

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH ENTREPRENEURS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, although youth entrepreneurship is now on the rise and is a topic much discussed and highlighted in the media, what is still lacking is systematic and in-depth knowledge of youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia. The authors feel that greater knowledge about youth entrepreneurship is necessary to provide information to the government to design effective strategies and programmes for improvement in youth entrepreneurship so as to increase socio-economic development. This knowledge is useful to society, particularly to youths, especially in alleviating problems of youth unemployment, and to increase youth participation and interest in entrepreneurship as a form of career path. To obtain such knowledge, the authors embarked on an exploratory study in 2009 on the nature of youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia. The study aims to explore the entrepreneurial characteristics of youth entrepreneurs in terms of personal, social and business characteristics, as well as challenges they faced. Findings from a survey of 531 male and female youths in Klang Valley revealed some commonalities between the youths in terms of entrepreneurial traits, problems and challenges faced by them.

Keywords: *Youth Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Traits, Personal Characteristics, Social Characteristics, Business Characteristics*

ABSTRAK

Di Malaysia, keusahawanan belia semakin berkembang, dibincangkan dan ditonjolkan dalam media. Namun, pengetahuan sistematik dan mendalam tentang keusahawanan belia masih berkurangan. Penulis berpendapat pengetahuan tentang keusahawanan belia perlu dipertingkatkan agar dapat memberi pengetahuan kepada pihak kerajaan dan membantu kerajaan menggariskan strategi peningkatan program keusahawanan belia yang efektif, dan selanjutnya mengembangkan pembangunan sosioekonomi negara. Pengetahuan itu berguna kepada masyarakat terutamanya pihak belia, dalam mengurangkan masalah pengangguran dalam kalangan belia, dan juga meningkatkan penglibatan belia dalam keusahawanan. Para belia diharapkan juga mempunyai minat untuk menceburi bidang keusahawanan sebagai satu kerjaya. Untuk memperoleh pengetahuan itu, penulis telah menjalankan satu kajian exploratori tentang sifat

keusahawanan belia in Malaysia pada tahun 2009 dengan meninjau ciri-ciri personal, sosial dan perniagaan kelompok tersebut. Hasil kajian dari tinjauan ke atas 531 belia wanita dan lelaki di Lembah Kelang telah menonjolkan beberapa persamaan dalam kalangan responden belia itu dari segi sifat keusahawanan, masalah dan cabaran yang dihadapi.

Kata Kunci: *Usahawan Belia, Tret Usahawan, Ciri Personal, Ciri Sosial, Ciri Perniagaan*

INTRODUCTION

Youths are increasingly facing unemployment problems in the 21st century (Schoof 2006). The issue of youth unemployment has increasingly become a big challenge and is faced by most governments and societies around the world. In a study conducted by the International Labour Office (ILO), youths were found to be generally three and a half times more likely than adults to be unemployed, and by 2015, approximately 660 million young people will either be working or looking for work (Schoof 2006: xi).

In Malaysia, the Youth Society and Development Act 2007 and the National Youth Development Policy stipulate the age range of youths as between 15 to 40 years old. According to the 10th Malaysia Plan, the population of youths in the 15-40 age groups has grown from 11.1 million in 2005 to 11.9 million in 2010 and this constitutes 41.5 percent of the country's population. However, youth unemployment in Malaysia has increased from 10.5 percent to 10.9 percent between 2001 and 2008, accounting for 62 percent of the total unemployment in 2008 (Government of Malaysia 2010). The Plan pointed out that employment to population ratio of youth aged between 15 and 24 was reduced from 42.7 percent in 2001 and further reduced to 36.7 percent in 2008.

In Malaysia, the issue of youth entrepreneurship is not only linked to rising youth unemployment due to uncertainties in the market place and global economic conditions, but also to the lack of appropriate skills and training among the youths. The lack of entrepreneurship among youths is usually identified as the critical factor in hampering future productivity and development of the country. Concerned with that, the government has heightened its effort to spur more youths to venture into entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Youth Development and Sports and the Malaysian Youth Research and Development Institute (Institut Penyelidikan Pembangunan Belia Malaysia or IPPBM, hereafter) have organized various programmes especially training and research programmes as well as activities pertaining to youth development, specifically those geared to entrepreneurship. The government has also organized entrepreneurship programmes in schools,

public universities and through various public youth organizations that aim to cultivate entrepreneurship potentials among young people (Government of Malaysia 2006). About RM5.4 billion was allocated in the 9th Malaysia Plan by the government for youth development through various youth skills training and youth leadership programmes (Government of Malaysia 2006).

Of late, various youth entrepreneurship programmes have been designed and implemented by the government. In the recent 10th Malaysia Plan, Malaysia documents its aspiration to produce youth population that is capable in the areas of skills, entrepreneurship and leadership. Thus, the government aims to nurture positive attitudes towards patriotism and volunteerism among youths as well as to establish a competitive culture based on merit and ability. To improve the employability of youths, the 10th Malaysia Plan lists among others, skills development programmes such as those offered by the National Youth Skills Institute (Government of Malaysia 2010). These skills development programmes do not only have high market demands but are also fully accredited under the Malaysian Skills Certificate. In addition, the government will also offer capital-intensive sports courses such as golf and motorsports to youths as well as introduce internship programmes for youth leaders so that they could be attached to government departments, companies and non-governmental organizations for up to one year.

According to the 10th Malaysia Plan, youths who have outstanding leadership qualities and who actively participate in organizations and societies will be given opportunities to attend various international conferences and forums such as the Global Model United Nations Programme.

The government is now slowly reaping the fruits of its labor. A testimony to this is the gradual emergence of youth entrepreneurs, amongst which are quite a number of successful youth entrepreneurs. Moreover, in a study of 4673 youths in 2008 by IPPBM, it was reported that the youth index scores were relatively high with a score of 63.3 for entrepreneurial potential and interest (IPPBM 2008: 7 & 12). The level of interest was said to have increased from the score of 51.6 in 2006. Youths in the study were said to have the interest and desire to acquire skills to increase career possibilities. However, the number of youth entrepreneurs is still not high enough to bring about advanced economic development and significant social change in the country. Many youths still shy away from entrepreneurial ventures, again citing common reasons such as lack of confidence, lack of interest in entrepreneurship as a career path, lack of entrepreneurial capability and skills, lack of personal motivation, lack of government incentives, fear of risk-taking and lack of capital (see Rajakutty

2005, Schoof 2006).

The nature of youth and youth entrepreneurship are discussed and highlighted by studies conducted by Francis Chigunta (2001) and Ulrich Schoof (2006). Chigunta discovered several different types of youth entrepreneurs based on different age ranges, specifically, 'pre-entrepreneurs (15-19 years old), 'budding entrepreneurs' (20-24 years old) and 'emergent entrepreneurs' (25-29 years old). This categorization indicates the process of youth enterprise development in the informal sector in Zambia and other parts of Africa (Chigunta 2001: 32-33). In the development process, as they aged, the youths go through different enterprise experiences. They will eventually get fully involved in more viable enterprise activities when they are older. For Chigunta (2001: 32-33), the time dimension for the involvement in more sustainable enterprise activities among young people is long and age is a key determinant of the socio-economic and enterprise characteristics of youths. Institutions and policy makers should not ignore this fact. Further, youth entrepreneurs in different age categories face specific needs and problems, and interestingly, the absolute number of youth involved in enterprise activities in the informal sector will decline as they grow older (Chigunta 2001: 33).

Chigunta argued that it is pertinent to pay heed to socio-economic characteristics when designing youth enterprise development as the development process may be positively or negatively influenced by variables such as gender, education, location, race and age. Furthermore, the categorization of youth entrepreneurs according to age range is useful to institutions and policy makers who may need to design different programmes and policies suitable to different segments of the youth entrepreneurs based on their specific needs necessary for enterprise development.

