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“GENERATION Z” AND MEDIA & ARTS ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: AN INVESTIGATION OF CREATIVE LEARNING ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Abstract

Generation Z, Post Millennials, Post Gen, Gen Wii: call this generational cohort what you will, they are reshaping the world around us, including future business enterprises. Born in the early to mid or late 1990's (Ife, 2013), many of these digital natives are very interested in entrepreneurial undertakings, despite (or perhaps because of) the economy (Ernst & Young, 2013). According to Harris Interactive, nearly 40% would like to start their own business some day (2010). Current educational and community outreach efforts most often focus on business and/or technology driven endeavors. However, a review of literature and analysis of current published interviews with young entrepreneurs reveals young Gen Z media and arts entrepreneurs are motivated by somewhat different factors, as compared to more “traditional” entrepreneurs and thereby facing some different challenges ahead. This paper concludes with recommendations for future research and an implications discussion for the development of creative young entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is critical to economic growth and job creation, especially with the financial times faced worldwide. The United States' Small Business Administration (SBA) reported 28 million small businesses (2013), a 4% increase versus 2011. More importantly, these small businesses represent 60-80% of all new jobs created in tough economic times (SBA, 2011). Continued entrepreneurial interest and growth is part of a global phenomenon, despite the economic concerns worldwide. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with 250 or fewer employees provided two-thirds of G20 employment, created jobs at twice the rate of their bigger

competitors and were more likely to recruit the unemployed (Ernst & Young, 2011). Unemployment and underemployment among teens and young adults are two more bleak side effects of the global financial crisis. Within the U.S., teens are facing a record level of unemployment at 24%; equaling levels achieved the Great Depression (BLS, 2013). Globally, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported almost 13% of the world's youth (representing nearly 75 million young people) as unemployed (2013). Some economists feel the real youth unemployment is much higher, estimating rates of 'economically inactive' young people (those neither working or studying) at nearly 290 million (Economist, 2013).

Therefore, entrepreneurship is critical not only to global growth of the world economy; but, also, the employment and future of today's youth. In fact, a study for the SBA, points to a direct correlation between entrepreneurship, positive economic growth and decreased unemployment (Plehn-Dujowich, 2012). Additionally and perhaps more importantly, a Harris Interactive Youth Pulse study for the Kauffman Foundation for Entrepreneurship found entrepreneurship to be a desired activity for 40% of those ages 8 to 24 years old in 2007 and again, three years later, despite the economy (Harris, 2010). In the same study, 25% of 18 to 21 year olds and those aged 13 to 17 years old surveyed saw starting a business as "more desirable than other career opportunities". More recently, a 2011 Gallup Hope Index Student Poll documented even more pronounced entrepreneurial aspirations stating nearly 8 in 10 students (77%) in grades 5 through 12 "want to be their own boss"; 45% "want to start their own business" and 42% believe they will "invent something that will change the world" (Calderon, 2011).

Entrepreneurship motivations obviously extend beyond economic issues for young people. Pop culture personalities, the media and startup events are nurturing the growing interest in entrepreneurial endeavors. In fact, entrepreneurship has become a pop culture hot button, creating a "start up nation" frenzy. Television programming such as "Dragon's Den," the top rated (especially among young people) "Shark Tank," "Crowd Rule," the new "Supermarket Wars," and the soon-to-debut "DormBiz" (among others) have created heightened interest and appeal for entrepreneurship. Additionally, entrepreneur superstars such as Mark Zuckerberg, Sergey Brin, or the late Steve Jobs have given entrepreneurship a quasi-rock star 'cool' status. Additionally, events like 'hack-a-thons,' 'start up weekends,' and other often technology based activities (frequently sponsored by assorted business incubators, accelerator programs and more) attract young entrepreneurs interested and excited by the intense, high-energy experience. Entrepreneurship is widely covered by the media and a phenomenon that young potential entrepreneurs have literally grown up amidst all of the excitement.

A final overriding force influencing young people to consider entrepreneurship is the technology-driven world they have been immersed in, since very young childhood. Pew Research Center, in conjunction with The Berkman Center for

Internet & Society at Harvard Society, produced a study showing that 95% of teens are online which is consistent with 2006 findings (Pew, 2013). However, teens' internet usage behaviors have changed as they have moved from stationary desktops to a laptop or even a tablet, 24/7. Per Nielsen's "The Teen Transition" report, 71% of teens now own a tablet and 61% own a smartphone and have increased their monthly data usage 256% versus a year ago, giving them even greater access to instant information and solutions as they 'google it' or turn to a YouTube tutorial (Nielsen, 2013). These young people have never known a world without the internet, without instant access to information or without the ability to quickly find the answer themselves.

