



Turun yliopisto
University of Turku

THE CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES OF INFLUENTIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Based on business related Customer Engagement approaches
emerged on Weibo**

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Author:
Yang Zhou

Supervisors:
D.Sc. Valtteri Kaartemo

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Turun kauppakorkeakoulu • Turku School of Economics

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Abstract

This study focuses on an emerging field of Influential Entrepreneurship to research the adoption of Customer Engagement Approaches as effective business strategies in China context. The aim is to establish an interactive framework combining theoretical findings and empirical evidence to illustrate the Customer Engagement Approaches enacted by Influential Entrepreneurs. The primary data is collected from expert Interviewees, and raw data is later interpreted, categorized, and grouped with thematic networks to display the logic and relationship of different terms. An interactive framework of Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs is put forward, and the framework sheds lights both on theoretical contributions and practical implications. Suggestions for future researches are discussed in the end to provide scholars with academic indications.

The study confirms that Customer Engagement Approaches are vigorously employed by Influential Entrepreneurs as efficient business strategies. Influential position themselves as knowledgeable, informative, and communicative figures with commonality and attainability so as to establish profit-oriented intimate relationship via Customer Engagement Approaches.

Customer Engagement approaches vary from case to case, and approaches include commoditization of contents production, management of persona, display of friendliness, presentation of perceived authenticity and intimacy, mostly through mixed social media related activities with a supplement in offline events. In this case, Influential Entrepreneurs exploit customers' desire from multiple perspectives and trigger contagion effects, leading to mutually amplified effects in economic returns, popularity, business opportunities, and communication effects. Specifically, Influential Entrepreneurs deems tangible value triggered interaction as temporary, while they consider relationship-oriented interaction as profoundly effective. Multi-channelling effects of social media platforms are particularly added to the scaling up of customer base. Influential endorsements are charged with emotional premium, which is similar with corporate charged brand premium.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Significance of the study

Influential and its relevant capability of capturing the effect of digital marketing and customer engagement has long been recognized by academic researchers and marketing practitioners. (Abidin 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Keller & Berry 2003) Many terms are using interchangeably to describe influential, like 'influencer', 'maven', 'social-hubs', 'micro-celebrities', 'opinion leaders', and 'connectors'. (Chae 2017, 371; Iyengar et al. 2011, 195; Goldenberg et al. 2009a & 2009b, 1; Senft 2008; Van den Bulte & Wuyts 2007) Influential is acknowledged with the procession of higher level of activism, more networking connections and better leadership of opinion. (Keller & Berry 2003) Influential remain in the center of the conversation, keep ahead with trending changes, and have a technology-oriented view of the future, comparing with the normal average. (Chan & Misra 1990, 53; Keller & Berry 2003) Researchers have discovered that the spectacular information centralization and Word-Of-Mouth capability belongs to a small group of people that own disproportional influential power. (Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 10; Hinz et al. 2014, 2843; Keller & Berry, 2003) Thusly, Influential are a small proportion of people who own dominant voice over the others with credibility and leading effects. With the prevalent of online social media, the personal influence power has now extended its power into Internet space as "interpersonal influence or electronic Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM)". (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2)

Influential have long been noted of their marketing potential and advising capability over non-influential people, namely social endorsement from influential is found to have more significant impact on purchasing decision over the others. (Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 732; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210) Influential power affects customer-to-customer (C2C) communications due to the dominating power in the conversation, which has been intentionally exploited by marketing practitioners in recent years. (Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) Better understanding of consumer engagement (CE) in eWOM will result in more efficient management approaches that promote eWOM to influence purchase

decisions. (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2). Meanwhile the traditional advertising power is declining, though there is no clear causal evidence linking it to the substitutability or complementarity by the rise of influential advertising power, the phenomena is observed by many researchers and practitioners. (Dimmick et al. 2004, 31; Michael 2017; Trusov et al 2009, 98; Van den Bulte & Wuyts 2007) Accordingly, firms have been actively targeting influential customers so as to attain better market response. (Bampo et al. 2008, 288) Marketing strategy by traditional firms involving Influential is summarized in Figure 1.

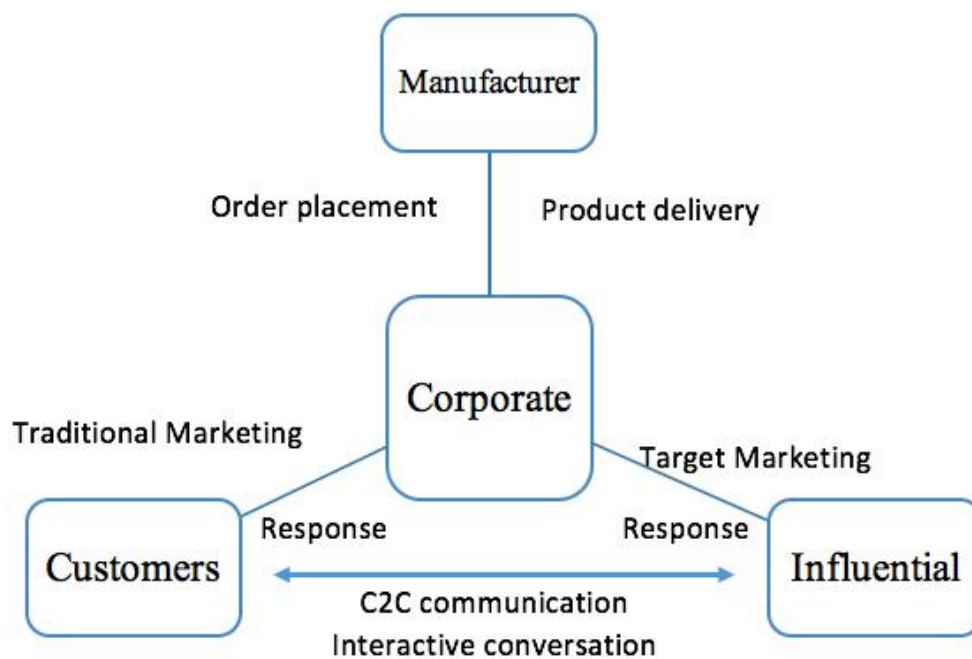


Figure 1 Summarized influential marketing strategy by traditional firms.

Entrepreneurs share much similarities with influential in nature, namely the proactiveness and commitment to others (McClelland 1987), independent problem solving skills (Littunen 2000), and effectiveness of leadership (Hornaday & Aboud 1971). Batjargal (2005; 2007) detects significant connection between entrepreneur's networking skills and exploitation of social capital with the survival likelihood and success of the business. In detail, he emphasizes that the utilization of structural holes and centrality in networking connections grants entrepreneurs with greater business opportunities, better access to promoting channels, financial options and

important decisions, and active participation in joint projects. Because centrality and well-connectedness entitles entrepreneurs with sufficient information flow and resources. Ultimately it leads to positive firm performance and better chances to act upon new opportunities. (Batjargal 2003)

The emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship is a special phenomenon when influential partially substitute firms, and become active marketers, generating revenue based on the influence power directly, instead of participating in target marketing activities from corporates on marginal reward. The transition into marketers possibly result from the unresolved dissatisfaction in influential customers (Keller & Berry 2003), in the entrepreneurial nature of need for achievement (McClelland 1987), or in the decline of reliance on co-operative partners (Littunen 2000). In other words, Influential present themselves as competitive entrepreneurs with a scale, operating with the corporates who used to target them as key customers. It comes along with the advent of social media, where customers actively seek and exchange information of products and brands. (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2) Abidin (Abidin 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) and Thompson (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) first academically acknowledge the identity of Influential as Influential Entrepreneurs to reveal the underlying business orientation of intimate relationship with normal customers.

The blooming of Influential Entrepreneurship mainly emerges in fashion industry regarding designing and retailing of fast moving consumer goods. Influential Entrepreneurs deliberately craft persona image on social media and generate economic return by establishing commercial intimacy with normal customers during the engagement process. From Influential Entrepreneurship perspective, CE approaches are enacted as effective business strategies. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) In the context of China, the success of Influential Entrepreneurship is inseparable with the huge and flexible manufacturing capabilities. According to the sales stats of shopping carnival called “Double Eleven” on 11th, November, 2016, four out of top ten brands in women’s garment category are owned by Influential. Unlike the traditional firms whose digital marketing is a supplementary part of offline stores, Influential Entrepreneurship exclusively relies on online marketing channel, and market without virtual stores. The customers that contributed to sales volume are largely channeled by Influential Entrepreneurs’ marketing strategy on social networks. In addition to the contribution towards sales, customers are also

constructive participants with knowledge input in the process of market research, prototype design, production and stock management. The Internet is positioned with marketing potential for marketers to communicate with customers, and to engage the later party in interactive communications. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feather 2000) The value co-creation in between entitles Influential Entrepreneurs with sensitivity in market trend and business orientation. It enables wider business opportunities for Influential individuals, considering the traditional firms owns accumulated capital, massive marketing force and brand reputation. Michael (2017) concludes that the power of influence is eroding traditional market share, which shall raise alert in traditional retailers.

The biggest factor that distinguishes Influential Entrepreneurship with traditional firms is their intimate relationship with customers. By management of customer inputs as in '*(1) labor and task performance, (2) information and knowledge sharing, and (3) behavior*' (Mustak et al. 2016, 256), Influential Entrepreneurs realize the business opportunities via management of Customer Engagement, and closely collaborate with the later party in the offering development process in terms of product and service. The engagement and collaboration is organized in various ways to boost commercial needs, and ultimately turns into profits and popularity. (See Chapter 2.2) The effectiveness in customer engagement management has been continuously raising academic interest since the market shifted customer-wise together with the development of Internet Technology. (Bowden 2009b, 71; Saishi 2012, 267) The process of effective customer engagement management paved the path for Influential Entrepreneurs to thrive, also it possesses academic value for both future research and managerial implications.

1.2 The research gap

Influential effect is attached with significance in customer relationship management and marketing strategy on corporate level by positioning Influential as valuable customers with contributing factors. (Keller & Berry 2003, Hinz & Spann 2008) When considering the prevalent of social media, the potential of digital marketing has been acknowledged of triggering the emergence of new business models and pricing mechanism, due to its advantages in lowering transaction cost and menu cost.