Schoof (2006: 42) found five crucial factors that influence youths to venture into entrepreneurship, specifically, social and cultural attitude towards youth entrepreneurship; entrepreneurship education; access to finance for business start-up; administrative and regulatory framework and business assistance and support. Social and cultural backgrounds indeed influence entrepreneurial activity and enterprise culture by either encouraging or restraining entrepreneurial behavior (Schoof 2006: 24-30). Some key social and cultural influences are religion, cultural values, beliefs, behaviors, social legitimacy and perception of entrepreneurship whereby the personal environment (family, parents, relatives, friends, etc.) of the youths play an influential role. In this sense, Schoof appeared to refer to the importance of social networks in the form of family networks and friendship ties to enterprise formation and development. Apart from that, for Schoof, individual awareness and familiarity with the

concept of entrepreneurship as well as the general reputation, acceptance and credibility of entrepreneurs in society also legitimately encourage or restrain entrepreneurial behavior. The idea of failure in business may discourage youths and they may distance themselves from entrepreneurship. Such youths may also possess a high sense of uncertainty avoidance; in other words, the youths would not want to take risks for fear of failure in business (Schoof 2006: 29). Schoof also ascertained that perceptions of society about entrepreneurs, for instance, entrepreneurs are corrupted, ruthless, dishonest and selfish can have a negative influence on young people's attitude towards entrepreneurship. However, entrepreneurs who are perceived as successful, honest, courageous, independent and innovative will influence youths to embark on enterprise formation.

If youths are knowledgeable and aware of entrepreneurship as a viable career path, they will want to engage in business, says Schoof (2006: 29). As such, education plays an important role in raising awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable self-employment measure. Education will be able to provide youths with skills and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship. The promotion of an entrepreneurial culture among young people may be able to encourage youth entrepreneurship (Schoof 2006: 30-34). This promotion may be in the form of research to understand cultural influences on entrepreneurship and assessing the attitudes, awareness and aspirations of young people towards entrepreneurship. Moreover, to motivate youths to engage in business, role models are necessary (Schoof 2006: 29 & 31). Other promotion methods would be to organize public relations campaigns, competitions and awards, media coverage and youth business events. In Schoof's view, all of these efforts may be able to educate youths about the viability of youth entrepreneurship and also to increase the youths' profile and status of entrepreneurship (2006: 37).

In the process of business start-ups and entrepreneurship sustainability, Schoof (2006: 42) discovered that youths faced several key constraints and barriers such as lack of personal savings and resources, lack of securities and credibility (for debt financing), lack of business experience and skills (for debt financing), strict credit-scoring methodologies and regulations, complex documentation procedures and long waiting periods (time needed to decide on an application for funding). Other constraints are lack of knowledge, understanding, awareness of start-up financing possibilities; unfavorable firm characteristics and industry; legal status/form of enterprise and lack of (successful) micro lending, financing and seed funding. Constraints related to business assistance and support and business development services for Schoof are lack of business connections, contacts, suppliers, suitable partners and networks, lack of knowledge of available business services, lack of tailor made business training

and advise for young start-ups, lack of trained counselors, development workers and adequate support agencies, lack of mentoring capacities, lack of workspace and ICT infrastructure, lack of exchange networks, forums and meeting places, and finally, lack of business development support (Schoof 2006: 57-60).

Prawit Thainiyom and Pudthila Srisontisuk (2008) highlighted various youth entrepreneurship gaps and challenges that are concerned with policy and practice in building, supporting and strengthening youth entrepreneurship in Thailand. According to them, notable gaps and challenges are: lack of English language skills, lack of information technology skills and practical training, lack of collaboration between academic, private and public sectors, lack of small business, lack of entrepreneurship courses for the youths in the higher education institutions and reluctance of employers to train youths (Thainiyom & Srisontisuk 2008: 3-5).

The Thai Ministry of Education, the academic sector and the private sector in Thailand were said to be working independently of one another in developing youth entrepreneurship. As a result of not responding to actual business and labor needs, there was a mismatch of skills demanded by the labor market and those provided by higher education institutions. All these factors contributed to the problem of Thai youth unemployment. Therefore, for Thainiyom and Srisontisuk (2008: 4), there is an urgent need to upgrade the youths to more advanced levels of employment, including that of being an entrepreneur, through close linkages between the government and its public programs working on entrepreneurship with the academic sector or with the private sector. EDC, the organization of which Thainiyom and Srisontisuk represented aimed to address all these gaps and challenges through the introduction of a new Graduate Entrepreneurship Training in IT curriculum to youths not only in Thailand but also those in Asia Pacific. This training project is currently on-going. EDC also discovered that some Thai youth entrepreneurs tended to display greater potential for success as they were more receptive to technology training and were also open to recommendations from business consultants (Thainiyom & Srisontisuk 2008: 9). They were also said to have the potential to actively pursue new business opportunities compared to older small business owners (Thainiyom & Srisontisuk 2008: 9).

In Malaysia, although youth entrepreneurship is now on the rise and is a topic much discussed and highlighted in the media, surprisingly what is lacking is continuous empirical studies conducted to study youth entrepreneurs, youth entrepreneurship and problems and challenges faced by the youths. As a result, there is still a lack of systematic and in-depth knowledge of youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia. The authors of this article feel that greater

knowledge about youth entrepreneurship is necessary to provide information and strategies to the government for improvement in youth entrepreneurship programmes so as to increase socio-economic development. This knowledge is useful to society, particularly to youths and can be useful in alleviating problems of youth unemployment, to increase youth participation and to increase their interest in entrepreneurship as a form of career path. To obtain such knowledge, the authors embarked on an exploratory study to investigate the nature of youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia. Curiosity about the nature of youth entrepreneurs also motivated the authors to embark on the study. Several research questions guided the study and they are:

- 1) What are the entrepreneurial characteristics for building and sustaining successful youth entrepreneurship?
 - a. Are there particular personal characteristics that youths possess?
 - b. Do social networks play a role in sustaining entrepreneurship?
 - c. Do the youths possess business and economy related characteristics?

What were the challenges faced by the youth entrepreneurs during/ throughout business sustainability?

To seek answers to the above questions, the objectives of the study were:

- 1) To profile the youth entrepreneurs' socio-demography and personal characteristics;
- 2) To find out the business characteristics of the youth entrepreneurs;
- 3) To explore the nature of the youth entrepreneurs' social background/ context/relations, i.e. , the social influence, the role models and the types of social networks they possess in order to ascertain the kinds of social characteristics; and
- 4) To investigate the challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in the process of business sustainability.

CONCEPTUALISING YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship

The definition of youth entrepreneurship in our study is based on an eclectic combination of several definitions of entrepreneurship by several researchers in the field of entrepreneurship. This section will present the definitions of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship. The definition of youth entrepreneurship will follow thereafter. The definition of entrepreneurship requires prior definitions of entrepreneur. According to Bolton and Thompson (2004: 16), an entrepreneur is

a person “who habitually creates and innovates to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities”. This person can be an individual or a group of people, thus making it possible to describe entrepreneurs as teams or even organizations.

Bolton and Thompson (2004: 18), question the personality of an entrepreneur which normally revolves around issues of motivation and emotion; personality characteristics, i.e., being “born” or “made”; behavioral characteristics and personality attributes. McClelland (1961) raises significant insights concerning motivation and emotion as key psychological and social elements that drive people to venture into entrepreneurship. The basis of motivation is human needs. McClelland proposes three types of basic needs. They are: the need for achievement, the need for power and the need for affiliation. The need for achievement is particularly significant in motivating people to become entrepreneurs and in steering the country towards economic development. Spirit of competitiveness, personal satisfaction, monetary benefits and independence are other emotional elements that motivate potential entrepreneurs and sustain entrepreneurship (Martens 1976 and Roberts 1991 in Bolton & Thompson 2004).

