



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN BUSINESS & SOCIAL SCIENCES



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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/14088>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/14088

**Received:** 10 April 2022, **Revised:** 12 May 2022, **Accepted:** 30 May 2022

**Published Online:** 17 June 2022

**In-Text Citation:** (Adam et al., 2022)

**To Cite this Article:** Adam, S., Fuzi, N. M., Senin, A. A., Chuin, T. P., and Hairon, A. M. (2022). The Effectiveness of Digital Entrepreneurship towards Higher Education Institution in Malaysia: The Case of B40 Students in Southern Region Universities. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. 12(6), 1608 – 1614.

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**Vol. 12, No. 6, 2022, Pg. 1608 – 1614**

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[www.hrmars.com](http://www.hrmars.com)

ISSN: 2222-6990

## The Effectiveness of Digital Entrepreneurship towards Higher Education Institution in Malaysia: The Case of B40 Students in Southern Region Universities

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### Abstract

Digital Entrepreneurship (DE) is reconciling traditional entrepreneurship with a modern way of creating and doing business in the digital era. This research aimed to examine the effectiveness of entrepreneurship ecosystem (basic skills, knowledge and experiential learning) in promoting the Digital Entrepreneurship for B40 students towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals. This study will employ a mixed-method approach based on sequential design. The SPSS and analysis will be use at this stage to identify the integration between the relationship. Further, interview with the focus group is needed to obtain more in-depth information on the program. This research is expected to establish a conceptual framework of Digital Entrepreneurship that may give benefit to the pivotal issue to be tackled comprehensively for B40 students in Higher Education Institution (HEI) in developing an income generation through digital entrepreneurship by build a business and support their family.

**Keywords:** Digital Entrepreneurship, B40 Students, Sustainable Development Goals, Higher Education Institution, Malaysia

### Introduction

Statistically, there are 2.7 million Malaysian households in the Bottom 40 (B40) category, 56% of whom live in urban areas and 44% of whom live in rural areas. Malaysia's Eleventh Malaysia Plan refers to B40 as a household with average monthly income below RM4,850. In Malaysia, the Covid-19 pandemic will be one of the greatest obstacles for recent graduates in the labor market. The Department of Statistics Malaysia reports that the unemployment rate in Malaysia increased by 5.1 percent in the second quarter of 2020. These data show that graduate unemployment is a major contributor with total unemployment of 29.3% more than

half of the total unemployment makes it a huge struggle for graduates to get job. In reality, minimal movements during the Covid-19 pandemic are still a significant barrier to seeking a career and attending a physical interview. Unfortunately, most of the unemployed graduates which belonged to the households in the Bottom 40 (B40) category. It is hard for these graduates to help their families get out of poverty lifestyle. Thus, the Entrepreneurship Action Plan (PTK) 2021-2025 produced by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) aims to expand digital entrepreneurship in supporting students to open their own online businesses.

The opportunity of digital marketing for a larger market is now rapidly being trusted and cost-effective for entrepreneurs. Moreover, with the increase in industries impacted by the pandemic crisis, most micro, small and medium-sized companies have been driven to explore and expand digital marketing strategies in the multi-national commercial sector to further enhance the importance of competitiveness and credibility of the company. Digital marketing is a crucial component that must be learned by every company and every community that wishes to move into the business world so as not to drown in competition from industry. In the current era of business, it is very important to continue to improve digital policy from time to time so that economic growth will stay intact. This perspective is very fertile and can lead to significant developments in the field. Hence, the B40 student's involvement rate in digital entrepreneurship is an issue that merits serious attention.

Various provisions and initiatives to reduce the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the labor market have been announced. Much of the programmes announced are extensive, but the incentives for B40 students and recent graduates are small. Any changes, such as improvements and an emphasis on the management and financial capabilities of current services, need to be introduced by reviewing some of the existing programmes and projects in a curriculum that focuses primarily on providing job experience for young generations, especially B40 students in RU's. It is observed by some studies that the younger generations in the B40 community are very exposed to the Internet and social technologies in general. Hence, the adoption and creating an entrepreneurial mindset through digital entrepreneurship among B40 students in HEI signals that is an issue that deserves significant attention.