(Hinz et al. 2008, 366) In the process, influential are perceived as highly valuable customers comparing with average peers. (Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 11) Influential are motivated to urge product upgrades in pursuit of quality other than brand spill-overs. (Keller & Berry, 2003) Obviously, Influential own dominating voice power in C2C communication and peer influence. (Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) The capability of Influential urged online marketers to pay attention to initiate social interactions in customer communities so as to sustain the operation of business. In addition, deep understanding of social networks mechanism leads marketers to shape new forms of consumer patterns, and ultimately to attain comprehensive view of the market. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Hinz et al. 2008, 367) Goldenberg et al. (2009b, 10) have identified capability of promoting faster growth and increasing market size in influential. New product adoption by social hubs (Influential) is faster and earlier due to the large number of connections rather than innate innovativeness in products. To elaborate, the speed of adoption is particularly accelerated by influential, while the number of followers determines market size. However, the former acceleration process decides the ultimate product success, which is often taken as an effective forecast in early stages. On the other side, Keller & Berry (2003) recognized the possible negative effect from unsatisfied Influential. Consequently, researchers and firms have placed importance in addressing the particular consumers' social influence and carry out adaptations accordingly.

To summarize, Influential is recognized as new product adoption pioneers with distinguishing individual characteristics, superior market potential and huge customer influence, and they are mostly positioned as active customers by researchers and marketing practitioners. It brings out the first research gap of role clarification, in which rarely did the researchers realize the market effects and customer engagement approaches conducted by influential, especially when the subject integrates role of influential and entrepreneur. Some academic researches shed light on relevant research as in the context in Singapore. (Abidin 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) However, researches on the specific topic remain marginal. During the process of CE, Influential position themselves as 'someone in know' to minimize the profit orientation, and create an aura of intimacy and interconnectedness. The offering provided by Influential Entrepreneurship is attached with persona image as a display in credibility and

professionalism. The management of Customer Engagement surpasses capturing of customer satisfaction, and approaches to include the placement of involvement, trust, and commitment in creation of “fans” customers. (Abidin 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Bowden 2009b, 72)

The second research gap is in the facilitating effects by social network platform. In this study, the social network platform will take Weibo, the most popular one in China as an example. Though the potential economic benefits of influential on social network has been acknowledged, some empirical research argues that information seeking and entertainment is the primary objective on social network, while the bond developed with new customers by economic benefits may not last. (Gummerus et al. 2012, 870). Conceptual model of customer engagement on social network platform has been proposed on generic level. (Cheung et al. 2011) It concludes from previous researches, while omitting the Influential effect. CE through online communities represents co-created value and interactions, which attracts both academic researchers and practitioners, e.g. netnography. (Brodie et al. 2013) During the process of management CE through social network, the role of business reaches beyond the transactional activities, towards facilitating customers with collaborative social experience and valued dialogue. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36) Nevertheless, the emergence of social network introduces new perspective for studying Influential economic potential, especially when the Influential Entrepreneurship is mostly reliable on social network for business.

The third research gap lies on the level of research. From academic perspective, most of the study on customer engagement management from marketers’ side in two categories: conceptual and empirical. Some study Customer Engagement Management and strategic vision in a nutshell, others specialized in a particular industry. Besides, there has not been a Customer Engagement framework that emphasized on the prominent Influential business yet. Customer Engagement Management has significant implications for service industry marketing theory and practice, which has drawn under-estimated academic attention so far (Bowden 2009b, 71; Bolton 2011, 272; Gummerus et al. 2012, 857). Vivek (2012, 127) defined CE as *‘individual’s participation in and connection with an organization’s offerings and and/or organizational activities’*. The conception of Customer Engagement is viewed as new perspective of Customer Management (Verhoef et al. 2010, 249), which is distinguished for its nature of interactivity and value co-creation (Brodie et al. 2011),

multiplicity channels (van Bruggen et al. 2010, 338), impact of new social media (Henning Thureau et al. 2010, 324), beyond transactional factors (van Doorn et al. 2010, 258), value co-creation (Hoyer et al. 2010, 293), impact on marketing metrics (Kumar et al. 2010, 307), WOM (Libai et al. 2010), and transactional behaviours (Bijmolt et al. 2010, 351). Emotional bonds developed according to customer purchase frequency is effective in forming affective commitment. (Bowden 2009b)

Gummerus et al. (2012) divide Customer Engagement into ‘*Community Engagement Behaviours*’ and ‘*Transactional Engagement Behaviours*’, linking the engagement with relationship constructs, revealing that entertainment benefits have higher impact on satisfaction and/or loyalty, comparing with social benefits and economic benefits, which is in line with the essence of seeking entertainment on social network discovered by Biao (2013).

However, none of these focused on the approaches of Customer Engagement by Influential Entrepreneurship in context of China, especially when the scale concerning Influential Entrepreneurship has been expanding at a high speed, attracting Venture Capital, and generating Influential Entrepreneurs incubators. Hence, it leads to the fourth research gap, in which a concentration on the application of Customer Engagement Management as Influential Entrepreneurship in China by theorizing a framework from CE studies is in need.

To conclude, this study will bridge four research gaps as follows, (1) clarification of Influential Entrepreneurship as active marketers who conduct business activities affiliated with persona identity rather than as key customers who are involved in target marketing; (2) including the amplifying effect and community influence of social networks in this study; (3) developing specific framework concerning the application of CE as Influential Entrepreneurship; and (4) focusing on specific field as Influential Entrepreneurship in China.

1.3 Research purpose and research questions

The main purpose for this study is to explore and build an interactive framework for customer engagement approaches undertaken by Influential Entrepreneurship in China, specifically regard business related activities emerged on Weibo. In addition,

the purpose is guided with three sub-questions so as to establish a precise framework. Hence the research questions are displayed as follows:

Main questions:

What are the customer engagement approaches undertaken by Influential Entrepreneurs based on Weibo in China?

Sub questions:

1. What are unique characteristics that distinguish Influential Entrepreneurship from traditional marketers, especially with regard to Customer Management?
2. How do Influential Entrepreneurs develop and implement customer engagement activities?
3. What are the dynamics of effective Customer Engagement activities by Influential Entrepreneurs?

The objective of the first sub-question is to identify the key characteristics of Influential Entrepreneurs that facilitate an applicable Customer Engagement approaches. The objective of second sub-question is to observe and summarize the existing methods and find out the current adoption of managerial disciplines. Besides, it ensures that the study is not entirely generated from theoretical perspective, but also from empirical evidence to create pragmatic value. The objective of the third sub-question is to identify the existing approaches in Customer Engagement that are proved to be effective.

This study aims at making a theoretical implication, researching the customer engagement approaches from Influential Entrepreneurship business perspective, recognizing Influential Entrepreneurship as formal business, which is developed on the basis of social networks.

Two major practical implications will be revealed for further research. First, Influential entrepreneurship has become a formal category of entrepreneurship to classify and explore. Influential Entrepreneurship comes with the rise of SMEs and social networks in China. It combines Influential characteristics, engagement marketing strategies, and viral marketing placement through online social media and networking, conducting business strategies to engage customers in the process of value co-creation and marketing development. The utilization of social networks by Influential Entrepreneurship triggers new business model.

Then the study researches from the angle of customer engagement, which is increasingly attached with marketing potential to exploit by practitioners. To develop optimal customer engagement approaches is crucial for marketers to enhance competency, especially when the market is highly homogenous. Proper CE management adds value in both firms and customers in terms of social mobility and economic benefits, satisfying mutual interest. When combining the factor of social networks and the dominant of Influential Entrepreneurship, management of CE derives from traditional CE framework, and transforms towards interactive model with beyond transactional behaviours. Namely, the WOM marketing power is challenging the power of traditional mass media marketing, the interaction and participation of on-line community stimulates the creation and improvement of new products development and redefines marketing metrics.

1.4 Scope of study

The scope of the study is visualized as Figure 2, the focus of the study is on customer engagement approaches by entrepreneurship who stemmed from Influential, who mainly conduct customer engagement and marketing behaviors through online social network platforms. By researching customer engagement principles and interpreting engagement activities, this study aims at (1) drawing a theoretical framework to the inadequately researched CE management by Influential Entrepreneurs, and (2) seeking practical implications for Influential practitioners in China.

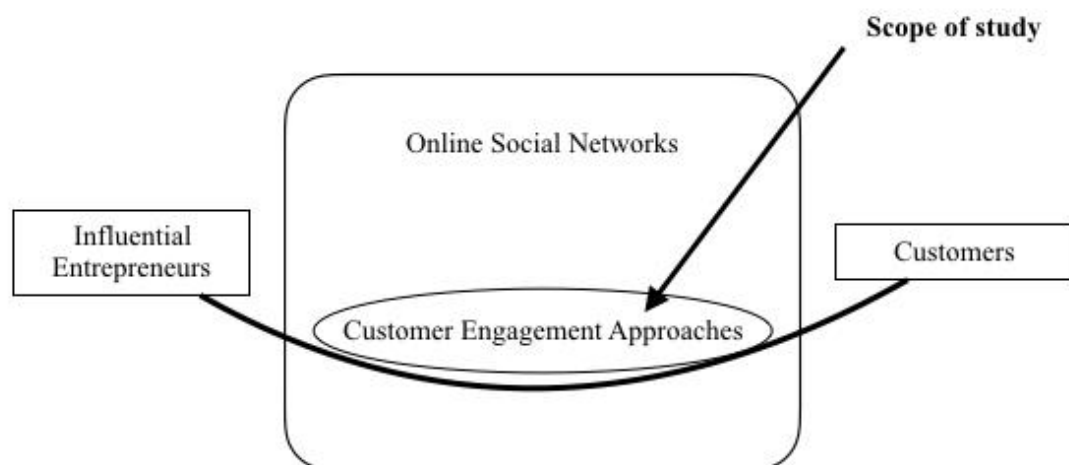


Figure 2 Scope of Study.

The study is based on the assumptions that (1) Influential Entrepreneurs possess superior knowledge and skillsets regard Customer Engagement, (2) online social networks nurtures the development of Influential Entrepreneurship, and facilitates relevant business activities, (3) Influential Entrepreneurs rely on Customer Engagement as business strategy, and (4) the success of CE management is a key component that defines successful Influential Entrepreneurship in homogenous market. The origin of assumptions will be briefly explained below in this section, and detail information will be elaborated in literature review.