There are some common arguments found in studies of entrepreneurial personality related to whether personality is natural and inborn or shaped by social surroundings. Thus, personality is often queried and argued as being “born” or “made”. Psychologists generally tend to favor the former argument as they see personality as deriving from an inner psychological core of a human being (Hans Eysenck 1965, Hollander 1971 and Derlega et. al. 1991). For them, personality is enduring inner characteristics of a person. Personality is even considered as biological in nature. Contrary to the psychological arguments, entrepreneurs are said to be “made” by social environment. Entrepreneurship can be taught and mastered like any other discipline. The environment is deemed an important parameter to encourage entrepreneurship in Bolton and Thompson’s view (2004).

Apart from the personality argument, attention is also given to explaining and understanding the behavioral characteristics of an entrepreneur. Researchers draw up several key common characteristics (Hornaday 1982, Kao 1991, Kuratko & Hodgetts 1998, Rotter 1966 and 1971 in Bolton & Thompson 2004). These characteristics are: perseverance and determination; the ability to take calculated risks; the need to achieve; initiative and taking responsibility; orientation to clear goals; creativity, honesty and integrity; independence; opportunity orientation; persistent problem solving and internal locus of control. Researchers also query about the existence of entrepreneur personality (in Bolton & Thompson 2004). Thus, statistical and scientific studies of personality attributes seek to investigate

clusters of personality attributes that distinguish the entrepreneur from the general public. A famous personality test, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was created to measure personality types and it was used in these studies to demonstrate entrepreneurial qualities.

Besides the personality factor, entrepreneurial origins of an entrepreneur, i.e., how does one become an entrepreneur also aroused the curiosity of researchers (Hisrich & Brush 1984, Roberts 1991 and Fukuyama 1995). Entrepreneurs are widely believed to be influenced by their surroundings. Therefore, many studies embarked on investigating the roots of entrepreneurs. Family background, education and age as well as work experience are considered vital environmental factors. They are said to mould the entrepreneurs by providing them with some relevant attitudes and perceptions necessary for entrepreneurship (Bolton & Thompson 2004). Being sons or daughters of self-employed fathers is as important as being formally and informally educated with relevant technical knowledge in the creation of an entrepreneur. Therefore, as discovered, education does not necessarily refer to formal education but learning through and within surroundings and culture. A person surrounded by technical environment may be motivated to get involved in a technical-related business. Age, in comparison with education background, is another significant factor in influencing and shaping entrepreneurial tendencies. People become entrepreneurs in their late teens or early twenties (Steiner 1998 in Bolton & Thompson 2004). As such, they become youth entrepreneurs.

With the possession of some entrepreneurial personality characteristics and relevant family background, being relatively young at age and with relevant work experience, entrepreneurs demonstrate action that propels them into the world of entrepreneurship. For Bolton and Thompson (2004: 27), there are several “*action factors*” of an entrepreneur and they are key action roles. The action roles are:-

- i. Entrepreneurs are individuals who make a significant difference,
- ii. Entrepreneurs are creative and innovative,
- iii. Entrepreneurs spot and exploit opportunities,
- iv. Entrepreneurs find the resources required to exploit opportunities,
- v. Entrepreneurs are good networkers,
- vi. Entrepreneurs are determined in the face of adversity,
- vii. Entrepreneurs manage risk,
- viii. Entrepreneurs have control of the business,
- ix. Entrepreneurs put the customer first and
- x. Entrepreneurs create capital.

Briefly, according to Clive Thompson, the Chief Executive of Rentokil Initial, entrepreneurs are said to make a difference both in business and in enterprises (in Bolton & Thompson 2004: 27). They translate ideas and desires into reality and into something that works (see Kao 1989). In Bolton and Thompson's view, entrepreneurs "have their own ways of dealing with opportunities, setbacks and uncertainties to 'creatively create' new products, new services, new organizations and new ways of satisfying customers or doing business" (2004: 28). They initiate change and enjoy it (Bolton & Thompson 2004: 28). Moreover, entrepreneurs are able to see opportunities that others do not see and can find resources to exploit those opportunities. In this process, meeting people important to their business is vital to entrepreneurs (Clifton & Harding 1986 in Bolton & Thompson 2004). Therefore, entrepreneurs are known to be good networkers.

Researchers also found that adversity which poses challenges and sometimes unexpected difficulties can be overcome by an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurs are capable of turning problems into opportunities (Williams 1994 in Bolton & Thompson 2004). Another common action undertaken by entrepreneurs is managing risk and exercising strategic control of their business (Williams 1994 in Bolton & Thompson 2004). Entrepreneurs usually give direct attention to customers as they provide knowledge about product and business improvement. Listening to customers' needs and complaints is rarely neglected. Creating capital is another action taken by all entrepreneurs. This of course goes without saying. Generally, financial capital is not the only capital created, also created are social and aesthetic capital.

According to Shane (2003: 4), entrepreneurship is "an activity that involves the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organizing, markets, processes, and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed" (see also Venkataraman 1997 and Shane & Venkataraman 2000). Entrepreneurship requires some necessary conditions, in Shane's view. One important condition is the existence of opportunities or situations in which people believe they can use new ways to recombine resources to generate profit. Another condition is the differences between people. This demonstrates the ability of entrepreneurs to recognize or obtain knowledge and identify opportunities or access to opportunities that others do not see. Besides, abilities vary between entrepreneurs. This perhaps determines the level of success or failure between entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs. Furthermore, risk-bearing is a necessary part of the entrepreneurial process. Organising is another condition required to be met by entrepreneurs. Organising, as an effort, involves the act of creating new ways to exploit opportunities that did not exist before. A final condition for Shane is that the entrepreneurial process requires some form of innovation. In short, as will be shown in the following

subsections here, Shane's definitions concerning entrepreneurship is not too much different from the definitions given by other researchers like Bird (1989), Bolton and Thompson (2004) and Bjerke (2007). One distinct difference, however, between Shane's definition and the rest is that Shane emphasizes on entrepreneurial opportunity as a pertinent feature of entrepreneurship.

For Bjerke (2007: 16-18), entrepreneurship is "to come up with new applications which others can use (as well) to fill a need and/or satisfy some demand, existing or created". For him, notions of creativity and innovation are key features of entrepreneurship. Bird (1989: 3), on the other hand, presents several operational definitions of entrepreneurship. One of them being, "entrepreneurship is the creation of value through the creation of organization". Another useful definition is that "entrepreneurship is the process of starting and/or growing a new profit-making business" (Bird 1989: 4). Finally, she also explains that "entrepreneurship is the process of providing a new product or service" (1989: 4). In brief, the process of entrepreneurship involves the "conceiving, organizing, promoting and implementing of new organizations" (Bird 1989: 2). The questions that deserve to be asked and answered are the following: how does the entrepreneurial process work?, what do entrepreneurs do?, who do they interact with and how?, and finally, what changes occur as entrepreneurs and their organizations grow? Equally important to know is the environment of venturing, that is, the larger social, economic and political forces that support or restrict entrepreneurship.

To add to the earlier definition of entrepreneurship by Bird, entrepreneurs "discover, invent, reveal, enact and in other ways make manifest some new product, service, transaction, resource, technology, and/or market that has value to some community or marketplace" (Bird 1989: 3). In this sense, the process of creating value occurs through a "multi person system" (Bird 1989: 3) or what is simply known as an organization. An organization is thus important to entrepreneurship as it is able to transform input for entrepreneurial activity into valued-added output in organized, systematic and formal ways. In entrepreneurship, business start-up and existing businesses are important as entrepreneurship involves the process of starting and/or growing a new profit-making business or creating value for existing businesses.

Moreover, following Bird's arguments, creation of new goods, new methods of production, new markets, new sources of supply, and new organization of the industry are concerned with entrepreneurship processes. The demonstration of entrepreneurial behavior is seen in terms of "opportunistic, value-driven, value-adding, risk-accepting, creative activity where ideas take the

form of organizational birth, growth, or transformation” (Bird 1989: 5-6). As such, entrepreneurial behavior for Bird is understood as all actions undertaken by the entrepreneur and the entrepreneurial team in their business endeavor in the form of activities, interactions, competencies, feelings and relationships. In short, based on the above definitions of entrepreneurship, for Bird, there are four dimensions of entrepreneurial behavior, and they are: individuals, organizational outcomes, process of entrepreneurship and the environment of venturing. In interpreting Bird’s ideas, interaction appears to be an important idea in entrepreneurship as it is concerned with the relationship between the entrepreneur and the social contexts that support or can even inhibit entrepreneurial behavior.

