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Write a critical reflection on entrepreneurship based on one or more of the topics discussed in the module making specific reference to the content discussed in the session/s.

As a general consensus I think it’s safe to say that all the student’s pre-conceptions regarding entrepreneurship had not only been elaborated on but also challenged and subverted as we went from week to week, myself included. Although my pre-conceived ideas about what it meant to be an entrepreneur eg. being a rich, individualistic and successful business tycoon, who possessed certain characteristics like ‘the dark triad’ still carries its legitimacy, what I’ve taken away from this module is how there are other branches of Entrepreneurship that don’t conform to the traditional, more well- known concepts but are undoubtedly facets of Entrepreneurship in their own right.

In this critical reflection I would like to home in on the specific implications of digital entrepreneurship, firstly considering my initial presumptions regarding what it was to be a ‘digital entrepreneur’ and then elaborating on how these implications have inspired me as I feel they would be useful and relevant to the type of Entrepreneur I would want to be if I were to pursue such a venture. Additionally, I also feel like it would be particularly helpful to elaborate further on the theories behind digital Entrepreneurship in order to understand how todays technological innovations have come about to form todays practices, particularly in regard to the phenomenon of social- media and how it arguably has become such an integral part in our modern society. With reference to the future shaping practices framework (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014) I will relate these implications specifically to the Instagram platform as I believe it will play a big part in my wishes to be an entrepreneur, so I think acknowledging its role and functions will be vital.

I suppose what immediately came to mind when thinking of the concept of a digital entrepreneur were just the people on Instagram who promote products and services via the photos they upload on to their accounts as I suppose these are the people that we come into contact with digitally on a day to day basis. Additionally, it had never occurred to me to reflect on how many of these technological implications that occur on a day to day basis had come about, as they had, I suppose always been available, yet I think understanding the narrative of such innovation is important.

Relating these ideas specifically back to myself and having witnessed the success of creating an online business derived from social media, I think being a digital entrepreneur to an extent would be essential in becoming the kind of entrepreneur I would want to be. For me, the concept of being a fitness based online personal trainer sounds very appealing. From what originally started out as just a hobby when I was around the age of 15, keeping fit, going to the gym around 5 to 6 times a week and ultimately adopting this entire lifestyle overhaul has stuck with me and integrated itself into my everyday routine. It is something I thoroughly enjoy yet had only been considered as a hobby for a long time. However, seeing how nowadays there are numerous amounts of online personal trainers who have been able to utilize the tools such as the internet and social media to develop a very sustainable form of income, this idea seems a lot less farfetched as I recognize I too have the tools available. With these tools however comes the difficulties and challenges that one may face when one is attempting to become part of what is arguably a highly saturated market and I will discuss these difficulties later on.

Recognizing the democratization of technology is crucial in order to explain the success of digital entrepreneurship. It can be defined as the process by which access to technology is rapidly continuing to become more accessible to the larger more general population (Tringham & Lopez, 2001). New technologies and improved user experiences have empowered those outside of the technical industry, meaning consumers at an increasing scale, have greater access to use and purchase technologically sophisticated products, as well as participating in the development of these products. Industry innovation and user demand have been associated with more affordable, user friendly products, in an ongoing process which began with the development of mass production and has increased dramatically as digitation became commonplace. This relates directly to social media and platforms like Instagram, which has empowered and embodied user to become contributors and critics of technological developments- becoming their own digital entrepreneurs.

Applying the ideals of future shaping practices, which can be defined by ‘practices derived from mundane and embedded exercises of everyday life, engendered by digitally empowered users with an entrepreneurial vision to address the current needs in imaginative and innovative ways’, (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014) we can understand how the Instagram platform is being used in this way. Understanding the original format and purpose of Instagram is important in order to illustrate how it has developed and changed into the social media site many people use today by relating it to the core element of practice- induced innovation. Practice induced innovation ‘highlights the role of mundane activities for shaping new uses of digital technology’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014) which relates to Instagram as it was designed in response to the process of photo sharing. Much like many other technological innovations, Instagram formed due to a user experiencing dissatisfaction during an everyday practice. The app was launched in the Autumn of 2010 and an original blog post illustrates its points of success against common criticisms among mobile phone photos (Riley- Smith, 2013). The first criticism simply addressed the quality of the photos. The development of the modern-day smartphone possessed the owners with a high quality, easy to use camera at the touch of their fingertips, yet the ability to edit and enhance photos easily was not yet available. Instagram launched with 11 preset filters and editing capabilities which gave the user a good range of customization which was easy to grasp and use with virtually no skill in photo editing needed. Secondly, the criticism that sharing photos to friends was a hassle was simply addressed by Instagram being easily linked to other sites like Facebook and Twitter meant that photos could be uploaded and shared instantly. Lastly, Instagram addressed the general frustration of uploading photos. Before Instagram, uploading photos usually meant connecting a cable to a computer and slow internet sometimes meant this uploading process was slow. Instagram’s solution was to make the uploading capabilities of the photos only 60kb, meaning there is a huge difference in reliability when the size of the photo is so small. Taking inspiration from polaroid photos, in which consumers were able to access their photos instantly compared to the old method of photography where users had to go and get their photos developed, Instagram addressed an already established practice and can be characterized by practice- induced innovation as it ‘has become possible as a result of increasingly flexible technology that can be easily adopted by the users in order to best suit the flexibility of their constantly evolving needs and routines’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014).