Abidin and her colleagues have put forward a series of researches on Influential Entrepreneurs. In her study based on fieldworks in Singapore, Influential Entrepreneurs possess knowledge, skills, and know-hows to intentionally interact and communicate with customers for better outcome. Such interaction and communication constitutes customer relationship in between. The norms and skillsets are learnt and polished with the development of Influential Entrepreneurship rather than officially trained. This is partially attributed to the fast development of Internet and technology infrastructures in Singapore. In other words, the prevalent of online social networks in Singapore facilitates the development of domestic Influential Entrepreneurship, and enables revenue channels for Influential Entrepreneurship. Hence the Singaporean Influential Entrepreneurs learn and internalize the online communicational norms and skills with the development of Internet Technology. The relationship maintained by Influential Entrepreneurs with customers is profit-oriented, and the engagement of customers is classified as effective business strategies for Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin 2015a, 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

To construct a precise and coherent framework for Customer Engagement approaches in this particular field, which is to describe and explain the rationale of the customer and business antecedents, and engagement activities, relevant literature accomplishments will be reviewed. Specifically, the study will concentrate on two areas, Influential Entrepreneurship, and Customer Engagement. Clarification of terminology and in-depth research on relevant area will contribute to a concrete literature review. In the meantime, limitation of scope will assist in gaining profound knowledge and in-depth analysis.

Influential are first acknowledged as '*savvy entrepreneurs*' by their business activities and economic achievements. (Abidin 2016) Their approaches to manage followers are commercially oriented, which defines the role of followers as customers. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The prevalence of online social networks gives rise to the development of Influential Entrepreneurship, and enables various approaches in management customers for Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) By referring to a wide range of academic definition, this study clarifies Influential Entrepreneurship literally from both the components, and pins down the features in the overlapping area of two components, stressing on the operation through online social networks. Influential Entrepreneurs are defined by its nature as follows, (1) holding influential power over a group of people (identified by number of followers and interaction activeness like repost and comment), and (2) operating business activities for a certain period of time. Detailed measurement and classification will be further reviewed in literature review. This is to ensure the concentration on the research subject as well as to eliminate ambiguity. In addition, it forms pre-selection criteria for qualified interviewees.

Here online social network is positioned as a platform where customers are actively involved in Customer Engagement activities initiated by Influential Entrepreneurs. Despite the complexity of Influential Entrepreneurship, there are common characteristics that concerns Influencer Entrepreneurship in general. To scrutinize the typical features owned by Influential Entrepreneurship as well as to avoid complexity, the focus is further narrowed down effective business related activities by Influential Entrepreneurship. However, the implication that generated from the study is not constraint to certain category of product. Influential Entrepreneurship are active participants and professional content producers in various field.

This study emphasized on the development of CE management skills. Thusly the relevant literature on CE approaches is examined to build a theoretical framework. CE captures customer's behavioural activities and the interactions towards certain subject. In the process of engagement, marketers identify motivational drivers, and actively facilitated the customer behaviors. Apart from CE management approaches, the study goes through definition, purpose, approaches mechanism, and enactments of CE management. After theoretical construction, principles are examined and supplemented from empirical setting, in which data is gathered from experienced

Influential Entrepreneurs in China. Hence, the study would like to shed a light on the development of Influential Entrepreneurship.

All in all, studying the various approaches to manage CE by Influential Entrepreneurs in China helps academic researchers and practitioners to understand the current situation of Customer Management from a new perspective, to gather the scattered information on evaluating corresponding benefits and outcomes, providing foundation for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review will cover two main areas so as to better understand research subjects, and conduct in-depth analysis on research objective. First, the emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship will be presented by antecedents, market potential, and theorizing of Influential Entrepreneurship. Following by the review on customer engagement, which will be addressed from four perspectives: definition, purpose, approaches mechanism, and enactments.

2.1 Influential Entrepreneurship

The emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship is recognized when business of influential hold indispensable power over traditional firms, generating revenue based on the influence power. The term of Influential Entrepreneur is fresh, but the essence is the integration of traditional elements. Michael (2017) points out in the report for A.T. Kearney that Influential Entrepreneurship represents remarkable power of marketing force as it is recognized to erode the traditional market share, driven by the power of influence. The acknowledgement of Influential as fierce marketing force signified steering of mindset and strategies in marketing practitioners.

The linkage between Influential and Entrepreneurship is first academically identified by Abidin (2016, 2-3, 16). Abidin (2016, 3-4, 9, 12, 15) admits that Influential have formed a formal industry where large amount of Influential and broker agencies are actively engaged. She acknowledges the existence of Influential who monetize popularity by implanting ‘*advertorial*’ post of photos, videos, and messages and initiating massive dynamic social participation on social networks as ‘*savvy entrepreneurs*’ (Abidin 2016, 3). ‘*Advertorial*’ is a combination of advertisement and editorial, which often exists in forms of informative articles, and is designated as soft advertisements, explained by Cambridge Dictionary. In Abidin’s (2016, 1-2, 10, 16) argument, Influential Entrepreneurial activity is business appropriation of formal Influential activities as commercial object that contains cultivated theoretical knowledge, considerate analysis, progressive endeavour, and comprehensive fieldwork. She praises the activity as ‘*subversive*’, but also stated that the topic is ‘*under-visualized and under-estimated generative power*’, which used to

be framed by populist as '*marginal, inconsequential, and unproductive*' or merely as '*fun*'. From academic implication, researchers would like to reveal the mechanism for Influential as entrepreneurs. And for managerial implication, as Hintz et al. (2014, 2843-2843) points out, enterprises hope that knowledgeable insights will assist them to figure out the most influential customer that affects other customers' behavior along product adoption in social networks. Consequently, the identified influential can be an appropriate target in digital marketing.

In this study, Influential Entrepreneurship is defined by its nature, describing that when an Influential recognizes business opportunities through regular interactions and social connections, in the mean time she or he possesses entrepreneurial characteristics which drive the individual to realize business opportunities through business activities. The clarification of role will take an incremental approach to comb out the progress from which Influential Entrepreneur grows. First, the antecedents of Influential Entrepreneurship as Influential will be scrutinized to clarify the Influential characteristics as convincing, expertise, and are WOM specialized. Then the marketing potential of Influential is displayed to show the business potential as Influential, namely value co-creation in product adoption, positioning as valuable customers, and urging social interactions and triggering new consumer patterns. The combination of antecedents as Influential and the marketing potential both urges the transition towards Influential Entrepreneurship, which is facilitated by the prevalent of online social networks. Influential Entrepreneurs present polished authenticity, commercialize Influential activities, and enact purposeful engagement with followers as marketing tactics. In the meantime, the emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship has raised related debatable issues on this phenomenon. The gradual transition progress that fosters the emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship is synthesized as follows. (See Figure 3)

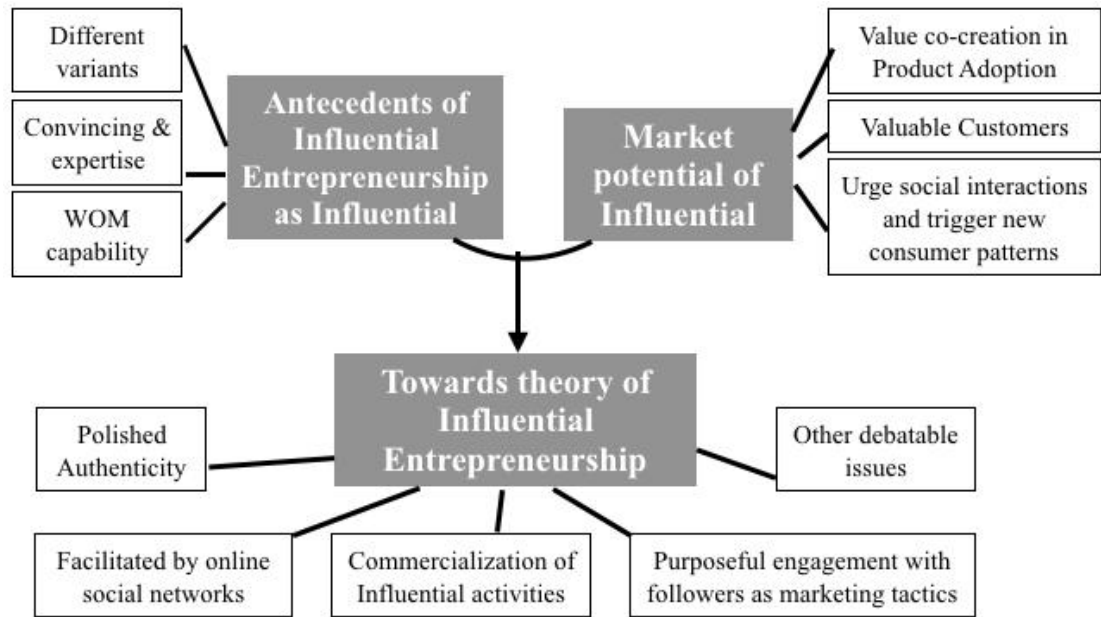


Figure 3. Synthesis of gradual transition towards Influential Entrepreneurship.

2.1.1 *Influential as antecedents of Influential Entrepreneurship*

Influential have long been realized of its' distinguishable features for a long period of time. Many researchers have focused on the existence of Influential, defining the distinguished characteristics and behavioral activities. (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1966; Chan & Misra 1990; Burt 1997; Keller & Berry 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006; Van den Bulte & Wuyts 2007; Senft 2008; Goldenberg et al. 2009a & 2009b; Iyengar et al. 2011; Hinz et al. 2014; Chae 2017)

The academic definitions of Influential are synthesized in Table 1.