Part of entrepreneurial activities that distinguish entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs, according to Bird, are to evaluate personal goals and consequently specific sales goals, evaluating locations, finding sources of supply and making as well as delivering the first sale. Other activities would include drawing up financial, production, marketing and management plans; borrowing funds; selecting the entrepreneurial team; selecting a product or service; establishing business objectives; setting up the organizational structure; choosing a legal form of business; surveying or researching the market to gauge market preferences and opinions; reviewing risks and plans for managing them; producing and test-marketing the product; locating a business opportunity and others (see Steinhoff 1978; Tate, Megginson, Scott & Trueblood 1978; Meredith, Nelson & Neck 1982; Silver 1983 and Gartner 1986 in Bird 1989: 7-8 for a comprehensive list of entrepreneurial activities).

Youth, youth entrepreneurs and youth entrepreneurship

The United Nations General Assembly provides a standard definition of youth as comprising young people aged from 15-24 years inclusive (<http://www.unescap.org/esid/hds/pubs/2286/s1.pdf>, 30May2009, see also World Bank 2008). This definition was created for the International Year of Youth, held around the world in 1985. In practice, the operational definition of youth or young people varies widely from country to country, depending on cultural, institutional and political factors (O’Higgins 2001 in Ruud, Tanzer & Vossen 2002). Therefore, for the study, the authors did not use the UN definition since the reviewed research papers and data sources often use other definitions.

Specifically for our study, youths refer to individuals whose age range between 18 to 40 years. This is based on the age range of Malaysian youths defined by the 1997 National Youth Development Policy (Dasar Pembangunan Belia Negara) and the 2007 Youth Development and Organisation Act (Akta Pertubuhan dan Pembangunan Belia 2007). Youths are often positively characterized as energetic,

frank, active, vibrant, vigorous, fresh, with vitality, exuberant, bold, courageous, willing to accept new and trendy lifestyles, full of new ideas, innovative, creative, enterprising, outgoing and respectful amongst others (see <http://www.unescap.org/esid/hds/pubs/2286/s1.pdf.30May2009> on the basic identifiable characteristics of a youth). However, there are negative qualities associated with youth such as immaturity; ignorance, impatience, impulsiveness, rebelliousness, emotional, carelessness, submissiveness, frustration, anger, ill-mannered, confusion, rowdiness and irresponsibility (see <http://www.unescap.org/esid/hds/pubs/2286/s1.pdf.30May2009> for the basic identifiable characteristics of a youth). Whether these youth qualities and attributes are linked to entrepreneurship is our interest.

In a study on youth entrepreneurship carried out by Ulrich Schoof in 2006, it is reported that there is no general agreed upon definition of the terms “entrepreneurship”, “entrepreneur” or “youth entrepreneurship” in the literature. Therefore, for his study, Schoof defines youth entrepreneurship using the general definitions of entrepreneurship. He favours a behaviorally-based definition instead of a trait-based approach (Schoof 2006: 7). For him, entrepreneurship (youth entrepreneurship) is a set of behaviors. An entrepreneur (youth) is someone who undertakes these behaviors. A behavioral definition allows Schoof to facilitate the analyses of youth entrepreneurship. It is easier to observe what young entrepreneurs do and how they do it rather than to identify their particular “entrepreneurial” traits and qualities – suggesting that entrepreneurship is innate, rather than something that can be learned. Schoof’s understanding of youth entrepreneurship is argued in his paper based on youth entrepreneurship in Australia. Entrepreneurship for him is the recognition of an opportunity to create value, and the process of acting on this opportunity, whether or not it involves the formation of a new entity. This rather broad definition embraces the potential wider benefits of entrepreneurship as it encompasses different entrepreneurship types (economic, social and public entrepreneurship as well as inter-, intrapreneurship and co-operative entrepreneurship) and does not constrain the concept to the process of commencing a new venture or creating a new entity (Schoof 2006: 7).

According to Chigunta (2002 in Delgado 2004:98), youth entrepreneurship refers to the practical application by youths of enterprising qualities such as initiative, innovation, creativity and risk taking into their work environment (either as self employed or small business start up) using appropriate skills necessary for success in the environment and culture. Chigunta grounds his definition within a learning context. Based on the earlier definitions of entrepreneurship by Bird (1989), Chigunta (2002), Shane (2003), Dabson (2005), Schoof (2006), Bolton and Thompson (2004), as well as Bjerke (2007), an operational definition of youth

entrepreneurship was created for our study. The definition includes the different phases of entrepreneurial behavior, which includes pre-business venture, during business operation and future planning postures. This broader concept captures the essence of youth entrepreneurship and facilitated the analyses of the youths' entrepreneurial behaviors in a nuanced understanding of several characteristics influencing business inception, managing and sustaining their businesses.

Broadly, for our study, the operational definition of youth entrepreneurship was based on a combination of ideas by Bolton and Thompson (2004) and Bird (1989). Youth entrepreneurship is the activity by youths to create and innovate in order to build something of recognized value around perceived opportunities. This activity is the process of creation of value through the creation of organization and also the process of starting and/or growing a new profit-making business. Youth entrepreneurial activity also includes the process of finding a new product or service. The youth entrepreneurs in our study displayed what Chigunta (2002) termed as "enterprising qualities", i.e., entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviors such as motivation or need to achieve; perseverance and determination; self-efficacy or self-esteem; risk taking; effort to initiate and to take responsibility; effort to seek opportunity; visionary or orientation to clear goals; creativity and innovation; honesty and integrity; sociable and control of business or locus of control. The youth entrepreneurs were energetic, initiative, vigorous, fresh and creative.

Entrepreneurial characteristics

For our study, entrepreneurial characteristics were divided into three categories. The three categories are: a) personal, b) social and c) business. The characteristics are possessed by the youths in the process of their entrepreneurial involvement.

a) Personal characteristics

In our study, personal characteristics refer to socio-demography and basic business background characteristics. Relevant socio-demography characteristics are age, ethnicity, gender, religion, parents' occupation, family background, education background, spouse background, marital status, place of birth, mother tongue, language used in business operation, previous work experience, parents' previous and current work experiences, business-related or entrepreneurial training experiences, factors influencing business venture, role models and business visions, goals and motives.

Personal characteristics also refer to perceived possession of personal traits as an individual and perceived possession of traits that are important for entrepreneurship and are entrepreneurial in nature. These include motivation or

need to achieve, perseverance and determination, self-efficacy or self-esteem, risk taking, effort to initiate and take responsibility, effort to seek opportunity, visionary or orientation to clear goals, creativity and innovation, honesty and integrity, sociable and control of business or locus of control.

b) Social characteristics

Specifically, social characteristics in our study refer to social influence. Social influence refer to factors influencing youth entrepreneurial venture such as encouragement and motivation by parents, friends and family members, school counselor, school teachers, mass media, local entrepreneurs, promotional activities by private and public sector or government, government programmes, social background of parents/family members such as mother tongue, spouse's background, parents' previous and current occupation and family business background.

Besides that, social characteristics also refer to influence by role models, and influence through formal business-related courses and training in school, college or university, and also through business related or entrepreneurial training and skills prior to and during business venture. Social characteristics in our study also refer to possession of social networks, the types of social networks, the networks that were formed with particular actors (friends, former colleagues, family members, customers, suppliers) and utility of the networks for business involvement and sustainability (for instance, to seek customers and suppliers, provision of capital, provision of moral support and to act as customers and suppliers).

c) Business characteristics

As for business characteristics, they refer to the status of business share ownership (business partnership), business inheritance, business visions, goals and motives, business-start up capital (paid-up capital), business asset value, types of business (main business and supporting business) during start-up and current business operation, business branch, location of business, business premise ownership, and number of employees or workers at the beginning of business and during current business operation. Other business characteristics are style of business management, types of business operational technological inputs, types and background of customers, types of suppliers, source of customers, source of suppliers, levels and types of business competition, levels of business expansion (critical, slow growth, moderate growth, matured growth and rapid expansion), profit and loss levels, types of financial aid and finally, business vision.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

The study was an exploratory research that adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The main units of analysis were youths entrepreneurs aged between 18-40 years old. Any kind of business sector built by the youths, regardless of gender and ethnicity, was the focus of analysis. The duration of business involvement and sustainability is 5 years.