Additionally, understanding how Instagram has been shaped by past- future tensions is ‘essential to grasping the casual mechanisms behind the inception, shifts, and scaling of future shaping practices’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). As formerly stated, Instagram was launched in response to a mundane activity and has now formed into an entirely new form of practice, arguably quite far from its original intention. Despite the overall success of Instagram being mainly as a result of technological imbrications and the impact of the smartphone and its capabilities, the success is ‘equally affected by choices, chances and various unintended consequences and other exogenous shocks outside of control of social actors involved in the inception, shift or scaling stages of practice development’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). Amassing a billion active users, the content of Instagram has made some huge shifts in the way that people are able to create businesses, careers and even disrupt whole industries. Without a doubt the use of the platform has been altered for different purposes. An example of how a brand has utilized Instagram as a marketing tool is watch brand Daniel Wellington, who bypassed traditional forms of advertising and instead sent their watches to influencers who then posted pictures of the watch to their followers which translated to sales, helping the company to become Europe’s fastest growing company between 2013 and 2015 (Brooks, 2018). This is a direct example of an innovation wake (Boland et al 2007), ‘which can in turn exponentially produce newer, more complex and turbulent landscapes of innovations’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014) yet these ways in which the Instagram platform is being utilized wouldn’t have been possible without Instagram’s initial aim to combat the original photo sharing process.

Although the criticisms addressed by Instagram are still the main components of the app, its use has been altered as its user base has grown exponentially and users are utilizing it for entrepreneurial purposes. This is thanks to technological development but also democratization alongside it, empowering users ‘whose influence now spans much further than mere acceptance or up taking of every innovation introduced to the market’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). The best example of this, which also relates specifically back to how I would utilize the platform as well, is the new brand of influencer that has been created as a result. The concept of a blogger is nothing new, yet Instagram has given these bloggers the ability to output easily digestible, short and sweet updates as the platform is so emphasized on visuals with only a caption under a photo needed. Utilizing the apps functions, which include being able to post pictures, comment on them, direct message and put up ‘stories’, influencers are using these functions among other ways to interact and grow a following. Having a huge following on Instagram holds a direct correlation to one’s potential ability to make money as brands recognize you can potentially reach a wide or niche audience. The democratization of technology has allowed users to utilize things like Instagram in order to seek an entrepreneurial vision and ultimately the view that ‘the sources and seedbeds of user innovation are usually the communities of users that reinvent emerging digital opportunities usually in an unintended manner’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014) holds true specifically in the case of Instagram, which began as a photo streaming app but is now being used by individuals to generate income as many are now seeing it as being entirely possible.

As the app’s user base continues to grow and as the app continues to be developed and altered as different functions are being applied, ‘we are experiencing a shift in the way our modern society reconsiders century old behaviors and practices of sharing, bartering and transferring knowledge, products, favors within and among communities’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). I think the biggest shift we’ve seen among our modern society is Instagram’s impact on marketing, specifically through the use of influencers which has grown in popularity over the past few years. As brands and companies are acknowledging the huge audience base on Instagram, they are devoting more time and effort into the implementation of influencer marketing and bringing it to the forefront as many have been able to propel their brand through the use of social media (Matew, 2018). Influencer marketing typically entails the influencer promoting a brands products or services. The influencer is usually selected under certain conditions; the number of followers and the loyalty of those followers typically being one of the main reasons but other factors such as the nature of the content and whether or not that particular influencer aligns with the upkeeping of the brand are also considerable factors. The reality is that anyone can become an influencer as ‘this shift has become possible due to digitization and the increasing flexibility of digital technology’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014). Additionally, ‘By engaging in digitally fueled social interactions users satisfy their needs in more suitable for them ways, moving two steps ahead of the ‘middle man’, high costs, and other peer to peer trade boundaries such as geographic. This not only redefines present and future innovation trajectories, but also market relations and even societal structures’ (Kelestyn & Henfridsson, 2014).Before the impact of social media, advertising through television was essentially the only way in which marketers were able to reach a large audience, however nowadays consumers have the freedom to view any content they wish to see through social media (Matew, 2018). This is potentially problematic for brands as their audience becomes more difficult to reach as it spreads over many forms of media. Influencer marketing has offered a solution to this problem, as brands are now able to market directly to their target audience. A shift in which our society chooses to perceive knowledge and information can be seen here as consumers are becoming more skeptical towards brands and their marketing tactics, however by advertising through the use of influencers, consumers develop a form of trust with the influencer as they have chosen to follow, engage and ultimately trust their judgement when it comes to the promotion of a certain product or service.