Perspective	Concept	Sources
Variants	‘Influencer’, ‘maven’, ‘social-hubs’, ‘micro-celebrities’, ‘opinion leaders’, ‘connectors’, and ‘molecular leader’.	Katz & Lazarsfeld 1966, 273, 275; Feick & Price 1987, 83-95; Keller & Berry, 2003; Senft 2008, 25, 116; Goldenberg et al. 2009a, 36-37 & 2009b, 1; Iyengar et al. 2011, 195, 209-211; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Chae 2017, 371.
Convincing and Expertise	Influentials are convincing experts with large social networking connections. They remain in conversation centre with psychological advantages. They hold technology-oriented view and keep ahead with trends.	Katz & Lazarsfeld 1966, 205; Feick & Price 1987, 83-95; Chan & Misra 1990, 53-55; Burt 1997, 339-345; Keller & Berry 2003; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 1-2.
WOM capability	Influential are a small group of people who hold disproportional substantial influential power, Word-Of-Mouth capability (includes eWOM) and information centralization.	Burt 1997, 339-345; Keller & Berry, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Hinz et al. 2014, 2843.

Table 1 Synthesis of characteristic definition of influential.

Many terms are using interchangeably to describe influential, like ‘influencer’, ‘maven’, ‘social-hubs’, ‘micro-celebrities’, ‘opinion leaders’, ‘connectors’, and ‘molecular leader’. (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1966, 273, 275; Senft 2008; Goldenberg et al. 2009a & 2009b, 1; Iyengar et al. 2011, 195, 209-211; Chae 2017, 371) The earliest recognition of Influential effect on social communication can be traced back to 50 years ago. (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1966, 273, 275) Influential individuals have been identified by unique social and demographic characteristics, distinguishing them from the rest of public.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1966, 205-206, 273) confirmed the effectiveness of influential personal relationship for its greater knowledge coverage and certain psychological advantages beyond traditional media forces, and defined influential role as opinion leaders. The intimate non-purposive relationship is more flexible in countering resistance. Hence the information source is considered as trustworthy and persuasive. Feick & Price (1987, 83-95) proved that mavens are significantly correlated to opinion leaders and influencers in personality and behavioral features, namely product-oriented knowledge and responsiveness in peer information seeking. The characteristics of Influential are perceived as convincing, charismatic, and expertise. (Goldenberg et al 2009b, 1) On top of such feature identification, Chan and Misra (1990, 53-56) clarified that opinion leaders are distinguished from the public by product-related experienced and higher exposure to mass media. Demographic features of higher education, higher income, greater social mobility, and younger age are detected, which align with findings from Keller & Berry (2003). Chan and Misra (1990, 55-56) portrait Influential as innovative, venturesome, confident and socially active.

Chan & Misra (1990, 53), Keller & Berry (2003), Iyengar et al. (2011, 210-211) and Goldenberg et al. (2009a, 36-37 & 2009b, 1) further complement the definition of Influential by addressing social capital. Features like large social networking connections, centralism in conversation, early adoption of trending changes, technology-oriented view, and Word-Of-Mouth capability of Influential are listed to define Influential as 'maven', 'hubs', and 'social-hubs'. Capability of bridging structural holes comes along with bigger opportunity pool and diversified contacts for Influential. (Burt 1997, 339-345) The effect of social ties is classified as imbalanced between influential and their connections, namely, the influential are less responsive for peer behavior than reciprocally. (Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211) Hintz et al. (2014, 2843) confirms in an empirical research by quantifying the extent to which an influential advisee has on the recipient and reversely. By studying the adoption of products, the chances of an opinion leader accepting advice from their connectional advisers is one third of vice versa. It is tested that the defense of opinion construct helps to maintain the influential status in terms of innovativeness and leadership. Besides, scholars (Keller & Berry, 2003; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Hinz et al. 2014, 2843) reveal the fact that influential are small group of people who own disproportional substantial influence over the majority.

Goldsmith & Horowitz (2006, 3-4) discussed the application of WOM capability online through social networks will form e-WOM, which represents power of Influential in online communities. Senft (2008, 25, 116) defines Influential in technology age as 'micro-celebrity' who utilize new technology like blogs, social networks, videos to trigger massive participation, amplifying their popularity. He also clarifies the significant difference between '*micro-celebrity*' and conventional celebrity, despite the perceptive similarities. He explains from publicity ideology that Influential apply contrived authenticity, self-branding and self-publicity, which stress on responsiveness. Their information, life, events and activities are accessible as an individual in reality. In the meantime, conventional celebrity preserves a flawless life by distancing from the community. Despite the illusion of knowing everything of Influential, the truth is, no one is fully accessible by the public without reserve. Abidin (2016, 2, 4, 15-16) and Chae (2017, 371) refer to Influential as influencer or celebrity on social media. Abidin (2016, 1-16) specifically emphasized Influential capability of advertorial and praised them of editing tactics, knowledge reserve, learning by doing, and profitability. For example, an advertorial post from Influential showing effortless elegant life contains professional editorial skills and implanted sponsor information. Borges (2011, 6-19) proves that advertisements enhanced with edited photos induce positive evaluation on perspective purchase intention, while negatively affect female self-esteem and self-evaluation on appearance. Chae (2017, 374-375) reveals that Influential can be a target for upward comparison which promotes activities like selfie-taking, social media use, and public self-consciousness. Though the public are fully aware that such comparison is not appropriate or rational.

Apart from the synthesis table, gender factor in Influential is taken into consideration. Senft (2008, 13, 116) declares that 'micro-celebrities' are mostly 'cam-girls'. Oppositely, Keller & Berry (2003) did not include gender as a significant demographic Influential identification. Abidin (2016, 2, 4, 15-16) claims that gender stereotype is not a factor to distinguish Influential, since working as an Influential is not a gendered labor. Hintz et al. (2014, 2842-2843) contribute to the theory by testing product adoption progress, confirming that gender does not constitute as explanatory power in adoption intent.

2.1.2 Market potential of Influential

Then researchers revealed the relevant impact of Influential on business model, Customer Management, society and community etc. Upon the emergence of Influential as plausible marketing focus, several studies approach influential effect, positioning the latter one as key customers. Business opportunities in influential marketing since then bloom, together with the rise of related management approaches. (Granovetter 1973; Rogers 1976; Burt 1987; Valente & Davis 1999; Keller & Berry 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006; Van de Bulte & Joshi 2007; Hinz et al. 2008; Hinz & Spann 2008; Godes & Mayzlin 2009; Goldenberg et al. 2009b; Trusov et al. 2009; Hoyer et al. 2010; Libai et al. 2010; Hinz et al. 2011; Iyengar et al. 2011; Hinz & Takac 2014) The academic research of Influential on marketing level are synthesized in Table 2.

Perspective	Concepts	Sources
Value co-creation in product adoption	Influential urge or block product & service adoption and upgrades, and stress on cost performance, providing value co-creation in new product development.	Becker 1970, 273; Burt 1987, 1326-1327; Chan & Misra 1990, 54-55; Feick & Price 1987, 83-95; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Granovetter 1973, 1366-1368; Hoyer et al. 2010, 288; Valente & Davis 1999, 64.
Valuable customers	Influential are valuable customers comparing with peers, possessing significant impact on purchasing decision over the others. Marketing strategies are effective based on segmentation of customers as early adopters or late adopters. Influential are crucial in C2C communication. They are capable of promoting faster growth and increasing	Bampo et al. 2008, 288; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 737; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 10-11; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Hinz & Spann 2008, 366-367; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Joshi 2007, 402, 404, 415-418; Keller & Berry 2003; Libai et al. 2010, 278; Trusov et al. 2009, 90-92, 98;

	market size, offering effective marketing forecast in early stages.	Van de Bulte & Rogers 1976, 290, 292, 299; Wu & Wang 2014, 51-52.
Urge social interactions and trigger new consumer pattern	Capturing the effect of digital marketing and customer engagement, urging online marketers to initiate social interactions and shaping new forms of consumer patterns, and ultimately to forecast market.	Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 4-5; Hinz et al. 2014, 2839-2843; Hinz & Spann. 2008, 366-367; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Keller & Berry 2003.

Table 2 Synthesis of academic research of Influential impact on market level

The position of which individual is located in the social network may affect the process of product adoption. (Burt 1987, 1326-1327; Valente & Davis 1999, 64) From diffusion theoretical perspective, central figures who are rich in ‘weak ties’ like ‘non-friendship’ connections, are leading in product adoption and diffusion, on the basis that the product is comparatively uncontroversial. The leading adoption behaviour helps to sustain the reputational professionalism. (Becker 1970, 273; Granovetter 1973, 1366-1368) Chan & Misra (1990, 54-55) find that influential function as early adopters that disseminate the information of product publicly and persuade potential adopters into trial adoption. Opinion from influential may affect product adoption process by acceleration or blockage, which is redeemed from knowledgeability. Influential are rich in product category knowledge, and they are high in willingness to raise customer discussion. (Feick & Price 1987, 83-95; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10) From market segmentation perspective, mavens with knowledgeability and willingness to help are particularly engaged in value co-creation in new product development (NPD). (Hoyer et al. 2010, 288) For market practitioners, targeting Influential can be extraordinarily effective in product adoption, due to the capability in boosting customer communication and disseminating information. (Feick and Price 1987, 95)

People turn to Influential with opinion leadership for advice in a community, especially when it comes to innovative products. (Rogers 1976, 290, 292, 299; Keller & Berry 2003) With the introduction of online social networks, consumer

communicational networks have expanded accordingly. (Hinz & Spann. 2008, 367) Trusov et al. (2009, 90-92, 98) tested that communication by WOM with personal referral is profoundly effective against traditional advertising activities in acquiring new customers. Influential are especially important for retailers, due to their activism in information sharing on a wide range of goods. (Feick & Price 1987, 95) On the other side, disloyal customers are proved to be more effective than loyal customers in disseminating information. The crucial point to take advantages of Influential social networks scale is to identify effective Influential who are not loyal customers to the product. (Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 737) To cope with the advertising dynamic, firms have been actively targeting influential customers so as to achieve better market response. (Bampo et al. 2008, 288) Van de Bulte & Joshi (2007, 402, 404, 415-418) present a two-category model, classifying customers into influential and imitators. The influential are more updated with new product development and are more impactful on the other sectors in product diffusion. The influence process is single directed rather than reversibly. Hence for market practitioners it may not be necessary to update product, but focusing on customer network may as well provide adoption boost. Besides, among all the adoptions, those started from Influential does not descend, and Influential-initiated adoption can also rise after it declines for some time.