There was no statistical sampling frame for this study as purposive and snowballing sampling methods were used for practical reasons. This was the most suitable method to select a sample whose nature was confined to particular restricted research requirements, i.e., youth entrepreneurs whose age ranged only between 18-40 years. Moreover, we feel that these sampling methods were most suitable for us and allowed us to select the youths who were at times difficult to locate and uncooperative to us, the researchers and to our enumerators.

The sponsor of our study, IPPBM requested a research study of 500 respondents within a short research period of 6 months, i.e., from 1st December 2008 to 1st June 2009. Our research team however managed to meet this challenge and overcome obstacles and within this short duration, we managed to garner the cooperation of more than 500 respondents, i.e., 531 male and female respondents. The purposive sampling and snowballing allowed the selection of the respondents whose ages ranged between 18-40 years and who operated businesses within particular commercial/business areas. The location of the study was mainly around Klang Valley in areas such as Kuala Lumpur city centre, Ampang, Gombak, Batu Caves, Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Damansara, Cheras, Puchong, Shah Alam, Putrajaya, Kajang, Bandar Baru Bangi, Sepang, and Banting.

Data gathering was accomplished within 2 months, i.e., from 24th January 2009 to 22nd March 2009. The response rate was 100 percent with all 531 respondents answering the questions posed and returning the questionnaires. The response rate was good due to the face-to-face interaction between the researchers and enumerators with the respondents. Data analysis was guided by the problem statement, research questions and research objectives. The bulk of the data was analysed using statistical method. The quantitative data was input through a computerized package, i.e., the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Besides that, a qualitative approach using systematic content analysis was used to analyze the answers to open-ended questions. Documentary qualitative analysis of secondary data was also carried out. The qualitative analysis supported and strengthened the findings from the quantitative analysis.

FINDINGS

UNDERSTANDING ENTREPRENEURIAL CHARACTERISTICS

The following sections present some findings on personal, business and social characteristics of the youth entrepreneurs. Findings on challenges faced by the youth entrepreneurs are also discussed.

Personal characteristics

a) Socio-demography

63.14 percent of the sample consisted of male youth entrepreneur owners, and 36.86 per cent consisted of female business owners. Of all the entrepreneurs surveyed, the majority (17.89 percent) were operating sundry shops and mini-markets, followed by clothing type of business (7.34 percent) and photocopying and printing service type business (6.59 percent) (see Table 4.1 below).

Table 4.1 Type of Main present business

No	Type of business	Frequency	Percent
1	Sundry & mini market	95	17.89
2	Clothing	39	7.34
3	Health products, cosmetics & toiletries	21	3.95
4	Computer & accessories	20	3.77
5	Telecommunication products	15	2.82
6	Fruits, vegetables, seafood & chicken	14	2.64
7	Food & drinks	22	4.14
8	Personal services	26	4.90
9	Photocopy & printing	35	6.59
10	Motorcycle services	29	5.46
11	Laundry	27	5.08
12	Telecommunication services, ICT & computer	12	2.26
13	Contractor	10	1.88
14	Tailoring	25	4.71
15	Others	143	26.9
	Total	531	100
	Missing	1	

The moderate age of the youth entrepreneurs was 38 years. The youngest business operator was 18 years old and the oldest was 40 years old. This finding reflects the Malaysian categorization of older age-cohort (up to 40 years) resulting the likelihood of greater number in the upper age-category as they move from informal to formal sector as suggested by Chigunta (2001: 33). The study also demonstrated that a large majority (82.26 percent) of the selected entrepreneurs were of Malay ethnicity and were Muslims, while the remaining (12.64 percent) were of Chinese ethnicity followed by the Indians. Most of the entrepreneurs in the study grew-up in the places where they were born. The majority of the entrepreneurs were from the state of Selangor and Kuala Lumpur. More than 73 percent of the entrepreneurs were married and 25 percent were single. The remaining youths were either divorced or widowed.

The quality of human resources affects the development of enterprises in the study area. The level of education was high among the entrepreneurs selected for the study. All of the selected entrepreneurs were literate. Only about 1 percent had up to primary (6th. grade) school education. About 43 percent had completed secondary high school education, whilst 33 percent had tertiary education. This general lower illiteracy level must be considered in planning any entrepreneurship programme. As future youth entrepreneurs are going to come from the educated groups, there is a need to provide entrepreneurship skills at tertiary level as the experience in Thailand suggest the lack of entrepreneurship courses for the youths in the higher education (Thainiyom & Srisontisuk 2008: 3-5). In recent years, Malaysia has embark on this programme in inculcating entrepreneurial skills through specific courses at tertiary level. Most of the respondents' fathers were involved in business (25.47 percent), self-employed (10.14 percent) and about 12 percent are pensioners and their moderate income per month is about RM1500.00. Almost 12 percent of entrepreneurs who responded had worked as factory workers (12 percent), in other businesses (12 percent) and as clerks (5 percent) before opening their present business. About one-third (28 percent) worked in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur.

b) Level of importance of personal traits to business operation and growth

A majority of the youth entrepreneurs in the study put a high and very high level of importance to several personal traits that they possessed to their business operation and growth. The traits were motivation and desire to achieve something; determination and perseverance; self-esteem; risk-taking; initiative and responsibility; opportunity seeking; forward thinking and goal orientation; creativity and innovation; honesty and integrity; sociability and locus of control over business.

As demonstrated in Table 4.2 below, 34.46 percent and 57.4 percent youths said that motivation and desire to achieve something is highly and very highly important to business operation and growth respectively while 35.4 percent and 57.4 percent youths said that determination and perseverance is highly and very highly important, respectively. 36.16 percent and 57.82 percent youths perceived self-esteem as highly and very highly important to business operation and growth, respectively, and 41.24 percent and 44.82 percent said risk-taking is highly and very highly important. 39.55 percent youths felt that initiative and responsibility is highly important while 43.31 percent youths said that trait is very highly important to business operation and growth. 34.09 percent youths said that opportunity seeking is highly important and 54.8 percent youths said opportunity seeking is very highly important to business operation and growth. 38.79 percent and 39.36 percent youths perceived that forward thinking and goal orientation is highly and very highly important, respectively. In addition, being creative and innovative is considered highly and very highly important to 37.85 percent and 45.2 percent youths, respectively. As for honesty and integrity, 31.64 percent and 62.15 percent youths regarded it as highly and very highly important, respectively. Sociability is seen as highly and very highly important to 32.2 percent and 60.26 percent youth entrepreneurs, respectively. Finally, for the trait of locus of control over business, 35.03 percent and 47.65 percent youths voiced out that the trait is highly and very highly important, respectively.

From the above analysis, four personal traits were perceived to be highly important by the youths and they are: honesty and integrity; self-esteem; motivation and desire to achieve and determination and perseverance. The importance of perceived traits by the youths appears to suggest some difference with greater emphasis on ethics and confidence, besides the conventional need for achievement as proposed by McClelland (1961).