### **Literature Review**

Digitalization has contributed to one of the most fundamental behavioral changes in human culture and, in particular, to how well-established and emerging companies operate in the marketplace. Study by Sahut et al (2019) stated that understanding the conditions and factors that promote digital entrepreneurship (DE) is of significance to academic study and directs business practice, as well as government policies to support this development, considering its positive impacts on job creation and economic growth.

Digital entrepreneurship is a subcategory of entrepreneurship in which some or almost all of the physical elements of a traditional organization have been digitized. It thus integrates emerging technologies for developing and doing business in the digital age (Rippa & Secundo, 2019). From this, a study by Zainal and Yong (2020) suggests that digital entrepreneurship in education able to influence the use of digital technologies and able to accelerate entrepreneurial knowledge and skills among students. Besides, study by Valigursky et al (2021) highlighted that digital entrepreneurship as an entrepreneurship activity which involved innovation skills and competitive aggressiveness characteristics in order to compete in the digital market.

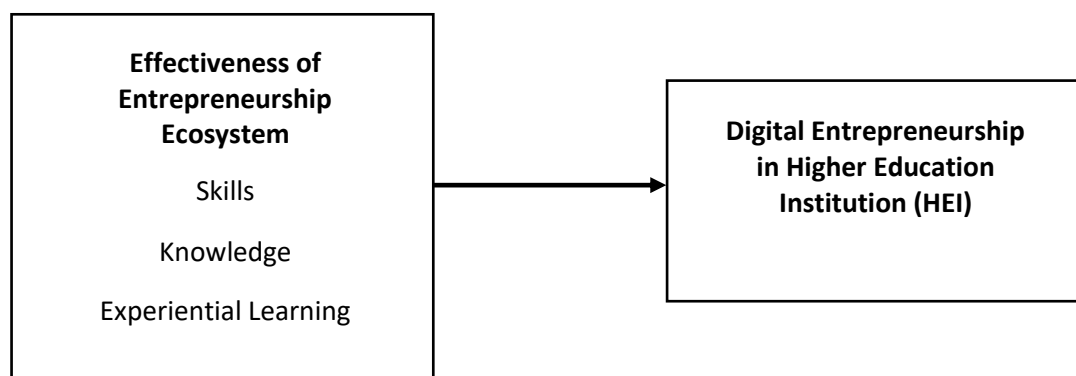
The digital entrepreneurship module has been implemented into the current entrepreneurship course at higher learning institutions in Malaysia starting in 2016. This convergence was due to the emergence of new innovations that have changed the job market and business environment, such as social media and websites (Zainal & Yong, 2020). In line with the Industrial Revolution 4.0, digital entrepreneurship was considered one of the emerging aspects in Malaysian education.

Undoubtedly, the government and universities have made concerted efforts to inculcate entrepreneurial mindsets and competencies by incorporating entrepreneurship education as part of the academic curriculum. In fact, the first agenda under the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 is to create a holistic, entrepreneurial and successful graduate (Fabeil, 2019). The intention is not only to build graduate entrepreneurs, but to train students with entrepreneurial qualities in the future to become independent and resourceful entrepreneurs.

The Covid-19 pandemic enables the organization and an entrepreneur to think critically about business processes and the use of social media platform to sustain operations in line with modern practices, using new technologies, social connections and techniques from the current crisis (Dwivedi et al., 2020). The Covid-19 has been identified by the government that digital economy helps in accelerates the growth of digital economy. The digital economy as one of the key economic growth areas to achieve national commitment of elevating the country to be a nation of sustainable growth while ensuring fair and equitable distribution across income groups, ethnicities and regions (Bernama, 2021). Students can be classified as a fast learner to respond to current technological change and, at the same time, to be able to benefit from social networking, gain trust levels and generate opportunities for them to integrate efficiency in the workplace (Picatoste et al., 2018). Study by Rodriguez dan Lieber (2020), proves that students with entrepreneurial and critical thinking are more focused on digital entrepreneurship and choose entrepreneurship as a career of a choice.