The value of a customer is calculated as beyond purchasing behavior, but includes the individual impact on others. Hence influential hold substantially greater value than previously assumed. Influential social networks are identified by its innovativeness as innovator hubs, and by number of connectors as social hubs. In the two different categories, Social hubs are effective in expanding market size due to the large number of connectors rather than innate innovativeness. The innovator hubs rely on the speed of adoption, as updated with the latest information. (Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 10-11) The existence of long underestimated effect of Influential is acknowledged, as Influential oriented social network campaigns will produce extraordinary social influence on other customers. (Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211)

Influential are attached with higher marketing potential, due to both connectivity and innovativeness. They are early adopters as well as heavy users, which in return increase their credibility and network value. Marketing practitioners focusing on influential expect boost in trail purchase activities together with a contagion effect. (Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211) Influential and its

relevant capability of capturing the effect of digital marketing and customer engagement has long been recognized by academic researchers and marketing practitioners. (Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Keller & Berry 2003) Targeting Influential on social networks directly increases the efficiency of marketing campaign. (Wu & Wang 2014, 51-52) Online social networks lower transactional cost, which triggers new business model and new pricing mechanism. New consumer behavior and developed predictions of market will be established on the basis of insightful knowledge of such structural networks, which urges digital marketers to initiate social interactions among consumers so as to sustain business. (Hintz & Spann 2008, 366-367) Goldsmith & Horowitz (2006,4-5) and Heller & Parasnis (2011, 30-36) call on corporates to act beyond mass media advertising towards organizing online events for commercial purpose. Hintz et al. (2014, 2839-2843) reveals the effectiveness in information dismissal in four kinds of social networks, directed networks where relationships are reciprocal versus in-directed networks where roles in relationships are clearly separated, and advice networks where relationships grow around a certain topic versus friendship network where relationship is built on general purpose. Internet forum is empirically tested as influential sources of consumer information. It is concluded that there are no significant information dismissal privileges in directed networks (like Facebook) or in-directed networks (like Twitter). However, implementing directed information in advice networks (like Google+) can be rewarding. This provides new insight for firms who are targeting social network platform as new digital marketing tools.

2.1.3 Towards a Theory of Influential Entrepreneurship

The transition of Influential activities towards commercialization was first academically acknowledged by Abidin (2016, 2-3, 16). She defines the achievement by Influential Entrepreneurs as ‘*under-visibility and underestimated generative power*’, which is previously viewed as ‘*marginal, inconsequential, and unproductive*’. However, the business activities of Influential Entrepreneurs have fostered the industry into a ‘*grown, matured, rapid expanding*’ one that thrives ‘*under the radar*’.

In fact, the active Influential Entrepreneurs are constantly reported by mainstream news as ‘*savvy entrepreneurs*’, who are admired for their impact on young Internet

users, capability to gain popularity, and power of earning real cash. (Abidin 2015b; 2016, 2-3, 16) Marwick (2013, 114) describes Influential in the age of social media as celebrity to a niche network. The Influential are accessible and tangible for the particular niche, comparing with traditional Influential who are not as active online, or with traditional celebrity who are distant to the public. Then with the commercial advancement of Influential, they enter various media channels and reach beyond the previously conceived niche group, being recognized in multiple mainstream industries and covered by mainstream media for good looks, entrepreneurship, and creative approaches. (Abidin 2015a)

Despite that previous academic researchers have recognized the existence of Influential Entrepreneurs and named them with multiple aliases like '*micro-celebrity*', '*savvy entrepreneurs*', '*Influencer*', and '*Influential*', this article decides to articulate the definition by emphasising on the business activities of by Influential. We refrain from defining the subject as purely '*micro-celebrity*' or '*Influential*', preferring to use the term Influential Entrepreneurs to cover the implication of both Influential and entrepreneur. (Abidin 2015b; 2016, 2-3, 16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Nevertheless, the term '*micro-celebrity*', '*Influential*', '*Influencer*' and such are using interchangeably by both scholars and public news, and the gesture will be followed in reference to other academic works and publications. The transition progress towards Influential Entrepreneurship is synthesized as follows. (See Table 3) In this section, the Table will be explained in detail.

Perspectives	Concepts	Sources
<p>The facilitation of online social networks.</p>	<p>The emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship is inseparable with online social networks. It starts with bloggers practicing celebrity equivalent activities across different spectrums, namely engaging people to amp up digital popularity on social media platforms.</p>	<p>Abidin 2015b; 2016, 2-3; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Keller & Berry 2003; Litunen 2000; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 155; Meclleland 1987; Sentf 2008</p>
<p>The polished authenticity.</p>	<p>Influential Entrepreneurs present retouched authenticity with editorial tactics, market know-how, and expertise skills. They produce consumable content and develop perceived interconnectness via self-representation to leverage aspirational consumption with aspirational production, and seek celebrity equivalent attention.</p>	<p>Abidin 2016, 1-3, 5-6, 13-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick 2003, 116-117; 2015, 156; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Rojek's 2001; Sentf 2008, 16, 116.</p>
<p>Commercialization of Influential activities.</p>	<p>The activities by Influential Entrepreneurs are profit-oriented, in which persona intimacy is developed as business strategy. A business model involving firms, management agency, and Influential Entrepreneurs is established to describe the ecology.</p>	<p>Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 2-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Marwick 2013, 114; Michael 2017.</p>
<p>Purposeful Engagement with followers as marketing tactics.</p>	<p>The business-oriented activities by Influential Entrepreneurs encourage connections with followers, which can be learnt and practiced by many. The strategic endeavors are crafted to present successful, attainable, and accessible figure to retain commonality and intimacy. Influential Entrepreneurs use tactics to establish image to be consumed, seeking popularity online and representing marketing value.</p>	<p>Abidin, 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Brodie et al. 2011, 256; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Hearn 2008, 213; Lair et al. 2005, 335-336; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 139-157; McLaughlin 2009, 1101-1104; Patterson et al. 2006, 4-6; Powell 2009; Sentf 2008, 25-26; Turkle 2008, 122-130; van Doorn et al. 2010, 258; Vivek et al. 2012, 132.</p>
<p>Other debatable issues.</p>	<p>The industry is predominantly occupied by female. Some followers may find the actions by Influential Entrepreneurs as artificial and attention-seeking. The activities are mostly self-taught, and unstandardized, which is mostly dependent on individual.</p>	<p>Abidin 2013; 2015a; 2016, 2-4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 150-154; Sentf 2008, 13, 26, 116.</p>

Table 3 The synthesis of transition progress towards Influential Entrepreneurship.

2.1.3.1 The Facilitation of Online Social Networks

The transition into Influential Entrepreneurs possibly attributes to the unresolved dissatisfaction in influential customers (Keller & Berry 2003), in the entrepreneurial nature of need for achievement (McClelland 1987), in the decline of reliance on co-operative partners (Littunen 2000), or in the pursuit for economic gains and social mobility (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477). The hidden cause remains uncertain. Regardless, the emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship is inseparable with the advent of social media, where customers actively seek and exchange information of products and brands. (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2)

As defined in previous chapter, many terms are using interchangeably to represent Influential, like '*Influencer*', '*micro-celebrity*', '*opinion leaders*' and such. The characteristic of Influential remain unchanged, but the commercialization of Influential is inseparable with facilitation of social networks. Marwick & Boyd (2011, 155) pointed out that the rise of Internet certainly created a new era where practice of celebrity can be '*practiced across the spectrum of fame*'. Abidin (2015b) discovered that the industry can be traced back to the mid-2000s when '*blog shop*' industry just started as '*commercial blogging*' industry, when Influential are once named '*bloggers*'. The pursuit of '*micro-celebrity personas*' as a career through social media was detected in Singapore since 2005. Abidin (2016, 2-3) constantly stressed the usage of digital social network as an important platform for communication and interaction. Senft (2008, 25) defines the online phenomenon as online activities that engaging people to '*amp up*' the digital popularity through social network platforms, namely blogs, videos, and other social networking websites.

2.1.3.2 The Polished Authenticity

Senft (2008, 16) specifically defined the active Influential on social media with authenticity, stating that they look more 'real' than television celebrity who has perfect look and lives. Abidin (2016, 1-3, 5-6) portrays Influential Entrepreneurs as authentic and '*organically*' viral to the audience, stating that they retouch the representation of authenticity.

De facto, Influential Entrepreneurs post their content with discreet editorial tactics, profound research, and expertise skills. Marwick (2003, 116-117) deduced from

Rojek's (2001) categorization on celebrities, and introduced two types of micro-celebrity, '*ascribed micro-celebrity*' who produce social media content and build online personality, and '*achieved micro-celebrity*' who use '*self-presentation*' tactics like developing '*perceived interconnectedness*' with followers, cultivating a persona, and '*selective disclosure on personal life*'. Regardless of '*micro-celebrity*' or celebrity, Senft (2008, 116) points out that rarely is any individual fully unedited to the public, or completely accessible by the public. The '*seemingly authentic*' (Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140) and '*contrived authenticity*' (Abidin 2016, 13-16) that hypnotize followers with illusion that they could be fully accessible to the Influential life is confirmed. Meanwhile the self-presentation is carefully crafted and designed, so as to be '*consumed by fans*'. In other words, deliberately crafted content and information are consumable product that offers '*vicarious experience*'. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) This is also distinct from accidental fame caused by Internet memes, like post that unintentionally went popular. (Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141) The micro-celebrities leverage '*aspirational consumption*' with '*aspirational production*', like to portray themselves working in high-end status, seeking celebrity equivalent attention. (Marwick 2015, 156)

2.1.3.3 The Commercialization of Influential Activities.

Apart from the prevalent of online social networks facilitating the emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship, the most important behavior distinguishing Influential Entrepreneurs from normal Influential is the integrated business activities. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The entrepreneurial Influential have '*subverted the expectations of female entrepreneurs*' (Abidin 2016, 2). The business-oriented core of Influential is early identified and acknowledged in the form of blogshops in Singapore as '*lucrative form of e-commerce*'. And the operator of blogshops are qualified as independent entrepreneurs with influencing effects, who actively craft an online persona image through social networks, aiming at establishing '*persona intimacy*' with followers so as to foster purchase activities. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325)