Table 4.2 Level of importance of traits to business operation and growth

Traits	Very low		Low		Moderate		High		Very high		Total	Missing	Total
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%			
Motivation and desire to achieve something	20	3.77	1	0.19	22	4.14	183	34.46	305	57.44	531	1	100

Determination and perseverance	20	3.77	3	0.56	15	2.82	188	35.40	305	57.44	531	1	100
Self-esteem	20	3.77	3	0.56	9	1.69	192	36.16	307	57.82	531	1	100
Risk-taking	27	5.08	5	0.94	42	7.91	219	41.24	238	44.82	531	1	100
Initiative and responsibility	30	5.65	7	1.32	54	10.17	210	39.5	23	43.3	531	1	100
Opportunity seeking	24	4.52	7	1.32	28	5.27	181	34.09	291	54.80	531	1	100
Forward thinking and goal orientation	30	5.65	19	3.58	67	12.62	206	38.75	209	39.36	531	1	100
Creativity and innovation	29	5.46	14	2.64	47	8.85	201	37.85	240	45.20	531	1	100
Honesty and integrity	23	4.33	1	0.19	9	1.69	168	31.64	330	62.15	531	1	100
Sociability	28	5.27	1	0.19	11	2.07	171	32.20	320	60.26	531	1	100
Locus of control over business	47	8.85	7	1.32	38	7.16	186	35.03	253	47.65	531	1	100

Business characteristics

With regards to whether they inherited their businesses or not, a majority of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed, i.e., 88.19 percent reported that their businesses are not inherited businesses as compared to 11.81 percent who reported that their businesses are inherited.

a) Status of business

In general, youth entrepreneurs' businesses fall into the following types: Sole proprietorship, partnership, limited company, corporation and franchises. The highest proportion of youth businesses was those of sole proprietorship (70.94 percent) with more women proprietorship (73.2 percent) than men (69.5 percent). The second highest proportion of youth businesses was those of partnerships that were reported at 21.89 percent with more women in partnership businesses (23.7 percent) than men (21.0 percent). The third highest proportion of youth businesses are those of limited company which was reported at 5.47 percent with men more involved in this type of businesses (7.8 per cent) than women (1.5 percent). This is followed by franchises (1.13 percent) and lastly, by corporation (0.57 percent).

A large majority of the youth entrepreneurs started up their businesses with a relatively small to medium capital size, 18.38 percent in the RM5001-RM10000 category, followed by 16.4 percent in the RM30001 – RMRM50000 category, and 15.02 percent in the RM20001-RM30000 category. A majority of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed, i.e., 85.6 percent reported no branches for their businesses while 14.4 percent reported positively to this question.

Overall, the youth entrepreneurs surveyed did not own their business premises, preferring to rent their premises instead. A majority of the youth entrepreneurs, i.e., 83.6 percent reported that they rented their business premise/shop lot as compared to 16.4 percent who reported owning the business premise/shop lot. 83.4 percent of the youth entrepreneurs reported that they self managed their businesses full time as compared to 16.6 percent who reported to self manage their businesses part time with the help of a manager or with help of trusted people (family, friends, etc.). For those who self managed their businesses part-time, enlisting the help of trusted people (family, friends, etc.) are reported more favorable than enlisting the help of a manager.

b) The importance of technology

The youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported telephone and fax facilities as well as computers as being the equipment/technology important to their businesses. A majority of the youth entrepreneurs, i.e., 86.5 percent reported the use of telephone and fax facilities as more important to their businesses and the use of computers as being important in their businesses.

c) Employee size

The majority of the male and female employees are hired in the smallest size category, registering 70.15 percent and 77.51 percent respectively, with female comprising a larger percentage. While in the 4-7 employees size category, male youth entrepreneurs registered a higher percentage (25.37 percent) than their female counterparts (19.53 percent). The gender divide in the employee size can be attributed to the scale and nature of business that differs between the gender groups.

d) Participation in business training/courses/programmes

More than half, specifically 62.71 percent of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported positively to this question, i.e., at some point they received formal business knowledge via training, courses or programmes.

The youth entrepreneurs surveyed were asked if they received any form of training in business skills or business counselling before they started their businesses as well as while carrying on their business in the following forms: Advice from a mentor or an experienced person in business; business seminar; book-keeping or accounting courses; internet on-line course; courses in marketing, worker's motivation, e-commerce, export and business planning, administrative skills, sales and business communications. They were asked to indicate on a scale of 1-5, with (1) being no importance, (3) not sure and (5) very important the effect upon their business development and sustainability.

According to those surveyed, before starting their business, 54.7 percent of the youth entrepreneurs reported that business communications courses are deemed important and very important (important 31.4 percent, very important 23.3 percent) and may affect their business development and sustainability. Equally important are administrative skills courses whereby 53 percent said that they are important (31.8 percent) and very important (21.2 percent) while 53.0 percent said that advice from a mentor or an experienced person in business is important (31.6 percent) and very important (21.4 percent). 45 percent said worker motivation is important (29.9 percent) and very important (15.1 percent); 43.2 percent said business seminar is important (31.9 percent) and very important (11.3 percent); 41.8 percent stated that business planning is important (28.4 percent) and very important (13.4 percent); followed by 41.4 percent who stated that sales is important (28.0 percent) and very important (13.4 percent). Finally, 41.2 percent said that accounts and accounting is important (28.0 percent) and very important (13.2 percent).

According to those surveyed, while carrying on their business, 57.1 percent (of the youth entrepreneurs) reported that business communication is deemed important and important (important 29.7 percent, very important 26.8 percent) and may affect their business development and sustainability. Equally important and very important is advice from a mentor or an experienced person in business that is reported by 56.6 percent of the respondents (important 29.7 percent, very important 26.8 percent). Next, 53.7 percent of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported that administrative skills courses are just as important (important 24.4 percent, very important 29.3 percent). Other courses/seminars that are also deemed important are: Courses in worker's motivation- 48.4 percent (important 23.4 percent, very important 25.0 percent); Business seminar- 47.4 percent (important 28.9 percent, very important 18.5 percent); Courses in sales - 45.0 percent (important 22.3 percent, very important 22.7 percent); Courses in accounts and accounting - 44.3 percent (important 21.0 percent, very important 23.3 percent) followed by courses in business planning - 43.9 percent (important

22.9 percent, very important 21.0 percent). Overwhelming, almost all the youth entrepreneurs surveyed (93.2 percent) agreed to the usefulness of courses/training to build entrepreneurial skills. The importance of education in cultivating greater awareness and knowledge amongst the youth entrepreneurs as highlighted by Schoof (2006:29) is reaffirmed in our findings.

e) The realm of competition

To find out more specifically about what types of competition are faced by the respondents surveyed, they were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5, with (1) being very low, (3) being moderate and (5) being very high the levels of competition they face with regards to pricing, product variety, product uniqueness, product quality and customer segment.

Overall, having rated the levels of competition from moderate (3), high (4) to very high (5), the majority of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported the highest competition they face was with regard to pricing (54.8 percent), followed closely by product quality and product variety (both at 51.5 percent), product uniqueness at 47.4 percent and lastly, customer segment at 40.6 percent. A majority of youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported that they do face competition – 77.02 percent of those surveyed as opposed to 22.98 percent reported they do not face competition in their business. Since youth entrepreneurs' entry into formal business (i.e., permanent store) such as sundry and convenience stores are prevalent, the likelihood of competition is high. Similarly, stereotypical business engaged by female youths such as textile retailing will result in higher competition. This competitive scenario amongst the youth entrepreneurs was alluded to by Chigunta (2002) where he argued that the propensity for younger youth and female business to concentrate in a narrow range of micro-enterprise activities, reflect the lack of diversity in the local economy.

f) Duration in business

The natural outcome of examining youth entrepreneurs and their businesses revealed that nearly half of the businesses (48.71 percent) are less than 5 years old. This is inevitable considering the early start of firm formation. However, more than one-third (36.30 percent) of businesses have been in existence for 5-9 years, and 11 percent have been operating between 10-14 years. In fact, we also found out that there are some businesses that have been operating for more than 20 years, and we suspect such businesses to be primarily family or inherited businesses.

g) Business expenditure and sales

With regards to business expenditure and sales throughout the past 5 financial years,

the youth entrepreneurs surveyed were asked to rate their expenditure and business sales on a scale of 1-5, with (1) being highly declining, (2) declining, (3) no changes, (4) increasing and (5) highly increasing.

