiences:

   - **Building resilience**
     Entrepreneurs stressed the need of resilience and commitment in the face of hardship, realising that failures may provide insightful lessons that advance one's career and personal development.
Seeking feedback and advice
In order to strengthen their tactics for self-presentation and identify areas for improvement, entrepreneurs asked advisors and their audience for feedback.

Adapting to changes
Entrepreneurs recognised that social media platforms are dynamic. They stressed that in order to properly define their entrepreneurial identity, they needed to be up to date on the latest developments, algorithm updates, and best practices. Through the strategic management of social media platforms and the optimisation of its prospects, entrepreneurs may effectively shape their entrepreneurial identity and improve their methods of self-presentation.

4. DISCUSSION
This study examined the influence of social media on entrepreneurial identity and self-presentation in connection with audience perception, approaches and the implications for success of the entrepreneurial ventures. The results of the study highlight the role of affective and attractive self-presentation on the entrepreneurial success and acceptance on the social media platforms.

Social media has the great potential especially for the entrepreneurs as it provides the unlimited reach and approach to showcase the entrepreneurial self to the audience across the globe (Krämer & Winter, 2008; Shutaleva et al., 2022). The data analysis shows that the entrepreneurs often used different strategies like storytelling, content curation and visuals to present and promote their identities. The studies find these tools very important to attract and persuade the audience and consumers (Mack et al., 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2020b).

To encourage favourable audience reactions, entrepreneurs should be aware of the preconceptions of the audience and users. These insights about preconceptions and trends can help in building a favorable and attractive identity of the self and business. The correlation analysis revealed that while presenting and formulating self and entrepreneurial identities on social media platforms the visual components has strong positive correlation with audience engagement. These studies confirm that the availability of the visual content on the social media platforms made them more captivating through engaging the users (Gavilanes et al., 2018; Jaakonmäki et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021). Hence, the entrepreneurs may utilize better and engaging visual content like videos, high quality pictures and infographics to develop to attract more users.

The regression analysis shows that affective self-presentation on social media is a strong predictor of entrepreneurial success as the studies about the subject concluded that a strong online presence ensures and attract better investments, support and engagement (Carlson et al., 2018; Farook & Abeyskara, 2016; Schniederjans et al., 2013). The findings revealed that the entrepreneurs who utilizes the above stated strategies of self-presentation are more likely to yield better results and engagements.

5. CONCLUSION
This study is an effort to enhance the body of knowledge about social media usage, self-presentation and how entrepreneurship can benefit from the potential offered by the social media. The entrepreneurs must put emphasis to develop an effective self-presentation through the use of engagement strategies through content sharing, building an attractive online self, understanding audience perception and adopting the trends.

REFERENCES