There is no doubt that Influential Entrepreneurs are profit-oriented. Delicate '*persona intimacy*' is positioned as an effective business strategy to sustain consumer base. The connections between Influential and customers are sometimes taken as

friendly intimacy rather than commercial intimacy. The truth is, there is no pure friendly intimacy in between, and business pursuit always wins out in the relationship. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Abidin (2016, 2-4) concluded that the labor realized monetization activities and self-actualizing persona is profitable, which '*shapes social media ecology*'. The potential to monetizing popularity among audience can be quantified by volume of 'Likes'. In other words, the '*likeability*' measures capability to draw attention on screen. Of course, the channel of revenue is not established immediately. Abidin (2015a; 2015b; 2016, 3-10) pointed out that Influential initially accumulate popularity as normal Internet users on various social media platform through recording their personal life textually and visually. Then they engage with the followings both virtually and physically. The official turning point of Influential towards Influential Entrepreneurs is when Influential monetize the popularity of following by posting integrated '*advertorials*' on social media and attending sponsored events or campaign physically as invited guest. In fact, the development of Influential Entrepreneurship is competitively rapid that a new business model is formed with firms as upper stream sponsors, management agencies as middleman, and Influential Entrepreneurs as promoters and implementers. Managers from agencies collaborate between publicity resources and Influential Entrepreneurs for a commission fee. The job responsibility of agents includes brokering the profile and portfolio of Influential to prospective clients for a dealer charge, and guaranteeing punctual delivery of qualified endorsement post in exchange for a reward for Influential Entrepreneurs. Being contracted to the management agency also symbolizes an advanced status of Influential Entrepreneur. The agent contract charges commission fee and allows Influential to access knowledge, information, skillsets, and resources. In this case, corporates collaborate with Influential through agents to exploit their affluence in niche customer base. (Abidin 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2-3; Marwick 2013, 114)

The Influential market is highly customized, and is prevalent with opinion-directed endorsement of offerings that Influential seem to personally experience. For endorsing offerings with self-credibility, an endorsement fee is charged from the corporate party, who later receive popularity of the offering as a result. The endorsement job and collaborative work of Influential Entrepreneurs cover products and services in various fields, especially in fashion, beauty, food & beverage (F&B), leisure activities like travel, and electronics. On the recognition of entrepreneurial

influence, the 'success stories' are shared by academic institutions and covered by mainstream media, brushing out the envisioned '*unstable career*' impression. (Abidin, 2015a; 2015b)

This particular phenomenon is spotted in various locations globally. By managing the intimate interactions with customers, Influential enact marketing strategy as well as involve customers in value co-creation process. Their success is qualified as evident as in monthly sales up to \$10,000 to \$30,000. Many medias have reported the exponential growth of Influential scale and their erosion of the market share, which is once monopolized by big firms. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Michael 2017)

For example, Nuffnang, established in 2007, is a blog advertising company that connects blogger and brands in Asia-Pacific areas. (Nuffang Asia-Pacific Blog Awards, 2009, 2011) A social-media presence management company called theAudience, established in 2011, managed to incubate D.J. Steve Aoki into major Internet celebrity, and brought up Chainsmokers with a popular song '#Selfie'. (Turning Microcelebrity Into a Big Business. 2014). Alibaba attributed its remarkable revenue growth to integrating social media with E-commerce, in which Influential Entrepreneurs make real money through monetizing social media followers by turning them into loyal Alibaba customers. The Influential Entrepreneurs, named '*Wanghong*' in Chinese, basically means online micro-celebrities. Wanghong make all digital and physical endeavors, namely modeling for their own clothing shops, live-streaming about personal life like shopping experience, blogging about offerings. (Superstar Influencers: China's Internet Celebrities At Heart Of Alibaba's Growth. 2017). Zhang Dayi, known as a famous Chinese Influential Entrepreneur, owns 4.86 million followers on Chinese Twitter-equivalent Weibo. Zhang was initially famous online for stylish dressing, then she opened her own Alibaba store with a monthly turnover of RMB one million (Euro 135,000). (China's top 10 online celebrities of 2015, 2016) The other famous Influential Entrepreneur named Papi Jiang takes a different routine. By posting video-bloggings (vloggings) on hot topic on Weibo, Papi cumulates 44 million followers across multiple platforms and received joint VC investment of US\$ 1.8 billion (Euro 1.7 million). (China's Viral Idol: Papi Jiang, a Girl Next Door With Attitude. 2016). Tophot, established in 2015 in Shanghai, is one of the incubators that provide service from incubator programs for budding Influential to bridging Influential with

endorsement opportunities for a commission fee. Tophot aims at incubating an Influential by branding and marketing towards a Professional-Generated-Content (PGC) producer. One of Tophot's contracted Influential Entrepreneur, Ling Ling, emphasizes the importance of fans, and she appreciates support from fans which lasts for a decade. Ling Ling tries to maintain a friendly image online through personal interaction with fans on different platforms like Weibo, WeChat, and live-streaming sessions. (Wang Hong: China's online stars making real cash. 2016)

2.1.3.4 Purposeful Engagement with followers as a marketing tactic

Like Influential Entrepreneurs bearing multiple aliases, their followers are referred to with different names, like followers, fans, viewers, readers, haters (detractors), bots, the audience, family, etc. The purposed engagement with followers are referred to as intimacy, participation, affiliation, interaction, acknowledgement, interconnectedness, rapport etc. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 139-157; Senft 2008, 25-26)

Marwick & Boyd (2011, 139-147, 156-157) stated that celebrity practitioners on social media, who in many ways resemble micro-celebrities in practicing online fan base maintenance, would prefer viewing the followers as '*fans*'. Online celebrity practice is defined as a stage of mind and set of practices that treat audience as fans. Influential Entrepreneurs view followers is like '*family*' to encourage connection. In followers' perspective, they are self-viewed in multiple aspects, like '*friends, customers, detractors, or neighbour online*'. (Senft 2008, 25-26) Unlike real celebrities maintaining asymmetrical relationship with fans, the micro-celebrities would prefer 'followers' rather 'fans' to enhance sense of closeness and familiarity, rejecting hierarchical status evaluation. Followers are also classified by attitude into 'readers'(supporters), 'haters'(detractors), and 'bots' (notoriously known as fake accounts, purchased by some Influential for boosting followers number). (Abidin 2015a)

In the online contextual base, Marwick & Boyd (2011, 140-142) scrutinize the definition of celebrity and micro-celebrity online, and define that celebrity practice is not exclusive, but can be learnt and practiced by a greater many now. Celebrities are conventionally separated from the audience so as to build an illusion of perfection, while 'micro-celebrities' obsess viewers for the subject's '*obligations*' to the viewers,

who made the subject what they are. Because in the online community, popularity is built upon connections with ‘*audience*’ rather than upon separation. (Senft 2008, 25-26) The crucial advertorial posts are intentionally scheduled in correspondence with the peak hours of the followings’ online activities. (Abidin 2015a) The same dynamic is elaborated in detail by Powell (2009) and Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477), stating that traditional celebrities sustain popularity by distancing from the public, retaining a hierarchical social image. While Influential Entrepreneurs choose to transform into ‘micro-celebrities’, positioning themselves as commercially successful, accessible, attainable, and representing commonality. Meanwhile, persona intimacy is practiced by micro-celebrities to enact an illusion of friend-like relationship, which is motivated by underlying commercial purpose de facto.

‘Micro-celebrity’ represents strategic endeavour both digitally and physically, aiming at cultivate popularity through selective self-presentation and self-branding. (Hearn 2008, 213; Lair et al. 2005, 335-336) During the commercialization progress, the conventional norms and posture of personae are collectively internalized within to facilitate the ‘*communicative intimacies*’. (Abidin 2015a; Turkle 2008, 122-130) Through seemingly authentic self-presentation, performed intimacy as expected, and preserved ongoing relationships, interactions and engagements on social networks are thusly implemented. The subject manages followers or friends on social networks as a fan base, using a series of techniques like ‘*performed intimacy, affiliation, and public acknowledgement*’, establishing a self-image to be consumed, and targeting popularity as a goal. The subject here constructs and maintains popularity with continuous fan management. (Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141)

In the maintenance of intimate impression, the Influential intend to posture an ordinary persona and situate the communication on a responsive basis, rather than distanced or unanswered. Abidin (2015a) builds a communication model of ‘*perceived interconnectedness*’ to better describe the developed intimacy, which is appropriated and mobilized in multiple ways by Influential Entrepreneurs, namely ‘*commercial, interactive, reciprocal, and disclosive*’. (Abidin 2015a) Without doubt, the purposed intimacy is profit oriented, motivated by commercial interests. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 472) The number of ‘Likes’ is one monitor of the level of intimacy on-screen, as ‘Likes’ directly quantify the popularity, thusly measure the potential of monetization on followers’ attention. (Abidin 2016, 4) The different enactment of intimacy will be further elaborated in chapter 2.2.5.

Regardless of names, the engagement with followers composed an important part of Influential Entrepreneurial commercial activities. Firms recognize the monetary value in campaign initiated by Influential on social networks, which stimulates engagement and interactions, promotes circulation and exposure of publicity. In return, the active interaction and participation are valued as promotional instruments by firms. For example, sponsors organize Influential to make endorsement so as to attract potential customers, providing opportunities for followers to get in touch with Influential Entrepreneurs in person. Some Influential Entrepreneurs choose to actively interact with followers to build up '*perceived interconnectedness*', like sharing documentary blogs with inconspicuous advertorials or solicitation for advice. (Abidin, 2015a, 2015b) Despite of the coverage on the close relationship, the ultimate goal is to involve customer into the concept of intimacy and acknowledgment of ideal image of the Influential, through business activities regard material goods. Regardless, the business purpose under the relationship is obvious and the emotional attachment constitutes parts of marketing strategies. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

Here we refrain from defining the followers as purely 'followers', 'fans' or 'viewers' to avoid binary implication, preferring to use the term consumers or customers to complete the commercial implications from followers' side. Marwick & Boyd (2011, 140-141) conceptualized the celebrity practitioners are producing 'consumable' products for followers to consume, in which the followers can be classified as consumers. Although the Influential Entrepreneurs try to avoid stage evaluation by referring to followers as 'readers' and so forth (Abidin 2015a), the followers are technically customers who see Influential Entrepreneurs' output and acknowledgement as consumable goods. In return the customers pay with support and attention to the Influential, which ultimately contribute to the economic gain and popularity of the producer. McLaughlin (2009, 1101-1104) stated that the terms of 'customers' and 'consumers' are used interchangeably and overlappingly to describe the service recipient albeit that the conceptualization is distinct. 'Consumers' indicates relationship where products are managed by those who are accountable as the service provider, rather than as the recipients. Meanwhile, 'customers' signifies the relationship where the product is marketized as a manageable commodity. In the second conceptualization, responsible persons as opposing to customers are seen as business brokers. For those who are adventuresome, creative, and innovative, they

can be qualified as entrepreneurs. Furthermore, customer engagement is distinctive from consumer engagement. (Brodie et al. 2011, 256) Customer engagement focuses on the customer's psychological immersion in the relationship with the service organization, namely, physical, cognitive, and emotional adherence. (Patterson et al. 2006, 4-6) Whilst consumer engagement deals with the level of individual's response to the organization's offerings, like participation and connection, which can be initiated by either side. (Vivek et al. 2012, 132) Customer engagement is thusly recognized as a beyond-transactional behavior that surpasses simplistic consuming activities. (van Doorn et al. 2010, 258) In this study, the sphere of followers is extended to 'customers' area, addressing the business nature between followers and Influential Entrepreneurs. The power dynamics within the relationship is discussed from supply side, defined as engagement approaches, implicating the underlying commercial value.