Entrepreneurial education

Current entrepreneurial educational efforts are primarily concentrated within higher education and the private sector focused on adult learning. A passive study by Saint Louis University's John Cook School of Business resulted in a combined list (mining data from the Entrepreneurship Compendium, the National Consortium of Entrepreneurship Centers, the GWU/SBA Survey and other sources) reported some 224 higher education U.S. institutions with majors in entrepreneurship or small business. However, data from the United States Report for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2012 found that of entrepreneurs aged 18 to 64 years old, only 31% had trained for their entrepreneur endeavors at a 'college or university course,' 8% had 'adult training' and less than 1% received training at grade school or youth programs (Kelly et al. 2012). Presumably the number of higher education students majoring and benefiting from entrepreneurship coursework will grow as the programs proliferate.

Within the United States, the Gallup Hope Index 2011 survey reports that 64% of students in grades 9 through 12 believe "my school offers classes in how to start and run a business" (Calderon, 2011). Yet, very few of these Gallup surveyed students had any actual entrepreneurial experience as 96% of those in grades 5-12 then responded "no" to the question "do you run your own business now?" (2011). Similarly, in a 2006 National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) and VISA survey, 90% of high school teachers and guidance counselors surveyed believed their students had interest in becoming their own bosses; but, 75% of respondents felt students didn't know where to turn for assistance (NFIB, 2006). Additionally, the GEM Global Report (Xavier et al., 2013) survey of 69 participating countries found entrepreneurship training *for elementary and secondary school aged students* to be the least adequate factor.

Therefore, GEM recommendations globally were to increase entrepreneurial training efforts within these youth segments, for a variety of reasons (employment growth, economic development, innovation, etc.). For example, 66% of the

young entrepreneurs at the G20 Young Entrepreneurs Summit in Russia believe “entrepreneurial skills need to be taught” (Ernst & Young, 2013). Also, in a 2011 survey of current and recent college graduates, 89% believed “entrepreneurship education is important given the new economy and job market”; yet, only 27% of respondents felt they had been “ever offered a class(es) on entrepreneurship” (Youth Entrepreneur Council, 2011). These findings are also supported by the 2011 Entrepreneurship Barometer as presented at the G20 Young Entrepreneur Summit in Nice, where young entrepreneurs profiled felt budding entrepreneurs needed a stronger infrastructure of educational support and mentoring (Ernst & Young, 2011). Specifically, 70% of the G20 Young Entrepreneur Summit attendees felt students needed to “follow specific training to become entrepreneurs” and 88% saw success stories and coaching programs as “key priorities to improve student perceptions of entrepreneurship as a career option over the next three years” (2011).

The imperative to increase youth entrepreneurship educational efforts becomes particularly important when one considers the age of potential entrepreneurial beginnings. Among a study of 685 leading entrepreneurs, 59% started their first business before the age of 30; 10% starting their business even earlier, under 20 years old (Ernst & Young, 2011). Recent popular press is inundated with stories of teen entrepreneur prodigies such as: Nick D’Aloisio, the 17-year-old news summarization app. developer who sold his business to Yahoo! for \$30 million; Madison Robinson, 15 year old Founder and CEO of the \$1 million+ sales apparel company, Fish Flop’s apparel; Cameron Johnson, a serial teen entrepreneur, who started his first business at age 9 and had a net worth of \$1 million plus before he earned a high school diploma and many more (Strauss, 2013). Teen entrepreneur dramatic success stories are still certainly buzzworthy headlines; but not the isolated phenomenon they might once have been.

Key motivations for entrepreneurs have been identified time and again as involving the goals of profit and commercial gain. More recently however, Noam Wasserman and Timothy Butler of Harvard Business School (HBS) surveyed 2,000 entrepreneurs and identified key motivators, by age and gender. Key motivators within this HBS study for 20-something entrepreneurs of both genders included autonomy, power & influence and managing people; gender differences stressed an emphasis on financial gain for men versus altruism for women. Wasserman discussed the two key distinguishing motivators leading to the “founder’s dilemma” of determining the balance between being “rich” or being “king,” arguing that successful entrepreneurs ultimately should choose a path (not both), accepting the inevitable trade-offs involved (Wasserman, 2008). Interestingly, the Harris Interactive survey that reached 5,077 potential U.S. entrepreneurs aged 8 to 24 years old unearthed both similarities and differences when exploring start-up motivation patterns among the very young (Harris Interactive, 2010). The top 5 reasons

among the youthful potential entrepreneurs in the Harris study included: money (26%); building something for the future (18%), being my own boss (16%), using my skills and abilities (14%) and seeing my ideas realized (12%). Themes of financial reward, autonomy and personal achievement are sentiments frequently voiced by traditional entrepreneurs.

