

Chapter 7

Entering a New World: The Identity Work of Older South African Indian Male Entrepreneurs in the Digital Era

Nasima Mohamed Hoosen Carrim
University of Pretoria, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the identity work engaged in by two older Indian male entrepreneurs and their use of technology in their business enterprises. The chapter briefly outlines the concepts of older entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial innovation and gives an overview of the South African context that pertains to Indians. McClelland's theory of motivation, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and identity theory serve as the theoretical frameworks. The author conducted interviews with two older Indian male entrepreneurs to ascertain their use of digital technology in their respective businesses. The result of the investigation indicates that older Indian males' use of digital technology is minimal and that they engage in entrepreneurial professional identity work to a minimal extent. Some recommendations are made regarding solutions to the problems identified.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Yahoo signed a \$30 million contract with Nick D'Aloisio to buy his news-aggregating mobile app called Summly. Given the nature of the tech industry of today, this sale is not an extraordinary business deal. However, Nick was only 17 years old at the time he sold his mobile app. Larry Page and Sergey Brin were both 25 years old when they founded Google in 1998. Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg all began their enterprises before the age of 23 (Berold, 2013). The connection between youth and entrepreneurship has always been a symbol of the digital age (Berold, 2013). Nevertheless, one does not have to be young to be an entrepreneur or to engage with digital technology. The world of work is changing rapidly, and changes in technology and economies bring new demands and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9273-0.ch007

opportunities for both young and older entrepreneurs (Silberesisen & Chen 2010). Many older people who have long-established businesses have introduced innovation into their business operations, one such innovation being the latest technology (Grandi & Grimaldi, 2005).

Entrepreneurs have to identify, evaluate and create new ventures when they decide to embark on entrepreneurial activities (Lechmann & Schnabel, 2014). Identifying and evaluating business opportunities require having the cognitive ability to process ambiguous, disproportionate and unpredictable information whereas creating new ventures entails having the practical intelligence to execute various tasks relating to new business creation (Bayon, Vaillant, & Lafuente, 2015). Technological advances have resulted in entrepreneurs using both cognitive and practical intelligence to keep abreast of technological changes. Hence, these changes have tremendous significance for older entrepreneurs in that they have to construct new work identities (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2008) and engage in identity work at the same time (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) if they are to be competitive in today's world of work.

Therefore, entrepreneurs have to be alert to recognise and grasp opportunities once they have identified innovations that can have a significantly positive impact on their businesses. Changes due to market shifts and competition from competitor firms lead to technological changes and innovation within established ventures that want to stay current and ahead of competition (Bucherer, Eisert, & Gassmann, 2012). However, in order to introduce technological innovations into their already established businesses, older entrepreneurs have to want changes to take place. That is, they need to have a strong belief that they can succeed by being technologically innovative (Tang, 2008). Older entrepreneurs' professional identities are tested when they move their businesses into the digital realm; to them this represents exploring a whole new world of technology. In the process they engage in working and reworking their entrepreneurial identities.

Research related to older entrepreneurs has mainly been conducted in developed countries (Creagh, 2004; Weber & Schaper, 2004; Zolin, 2015). For example, Zolin (2015) conducted a study in which she compared the characteristics of young and older entrepreneurs who established new businesses. In their study, Weber and Schaper (2004) focused on the various issues facing grey older entrepreneurs in Australia. Some research has also been conducted in the Far East. For example, Chen, Lu, and He (2008) conducted a study on older entrepreneurs entering politics in China. Research on older entrepreneurs has focused mostly on older employees who start up their own businesses (Creagh, 2004; Gray, 2007). Research relating to how older entrepreneurs embrace technological advancement in the digital age and how they engage in identity work in the process is lacking. This line of research is especially lacking in terms of the African continent and an emerging country such as South Africa. In addressing the lack of such research in relation to the African continent, an answer should be sought to the following main question: *To what extent do older entrepreneurs engage in identity work in the digital era?* To answer this question, the author will look at the experiences of two older Indian entrepreneurs operating in the digital context in South Africa and their willingness to adopt technology in the digital age. To provide a foundation for exploring the issues and challenges faced by these two older Indian entrepreneurs, an overview of the background to the current study is given and the theoretical framework of the study is discussed.

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