In chapter 2.2., engagement with followers as customers will be further discussed in detail, focusing on the approaches implemented by Influential. Still, the term 'fans', 'followers', 'viewers' and such are using interchangeably by both scholars and public news, the gesture will be followed to refer to other academic works and publications.

2.1.3.5 Debatable Issue of Influential Entrepreneurs.

As discussed in the chapter 2.1.1., gender does not constitute a barrier for entrants in Influential industry, nor does it affect people's preference on product adoption. Undeniably, this industry is predominantly occupied by young female. (Senft 2008, 13, 116; Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3) And the young female has '*subverted the expectation of female entrepreneurs and the representation*'. The field is predominantly feminized, with a few male participants. It is observed that Influential Entrepreneurs have almost form exclusive cyber-female for emotional exchange with other women, performing a persona of young and successful woman, mainly by applying heterosexual femininity at the absence of men. From the fan customers' perspective, the deficiency in female body triggers desire to perfect as well as remedies. Meanwhile Influential seems to offer a solution in which the body feature and persona characteristics can be bought with money. In this case, the body and identity of the Influential are actually commoditized. By turning modified life style

into materialized goods to be consumed, the Influential attain both surplus value of exclusiveness and economic gains. Specifically, it is the anti-feminism activities that seems to hold feminism as a salable product, defining Influential activities and yearning economic return. (Abidin 2016, 2-4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The power of Influential Entrepreneurs both empowers and disciplines the audience and themselves, suggesting that only by aligning with the heterosexual femininity can someone enjoy privileges. Although such activity is often performed at the absence of men, and the real beneficiary of such performativity remains in doubt. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

Senft (2008, 26) states that some viewers may find this action negative as attention-seeking and artificial, and viewers are not as interested in the Influential endorsement as they are aware of the contrived authenticity of the subject. Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) also discover that a small proportion of audience are critical about the overpriced product quality and the unreal body images. Abidin (2013) research many Influentials in person to see that they are well aware of the controversial issue in conjunction with the performed intimacy, and handle the problem through various strategies.

As it is elaborated above, Influential Entrepreneurs have formed a remarkable industry covering various fields to enact business activities on. (Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 150-154) With the prosperity of the industry being recognized, the entrepreneurial tactics to operate such business is merely formally cultivated, but rather as self-taught through trial and errors, relying on experiences and exploration. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The approaches and activities are not standardized procedure, but rather individualized according to the Influential and the recipients. To explicitly distinguish between the different types of Influential Entrepreneurship (e.g. fashion, style, food & beverage, media, etc.) or different stages (e.g. mature practitioner, amateur, or liminal status) is not the focal point of this study, which possibly requires another full-length academic research to explain. In this study, Influential Entrepreneurship will be viewed by its nature on a general level: 1) possessing certain influential power over a group of people, and 2) operating business activities. The field of study will be primarily focused in online context for its prevailing condition, specifically to whom that are previously referred to as 'Influencer', 'micro-celebrities', 'Influencer Entrepreneurs' etc.

2.2 Customer Engagement

From academic perspective, most of the study on customer engagement management is from market side conceptually or empirically. Some study Customer Engagement Management and strategic vision in a nutshell, others specialized in a particular industry. Besides, there has not been a Customer Engagement framework that emphasized on the prominent Influential business yet. Customer Engagement Management has significant implications for service marketing theory and practice, which has been academically under-estimated so far, and lacks empirical evidence on individual level. (Bowden 2009b, 71; Libai et al. 2010, 277; Bolton 2011, 272; Gummerus et al. 2012, 857)

In this section, the definition of Customer Engagement will be first scrutinized and clarified, followed by a summarization. Then the purpose of conducting Customer Engagement will be discussed to justify the reasons for enactment. As this study focuses on the Customer Engagement approaches from Influential Entrepreneurship, online Customer Engagement approaches in a nutshell will be elaborated in detail, which leads to literature review about Customer Engagement approaches and Customer Engagement enactments from Influential Entrepreneurship.

2.2.1 Customer Engagement definition

2.2.1.1 Scrutinizing the definition

Customer Engagement (CE), emphasizing on non-transactional behavior of customers, is an important aspect of Customer Management (CM). CE is normally initiated and steered by firms and institutions on specific purposes, for it has long been recognized for its benefits like increasing cash flows, substantial growth from WOM, and co-created value through joint development (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247-249). Other positive outcomes are associated with proper CE management, namely increased efficiency and improved performance (Hoyer et al. 2010, 292), and driven customer loyalty (Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86). On the other side, improperly managed CE is in the position of causing adverse issues, like ignored negative customer reviews on public websites, misallocated resources from improper

calculated customer valuation, or false estimation of marketing return. (Kumar et al. 2010, 297-298; Rust et al. 2004, 109-123; Verhoef et al. 2010, 249) In short, CE is defined as marketer initiated interactive activities that involve customers in the value co-creative progress with psychological and behavioral investments, aiming at concrete strategic achievements on business level. The definition of Customer Engagement is synthesized as follows (See Figure 4), and the details of definition will be elaborated in this section.

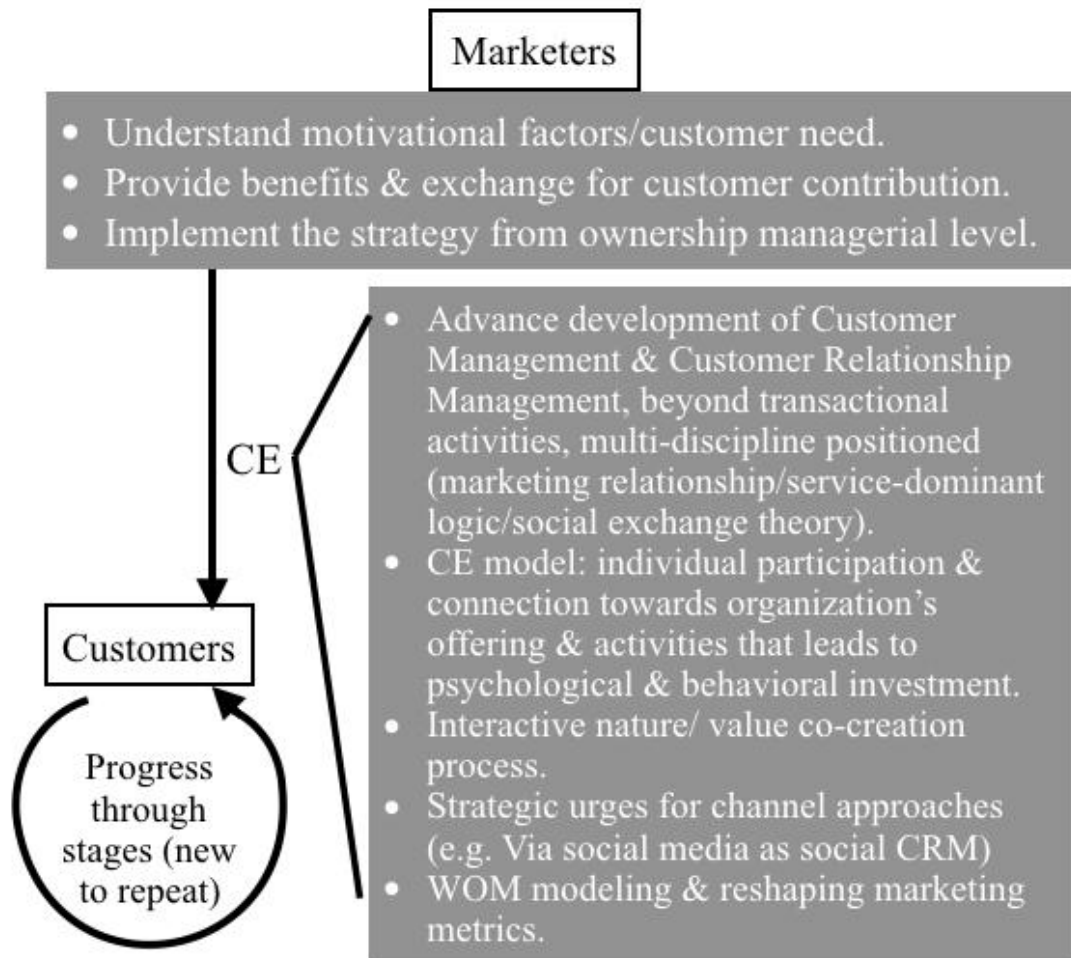


Figure 4 Synthesis of Customer Engagement definitions.