The growth of technology and social media applications, especially Facebook, has created great opportunities for students to enter the entrepreneurship world using low-cost technology (Khalil et al., 2021). Social media platforms often provide new resources for entrepreneurs and other organizations to manage their operations further (Rippa & Secundo, 2019). Digitalization and technology are an external support for the development of new entrepreneurial ventures and business transformation by creating and experimenting with new digital technologies to improve the online business development (Le Dinh et al., 2018; Oppong et al., 2020). Social media are a great tool for engaging students and they're well known to use the website regularly throughout their daily lives (Lewis & Molyneux, 2019). Social media as a platform to showcase the talents of young people and to develop, as well as design, start-ups in the fields in which they are interested (George, 2020). However, students only cultivate social media as a space to share pictures and videos. This shows that students need to be exposed to knowledge and skills in data analysis and to be able to evaluate social media information for their online business (Rani & Padmalosani, 2019).

## A Proposed Conceptual Model



**Figure 1.** The Proposed Conceptual Model

Figure 1 above is the proposed conceptual framework for this study. This framework shows the digital entrepreneurship in higher education institution. The independent variables for this study are the effectiveness of entrepreneurship ecosystem which consist of skills, knowledge and experiential learning. Meanwhile the dependent variable is the digital entrepreneurship in higher education institution. This conceptual framework is applied and adapted based on several previous researches.

## Methodology

The main objective of this research is to investigate whether there is an integration of effectiveness between entrepreneurship ecosystem towards Digital Entrepreneurship for B40 students in achieving Envision 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This study will employ a mixed method approach based on sequential design. First, the quantitative approach will be conducted using online pre- and post-questionnaires to measure the effectiveness of the program (comparison before and after the program). The population of this study consists of 100 B40 students from Southern Region Universities (UTM and UTHM). The sample size of this study is 50 B40 students from each Southern Region Universities. The unit of analysis in this study is B40 students. This research will focus on total 100 B40 students from 2 Southern Region Universities.

To achieve the objectives of this research, purposeful sampling technique will be used because it helped to narrow the sample down only to those that potentially could assist based on this study. To reiterate, the respondents of this research were qualified based on the identified criteria which are (1) the student must come from the B40 group; (2) the household income of the student family must below RM4850; (3) the student must be an active student. This data shall undergo SPSS analysis to measure pre- and post-analysis and SPSS approach also will be used to identify the integration between the relationship.

The second stage of this research applies the qualitative method, and it is designed to meet the rigor and trustworthiness of the research, and then a thick and rich data could be deemed important. For the qualitative method, a semi-structured interview is conducted to get as many explanations and feedbacks as possible pertaining to the input, output and outcome to strengthen the findings on the program. For this purpose, the semi-structured interview will be analysed using “thematic analysis” by Miles and Huberman (2014). This method involves three components which are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification and this analysis will start after the interview take place.



### Discussion

The expected findings of this study will shed some light on the emergence of IR 4.0 towards enriching digital economy in facilitating the digital entrepreneurship to adopt and apply the knowledge and skills in addressing social needs among the B40 students in Southern Region Universities. Besides, the establishment a proposed conceptual framework would assist those B40 students to venture into online business to be a digital entrepreneur and create a social impact in creating income generation and more sustainable community as the contribution of the study.

### Conclusion

This research is expected to establish a model of DE that may give benefit to the pivotal issue to be tackled comprehensively for B40 students in Southern Region Universities in developing an income generation through DE. This expected output of this study in line with the second objective of Shared Prosperity Vision 2030.

### Acknowledgement

This research was supported by Ministry of Education (MOE) through Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2021/SS01/UTM/02/3). We also want to thank you to Research Management Centre of Universiti Teknologi Malaysia through vote numbers V29000 (B29000) for this research (R.J130000.7855.5F465).

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