In general, with regards to business expenditure throughout the past 5 financial years, the majority of youth entrepreneurs, i.e., 63.6 percent reported the rate of expenditure within the increasing and highly increasing brackets as opposed to 27.8 percent who reported to no changes and only 8.7 percent reported their expenditure being in decline and highly declining.

With regards to business sales throughout the past 5 financial years, the majority of youth entrepreneurs (63.3 percent) reported the rate of business sales within the increasing and highly increasing brackets as opposed to 27.3 percent who reported to no changes and only 9.4 percent reported their sales being in decline and highly declining.

h) Business expansion

With regards to youth entrepreneurs' present business expansion, the youth entrepreneurs surveyed were asked to rate their present business expansion on a scale of 1-5, with (1) being that the business is at the Critical stage: it is difficult to continue operating this business, (2) Reinforcement stage: will continue the business, (3) Development stage, (4) Matured/stable/established stage, and (5) Successful stage.

In general, 66.9 percent of the youth entrepreneur respondents, i.e., a majority of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed, reported their present business expansion at stage 3, i.e., at the development stage. This is followed by 16.0 percent at stage 2, i.e., the reinforcement stage. 13.9 percent of the respondents reported their businesses being at the 4th stage, i.e., at the matured/stable/established stage. Only 2.1 percent of the respondents reported their businesses being at the 5th stage, i.e., at the successful stage. Our study found that only 1.1 percent of the respondents reported their businesses to be at the critical stage: it is difficult to continue operating this business.

i) Factors contributing to present business expansion

The open-ended questions in the questionnaire yielded the following opinions with regards to the factors that contributed to the youths' present business expansion:

- o Competition (12.6 percent) -no competition or less competition
- o Market conditions (9.9 percent)
- o Financial constraints (0.9 percent)

- o Customers (21.5 percent) - increase and decrease in the number of customers and customer demands, customer satisfaction
- o Local stability (9.2 percent) – political, social and economic
- o Product (9.9 percent) - quality uniqueness, variety, manufacturing technology
- o Business location (8.3 percent) - community and environment - strategic and non-strategic locations
- o Pricing (1.8 percent) - fair pricing
- o Individual personality and traits (10.5 percent) - own initiative(0.9 percent), spirited, initiative, hardworking and disciplined (6.0 percent), entrepreneurial interest-feels comfortable (0.9 percent), belief in god (0.2 percent), motivation and support from family (0.9 percent), motivation and support from friends/ customers (0.4 percent), basic characteristics of wanting to help others (0.4 percent), management skills (0.7 percent) risk taking(0.4 percent), past experience (0.2 percent)
- o Present business expansion (10.5 percent) - stages 2-4, reinforcementstage, development stage, matured/stable/established stage
- o No other options (2.6 percent)
- o Promotions and advertising (1.6 percent)

In general, the top 3 most important factors that are deemed important are those related to customers, individual personality and traits as well as present business expansion. In the case of customers, the specific factors are: the increase and decrease in the number of customers, customer demands and customer satisfaction. Individual personality and traits as well as present business expansion are both equally important to the youth entrepreneurs surveyed. With regards to individual personality and traits, the following were deemed important: own initiative (0.9 percent), spirited, initiative, hardworking and disciplined (6.0 percent), entrepreneurial interest - feels comfortable (0.9 percent), belief in god (0.2 percent), motivation and support from family (0.9 percent), motivation and support from friends/customers (0.4 percent), basic characteristics of wanting to help others (0.4 percent), management skills (0.7 percent), risk taking (0.4 percent) and past experience (0.2 percent). With regards to present business expansion, the following were deemed important, specifically those in stages 2-4, reinforcement stage, development stage, and matured/stable/established stage.

96.6 percent of the youths surveyed responded positively to an open ended question concerning the factors that would convince them to continue to do business in their present context/environment. Only 3.4 percent of those surveyed responded negatively to this question. Their opinions are listed below:

- o Competition (4.8 percent) - no competition or less competition
- o Market conditions (9.6 percent)
- o Financial constraints (0.2 percent)
- o Customers (28.5 percent) - increase and decrease in the number of customers and customer demands, customer satisfaction; customer loyalty
- o Product (9.9 percent) - quality, uniqueness, variety
- o Business location (23.0 percent) - community and environment - strategic and non-strategic locations
- o Cost factors (4.5 percent) - cheap rental, no rental needed
- o Individual personality and traits (4.7 percent) - own initiative (0.7 percent), spirited, initiative, hardworking and disciplined (1.3 percent), entrepreneurial interest-feels comfortable (1.3 percent), belief in god (0.2 percent), motivation and support from family (0.4 percent), management style (0.2 percent), risk taking (0.4 percent), past experience (0.2 percent)
- o Present business expansion (16.3 percent)- stages 2-4, reinforcement stage, development stage, matured/stable/established stage
- o Other options (0.4 percent) – can find other businesses
- o Promotions and advertising (0.4 percent)

In general, the top 3 most important factors that were deemed important to the youths were those related to customers, business location and present business expansion. With regards to customers, the following were deemed important: increase and decrease in the number of customers and customer demands, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Next, with regards to business location, community and environment (strategic and non-strategic locations) were also considered important to the youths. Finally, present business expansion was also regarded as an important factor, more so if the businesses were in stages 2-4, specifically, whether they fell within any one of the following stages: reinforcement stage, development stage and matured / stable / established stage.

In addition, there were several factors that would convince the youths not to continue to do business in their present context/environment. 20 percent of the youths considered competition as a factor while 20 percent of the youths said decrease in the number of customers was another factor. 30 percent of the youths said business location was a factor namely in terms of size of premise and new strategic location. 20 percent of the youths regarded they lacked individual personality traits such as spiritedness, initiative, hardworking and being disciplined (10.0 percent), and they were able to look for other work or get involved in other businesses (10.0 percent). Finally, 10 percent of the youths said their present

business expansion was either in the reinforcement stage, i.e., (2): will continue the business, or in the development stage, i.e., (3) would not convince them to continue to do business in the present business context.

Generally, the most important factor to consider is with regards to business location. This is followed by competition, customers and individual personality and traits that were deemed equally important by the youth entrepreneurs surveyed.

Social characteristics

Social characteristics for our study can be understood as social influence, role of social models in business operations and social networks. All of these were found to have an influential role upon the youth entrepreneurs' business operations.

A) Social networks

Ten types of social networks were investigated in our study and they are:

- i) Family networks
- ii) Friendship networks or ties
- iii) Networks with former work colleagues
- iv) Networks with business partners
- v) Networks with former school friends
- vi) Networks with former village friends
- vii) Networks with customers
- viii) Networks with suppliers
- ix) Networks with distributors
- x) Networks with neighbours

All of these networks were found to be present in the business operations of a significant number of respondents in this study. On the whole, 20 percent or more of the total respondents admitted that all of these networks were present in the business operations. These networks served particular functions for these respondents, specifically, for provision of moral support, provision of capital, as means to finding customers and suppliers, and also as a channel to act as customers and suppliers to the respondents. Schoof 's (2006) assertion of the importance of family and friendship ties in social networks amongst youth entrepreneurs rings true as the following findings suggest.

i) Family networks

The social networks that the youth entrepreneurs established with their family members played a key positive role in providing moral support for the entrepreneurs. In a lesser significant sense, the family networks provided some capital and also served as means to provide customers and suppliers for the entrepreneurs. The

family members also act as customers and suppliers for the entrepreneurs. The descriptions of the findings are found in the following paragraphs.

96.8 percent of the respondents admitted the presence of family networks in their business operations (see Table 4.3). 88.7 percent of the respondents said that family networks were very important and important in terms of provision of moral support. In comparison, 5.51 percent reported that those networks were very not important and not important to them. Only 5.8 percent thought those networks were of moderate value to them.