In comparison, when exploring the motivations of media arts and arts entrepreneurs, impetuses begin shifting. As Ruth Bridgstock's so aptly entitled paper, "Not a Dirty Word: Arts Entrepreneurship and Higher Education" implies and discusses, there is a seemingly inherent discomfort with any potentially crass 'commercial' aspect associated with artistic endeavors (Bridgstock, 2012). Young artists (often as well as their educators and mentors) frequently are very committed to fulfilling internal needs such as *personal artistic fulfillment* and a passionate desire to *innovate*. Arguably, art entrepreneurs can also be seeking external rewards such as *validation* via appreciation from others, *community connections* through shared visions, etc. Based on published interviews with entrepreneurs who began as teens and interviews with current teen entrepreneurs, the following preliminary analysis begins to illustrate the similarities and differences between more traditional entrepreneurs (involved in business, science and/or technically driven efforts) versus media and arts entrepreneurs as youthful business beginners.

Young entrepreneurs interested in more traditional business models and technology driven businesses repeated consistent themes of *profits*, *autonomy*, *maximizing investments* and sometimes, people management. As the quotes provided indicate, although these motivations may seem a bit cold and rational, the language and sentence structures reveal strong emotional connections highlighting passion, drive, pride and excitement.

"In elementary school, I was trying to sell not only my toys but also, for example, my uncle's products to friends and family for a profit...it was a continuous quest for autonomy." — Christopher Pruijse, *letsunch.com*

"When I was young...I found out you can make a lot of money as an entrepreneur... I was hooked at that point!" — Nick Friedman, *College Hunks Hauling Junk*

"At the age of 4...I realized I could make money...I wanted more of it. I continued to brainstorm and create new opportunities every year since then!" — Charles Gaudet, *Predictable Profits*

"I started my first business in middle school, when I was 11 years old, by partnering with an artist friend of mine... He was the 'manufacturer,' and I was the 'salesman.' We made enough to pay for our lunches every day" — Chad French, *Peerfly (Young Entrepreneur Council, 2012)*.

“...most of my companies focus on making money...Part of my struggle is that I want to see where they’re going with the business and, in most cases, I don’t have control over that. Like with a baby, I just want to make sure that it’s going to have a good future. —Mark Bao, 17 years old with 11 companies, 3 foundation (Scheides, 2012).

Although young media and arts entrepreneurs exhibit many of the same personal sentiments (passion, drive, excitement, etc.) through syntax and word choices, these teen entrepreneurs reveal slightly different priorities in terms of personal expression, artistic fulfillment, innovation, individual validation and connections. Less emphasis is placed on financial rewards, people management or power.

“One of my first ventures was in middle school: A co-founder and I offered more stylish Physical Education uniforms for fellow students.”—Doreen Bloch, Poshly

“My favorite example is my quest, as a teenager, to become an actress. I didn’t have the look or the talent, but I persisted past a million nos.”—Lauren Friese, TalentEgg (Young Entrepreneur Council, 2012).

“I like a challenge. I think what drove me to start my magazine was the fact that I was so young and I was doing something that nobody around me was doing.”—Savannah Britt, 15, Youngest Magazine Publisher

“When it first started, it wasn’t a business. The characters of the Miss O girls started off as my drawings. I thought, ‘We should really start doing something for these girls.’—Juliette Brindek, MissOandFriends.com (began at age 10)

“It’s fun to meet people who use the site. Go for your goals. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do it.” -- Catherine Cook, yearbook.com (launched in high school) (Scheides, 2012).

Conclusion and Next Steps Recommendations

In conclusion, young entrepreneurship is an important global educational priority and economic imperative. In particular, media arts and arts entrepreneurship education should be an important initiative. Although growing, arts entrepreneurship in undergraduate programs is inconsistent and seemingly, supported at a low level (Beckman, Hong & Bridgstock, 2011). Indeed, Dr. Gary Beckman, Director of Entrepreneurial Studies in the Arts at North Carolina State University argues,

“There are at least 130 universities and colleges that have arts

entrepreneurship courses of various kinds. While the majority of them are minors, many of us in arts education are looking at designing and offering broader arts degrees. We are working towards helping creative people become better at the business facets of their vocation. The marketing of artistic products and services has to be different, just like those who are great at running businesses need to be more creative” (Jessu, 2013).

In addition, further consideration should be given to arts entrepreneurship efforts at the secondary and even, primary education levels. Given the self-help inquisitive nature of GenZ, the technological resources available, the pop culture start-up mania and the economic uncertainty further focus on entrepreneurship is both necessary and seemingly welcome. Young artists (and their educational institutions) will otherwise continue to face a potential lifetime of portfolio based ‘job to job’ assignments and/or the unpleasant reality of a day job to ‘support their art,’ (Bridgstock, 2012). Recommended next steps are to conduct original research involving a comparative study of current GenZ students already exploring and considering media arts and arts entrepreneurship projects. In addition, in-depth interviews with appropriate GenZ educators and outreach program should provide narratives, giving perspective on the issues and opportunities ahead.

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