The impact of social media is ultimately one that cannot be ignored as it has integrated itself so heavily into the way we interact with one another. Much like having a phone number or an email address, having an account on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram seem to be something that is deemed essential and not having one seems to make you an the odd one out within a community. Instagram has been able to shift the way entire industries use to operate, including the fitness industry and it seems like if a brand or influencer is excluding themselves from these platforms, they are potentially missing out on a huge opportunity to expand their business as so much seems to be done electronically.

I think it would be relevant to quickly highlight how fitness entrepreneurs and trainers use to be portrayed before the impact of social media to really illustrate how it has been altered as a result. Typically, in the past, being a personal trainer usually meant you worked in your local gym, training clients 1 to 1 and things like flyers, leaflets and business cards were used in order to grow a client base. Nowadays however, using social media, personal trainers can post content easily and interact with a wider audience to increase their client base as many personal trainers operate strictly online, sending things like meal plans and training plans to clients who are potentially on the other side of the world. This means, through the democratization of technology, personal trainers have not only been able to expand their business outside the realms of a local gym and area but have also been able to operate entirely electronically ultimately meaning they could be anywhere and still be able to upkeep their business, which was an aspect I found appealing and would be an encouraging factor as to whether I would pursue this venture. Also, similarly to other influencers, fitness entrepreneurs are also seeked out by brands and companies to promote certain products such as supplements and clothing to create more streams of income alongside their personal training business.

Additionally, I think it would be interesting to note on how this ‘keeping -fit’ lifestyle phenomenon has really established itself over the last few years to really flood a lot of the content many of us see every day on social media (Schlossberg, 2016). Before, being able to ignore the need to have a healthy lifestyle seemed possible in comparison to today where the constant photo stream of workout regimes, body transformation videos, protein shakes and healthy meals seem to be unavoidable and with the ideals of image maintenance and body consciousness being at an all time high, going to the gym and looking a certain way seems to be a necessity for many.

Alongside this democratization of technology, which has allowed many online trainers to become very successful, I have also recognized some difficulties that also come along with this which could potentially inhibit my own potential success. Firstly, with todays current gym phenomenon the market has become highly saturated with many other fitness entrepreneurs trying to expand their business. The gym, for many, including myself has become such a huge part of our daily routine that making something that was initially perhaps just a hobby has instead presented a potential career opportunity and with todays trend of ‘doing what you love’, the two seem to coincide. Additionally, much like having access to social media, many have access to a gym they can go use to take photos and create content and although not easy, acquiring a personal training license is perhaps not as difficult in comparison to other professions. It is the growing of a following and creating a social presence which is the difficult part. The desire of becoming a fitness entrepreneur covers a wide spectrum of appeal as many have the tools available.

Another potential hurdle that I have recognized is that the nature of the content of many of these fitness entrepreneurs is very similar. In terms of the fundamental content that would qualify someone as a ‘fitness influencer’, I think this would include uploading workout videos, topless photos and perhaps the occasional food pic. The nature of many of the principals that encompass fitness eg. Gaining muscle or losing fat, have been well established and well grounded within the fitness community, making it easier to spot if someone is distributing false information as many are well educated in the field. The issue with this is that much of the content I see is very similar and quite monotonous which I think will make it difficult to stand out as an individual. Having recognized this, I think it would be important for me to actively try and stand out for personal reasons, as I would not want to just regurgitate a lot of what has already been done and out of practicality, as I think standing out in such a saturated market is what will gain attraction.

In addition to acknowledging the potential difficulties that one my face when attempting to grow social media, I think another concern that has come along with this democratization of technology are the social and mental issues that have arisen as a result of our attachment to social media. Never have we lived in a society where the approval of others and popularity is quantified by a number of likes or followers. I think many are consumed in portraying a certain image of themselves via social media which may represent a false reality as it is important to note that influencers choose what they wish to upload that come in the size of a 60kb photo or a short 30 second video. Many problems regarding depression and anxiety have been linked specifically to the Instagram platform and I think these highlights one of the impacts of the social media and I think it would be important to take these factors into consideration.

Nevertheless, despite these factors, I don’t think it would discourage me from pursuing an entrepreneurial venture in the digital sphere as I think I have a good awareness of the issues that may come as a result. Understanding how the democratization of technology has given rise to a new kind of digital entrepreneur has made me realize that I too possess the tools to become a digital entrepreneur. Being someone who doesn’t like to be too attached to many forms of social media, I think I would be able to maintain the mindset that Instagram is just a tool that can be utilized in order to expand as an entrepreneur and that growing a following is important in doing so, rather than placing pure vanity and social approval to the number.

Word count: 2983

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