Table 4.3 Social Networks/Family (Moral support)

Family networks in giving moral support	Frequency	Percent
Very not important	21	3.95
Not important	8	1.51
Moderate	31	5.84
Important	189	35.59
Very important	282	53.11
Total	531	100
Missing	1	

In Table 4.4, 46.9 percent of the respondents said family networks were very important and important in providing them with capital for their businesses. However, 33.1 percent of the respondents said that those networks were very not important and not important to them while 20 percent reported that those networks were of moderate value to them.

Table 4.4 Family Networks For Capital

Family networks in giving moral support	Frequency	Percent
Very not important	120	22.60
Not important	56	10.55
Moderate	106	19.96
Important	124	23.35
Very important	125	22.54
Total	531	100
Missing	1	

ii) Friendship ties

As for findings on the role of friendship ties in business operations, about 88.7 percent of the respondents said friendship ties were involved in their business operation while 60 percent of the respondents said otherwise.

In Table 4.5, 88.7 percent of the respondents admitted that friendship ties matters to them in their business operations. 67.5 percent of the respondents said that friendship ties were very important and important in terms of provision of moral support. However, only 16.4 percent reported experiencing opposing situations because they felt that the networks were not and very not important to them as far as provision of moral support to their business is concerned.

Table 4.5 Friendship Networks In Giving Moral Support

Family networks in giving moral support	Frequency	Percent
Very not important	79	14.88
Not important	8	1.51
Moderate	86	16.20
Important	192	36.16
Very important	166	31.26
Total	531	100
Missing	1	

B) Social influence in business operations

In this study, social influence is investigated in terms of influence upon the respondents and their business operations and sustainability by counselors, teachers, parents or guardians, mass media, local entrepreneurs, promotional materials such as pamphlets, career day and others that advertise job opportunities, government programmes and information concerning career and others. Another form of social influence is friends. Among all these types of social influences, parents or guardians were most influential followed by the mass media, local entrepreneurs and friends. The next paragraphs describe the findings. The findings differentiate the levels of social influence between men and women

For 67.4 percent of male respondents and 76.3 percent of female respondents, their parents or guardians were most influential in encouraging them to start and venture into business. 23.1 percent of male respondents and 21.6 percent of female respondents reported that the mass media did influence them to venture into business. About 35.3 percent of male respondents and 38.1

percent of female respondents said that local entrepreneurs were influential and motivated them to start a business. Lastly, 29.5 percent of male respondents and 19 percent of female respondents said that their friends influenced them into starting a business.

C) Role models in business operations

For 22.9 percent of the female respondents, their husbands were their role models while for 11.9 percent of the male respondents, their fathers were their role models. About 10.1 percent of the male respondents and 14.6 percent of the female respondents reported that their families were their role models. For 13.4 percent of the male respondents, their friends were their role models. As Schoof (2006) indicates, to motivate youths to engage in business, role models are necessary. In comparison, 28.4 percent male and 22.9 percent female respondents had no role models that they thought could play an influential role in their business operations.

CHALLENGES FACED IN THE PROCESS OF BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

An overview of the findings demonstrates that the youth respondents may face some challenges similarly faced by entrepreneurs, as noted by some literature. Some of the challenges would be lack of personal savings and resources; lack of securities and credibility; lack of business experience and skills (for debt financing); lack of knowledge, understanding, awareness of start-up financing possibilities; lack of business connections, contacts, suppliers, suitable partners and networks; lack of knowledge of available business services; lack of tailor made business training and advise for young start-ups; lack of trained counselors, development workers and adequate support agencies; lack of mentoring capacities; lack of workspace and ICT infrastructure; lack of exchange networks, forums and meeting places; and finally, lack of business development support. Nonetheless, some of the respondents of this study gave some feedback to suggest what they thought are the best ways for youths to embark in entrepreneurship. Their feedback was as follows:

- a) Participation in (free) business programme/training/courses
- b) Get inspiration from successful entrepreneurs through media and Internet
- c) Easy access to financial loans - government incentive/assistance, easy and flexible repayment
- d) Gain knowledge and experience first before starting a business
- e) Educate youths to change their selves
- f) Have enough capital (e.g., through savings), moral support and business target

- g) Be a wage earner before starting a business
- h) Seek advice from successful businessmen/mentor
- i) Need mental determination to be in business
- j) Be brave to try new ventures/to take risks
- k) Seek a good business location
- l) Must have interest in business
- m) Self motivation

Overwhelming, almost all the youth entrepreneurs surveyed (97.9 percent) agreed that social networks enhance entrepreneurship. Apart from that, there were several main internal factors (self/traits) and external factors (social/economy) that some of the youths mentioned that could contribute to the sustainability and existence of their business venture. The internal factors were sustainable interest (most important factor); high self confidence; believe in self; high sales/target expectations; ability to provide good service; high motivation; believe in god (spiritual factors); perseverance; determination (to succeed, in being better); positive thinking/attitude; ability to seek people who can give support; and hard working. Other internal factors were determination (e.g., not giving up easily); trustworthy; risk-taking; creative; having focus to succeed; skills; courage to take the plunge; courage to try new ventures and to compete; friendly and approachable (i.e., to be easily approached by customers); ability to accept opinions of others; open minded; possession of good communications skills; committed; seek to achieve a mission; mental strength; disciplined; patient; respect for others irrespective of status, race and religion; healthy; have good moral values; and finally, the ability to find experience first before starting a business.

As for the external factors (social/economy), they were: capital; family support (e.g., from mother, children and siblings); support from friends, supplier, business partner (partnership), clients, and husband/wife; following family steps as an entrepreneur; good quality goods; fair pricing; good communications with clients, neighbors; political factors; economic factors (integral factor); environmental factors (e.g., competition); sales/service factors and finally strategic business location.

CONCLUSION

This study began with the issue of youth entrepreneurship primarily confronted with rising unemployment amongst them due to uncertainties in the market place and global economic conditions, as well as due to the lack of appropriate skills and training. Besides that, the lack of entrepreneurship amongst them was identified as

a critical factor in ensuring the future productivity and development of the country. Curious and motivated by the situation of the youth entrepreneurs in Malaysia, the authors embarked on investigating the nature of youth entrepreneurship. The study achieved its objectives and succeeded in uncovering salient entrepreneurial traits common among the youth entrepreneurs such as self-esteem, determination and perseverance, honesty and integrity, sociability, motivation and desire to achieve, opportunity seeking, risk taking, initiative and responsibility, creativity and innovation and self-control over business. It appears that several salient personal characteristics such as opportunity seeking, risk taking, initiative and responsibility, creativity and innovation, and self-control needed to be cultivated through social mechanisms such as social networks, training programs as well as practical exposure.

In terms of business characteristics, the study revealed that the nature of trade embarked by the youths was predominantly goods trade, primarily in conventional trades such as sundry and minimarket, and clothing shop, photocopying services and motor services. Though these sectors are traditional in nature, there were emerging trades that the youths were involved in such as laundry services, health and beauty services, computer and accessories and telecommunication. Also some modernizing features in organizational structure were evident in terms of only one-tenth of the businesses being family owned businesses, partnership practices, computer usage, and moderate development in business expansion (66 percent). However, there were some business features which acted as obstacles or drawback for business ventures such as small capital start-up (70 percent below RM30000), rented premises (83 percent), small workforce (70 percent) and entrepreneurs facing competition (77 percent).

The social characteristics uncovered included social influence, types of social networks, role models as well as training and skills. Critical social networks that were salient are family, friendship, customer networks and supplier networks. The family networks provided moral support and capital whilst the friendship ties and customer network provided moral support. Meanwhile, supplier networks together with customer networks acted as an avenue to find clients. In the area of social influence, parents or guardians were most influential followed by mass media, local entrepreneurs and friends. As for the training and skills programmes both prior training before business start-up and ongoing training has helped in shaping youth enterprise.

With the findings, the authors hope that the new knowledge gathered about youth entrepreneurship will provide salient information to the government with regards to the design of effective strategies and programmes for improving

youth entrepreneurship so as to increase socio-economic development. If possible, the findings of this study may contribute to reducing or providing some answers to problems of youth unemployment, and may provide some solution to increase youth participation and interest in entrepreneurship as a form of career path.

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