The attention on customer engagement management has been significantly raising academic and practitioner's interest in multiple disciplines like sociology, political science, psychology, marketing and organizational study since 2000 (Brodie et al. 2011, 252). Here we emphasize root of CE in marketing relationships, as in interactive experience and value co-creation. Like Vargo & Lusch (2004, 5-15; 2008, 1-10) who propose CE from '*service-dominant (S-D) logic*', in which CE is viewed as constantly changing relationship. This '*transcending relationship*' is in contrast

with the conventional transactional view of '*goods-dominant logic*' in marketing relationship. (Vargo 2009, 372-378)

CE is primarily defined as non-transactional activities, resulting from stimulus like WOM, C2C interactive relationship, and blogging activities. (Van Doorn et al. 2010, 258; Verhoef et al. 2010, 248-249) The exploration of CE within the context of customer transactional activities is approached from the side of Customer Life Cycle and Customer Equity, basing on elements like purchase frequency, purchase quantity, and brand-switching patterns. (Rust et al. 2004, 109-123; Verhoef et al. 2010, 248-249) From the implementer side, firm attaches great importance with transactional activities for the instant cash return on marketing investment. While the benefits and potential risks of non-transactional activities increasingly call for attention, both by practitioners and for academic researchers. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247-249)

Brodie et al. (2011, 260-264) explored the theoretical foundation of Customer Engagement from Relationship Marketing (RM) and Service-Dominant perspective, distinguishing the terminology of 'engagement' from 'participation' and 'involvement', emphasizing on the interactive nature and co-creation of value. CE is concluded on a general level as a multidimensional contextually based concept, motivated by interactive customer experience, concentrating on a certain engagement object, value co-created process, and existing in different stages. The construction is further extended from RM and S-D logic with the connection to social exchange theory, defining CE as '*investment level of customer's cognition, emotion and behavior regarding particular brand interaction*'. (Hollebeek 2011, 555-573)

Participation and involvement are recognized as either antecedents or potential outcomes for the particular dynamic relationship among customer community, subject (e.g. brand), firms, and institutions. The term 'engagement' increasingly substitutes traditional conception of 'involvement' and 'participation', for example, brand community value co-creation is deliberately addressed in 'engagement' context instead of in 'involvement' or 'participation' context. (Schau et al. 2009, 30-42)

Meanwhile, customer engagement is distinguished from related terms like customer co-production, and customer co-creation. Customer co-production defines customer participation activities within the organization predetermined options, like self-check-in at the Airport, where customers are perceived as 'partial employees'. (Bowen 1986, 374-375; Bolton & Saxena-Iyer 2009, 93-94) And customer co-

creation involves customer participation beyond pre-defined parameters, which includes contributing to the core offering development through shared creativeness, collaborative designing, and co-production of the package. It comes up when customers are spontaneously involved through deliberate engagement that is correspondingly designed for the service progress. (Lusch & Vargo 2006, 284) Co-creation is considered as an important demonstration of customer engagement. (Hoyer et al. 2010, 292) But customer engagement behavior surpasses co-creation. (van Door et al 2010, 254) Despite customer co-creation is vital in different context, the practices are more viable in service settings. (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer 2009, 92-94) Regardless of the rhetoric, CE conceptualization is connected with the traditional conceptualization of CM related items. Nevertheless, distinguishing the concepts is not the focal point of this study, nor is the uniqueness against traditional concepts.

Verhoef et al. (2010, 249) presented another conceptual model, placing customer engagement as a new perspective of Customer Management on firm level. This conceptual framework compensates the theoretical conceptualization of Brodie et al (2011) with company perspective practices and motivational drivers. Verhoef et al. (2010, 249) combines: (1) strategic urges in firms to develop explicit channel approaches from multiplicity channel (van Bruggen et al. 2010, 338), (2) emphasized impact of new social media on customer relationship (Henning Thureau et al. 2010, 324), (3) the recognition of customer engagement as a beyond transactional behavior and its relevant contextual factors that shapes CE (van Doorn et al. 2010, 258), (4) customer co-creation value for both firm and customers in new product development (Hoyer et al. 2010, 293), (5) the impact of CE on marketing measurement metrics (Kumar et al. 2010, 307), (6) Word-Of-Mouth Modelling stressing on agent-based models, namely, contagion effects, duration, and depth (Libai et al. 2010, 276-277), and (7) review of previous achievement on customer transactional behavior modelling (Bijmolt et al. 2010, 351). (See Figure 5)

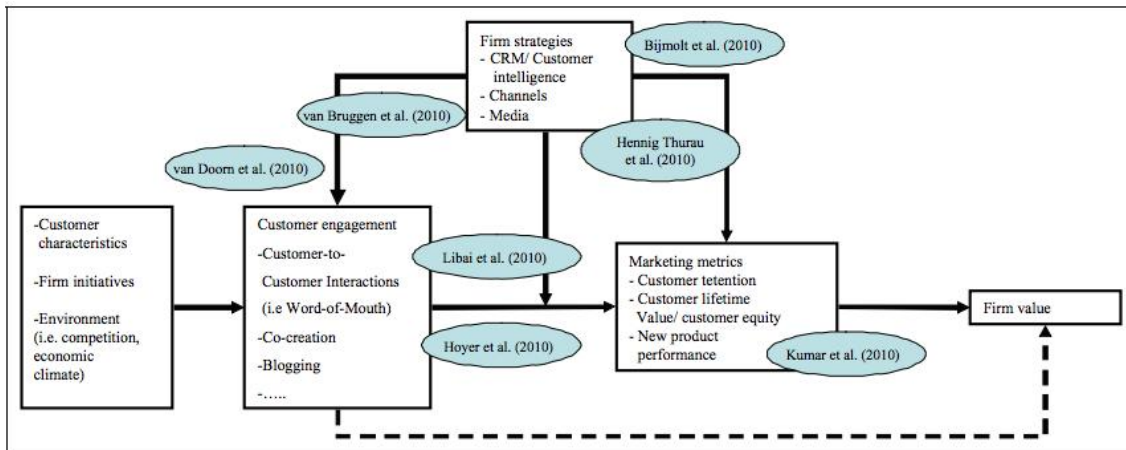


Figure 5 Conceptual Model of Customer Engagement. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 249)

Bowden (2009b) develops conceptual customer engagement framework (See Figure 6) depending on the segmentation of new or repeat customers. She discovers that development of emotional bonds by customer segmentation of purchase frequency is effective in leading towards affective commitment. The newly acquainted customer progress through new customer, return customer, repeat customer, and finally loyal customer, under the effective implementation of customer engagement practices. Brodie et al. (2011, 262) address such itineration nature of CE between new customers and old customers with necessary CE antecedents (e.g. involvements and participation) and hidden CE consequences or antecedents (e.g. commitment, loyalty, trust, emotional brand attachment, and self-brand connection). In the transcending process of CE, the consequence may serve as antecedents in the following interactive, value co-creational experiences between the customer and the concentrative engagement subject (e.g. brand). Such itinerating process is positioned on timeframe with looping nature on feedbacks. Vivek et al. (2012, 127) further qualitatively researched executives and customers, and presented a model of Customer Engagement, during which CE is defined as *'individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities'*.

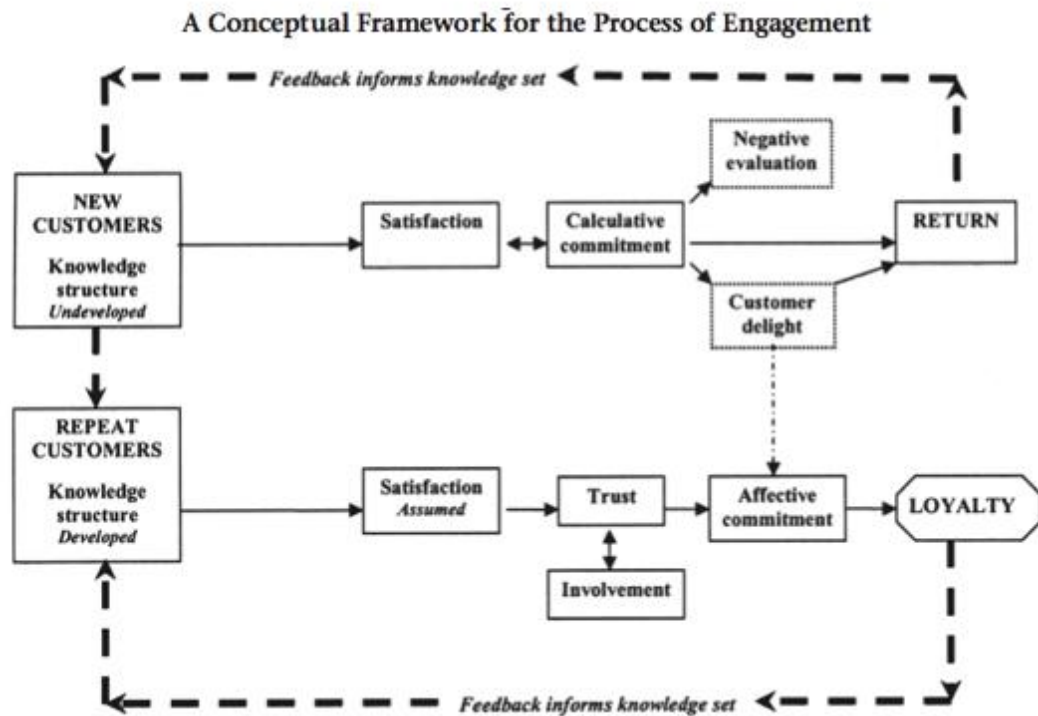


Figure 6 A conceptual Framework for the Process of Engagement.(Bowden 2009b, 66)

Others focus on particular industry by both qualitative approach and quantitative approach, for example Bowden (2009a) explored the application of managing customer-brand relationship in restaurant industry, Sawhney et al (2005) analyzed customer engagement possibilities in product innovation considering the introduction of Internet as a platform. Gummerus et al. (2012) divide Customer Engagement into ‘*Community Engagement Behaviors*’ and ‘*Transactional Engagement Behaviors*’ by empirically study the topic on Facebook community, linking the engagement with relationship constructs. It is revealed that entertainment benefits have higher impact on satisfaction and/or loyalty, comparing with social benefits and economic benefits, which is in line with the essence of entertainment seeking on social network (Biao 2013, 12-14).

Customer Engagement through online communities represents co-created value and interactions, which attracts both academic researchers and practitioners, e.g. application of netnography. (Brodie et al. 2013) Heller and Parasnis (2011, 30-36) point out that the rise of social media opens a new chapter for customer engagement, as well as challenging conventional customer relationship management. CE through social media is positioned as social CRM in contrast with traditional CRM. The latter

is driven by managerial process and IT technologies to manage customers in response to operational requirement, aiming at exploiting maximum customer value from the lasting relationship. While CE on social media develops customer intimacy by facilitating valuable dialogues and co-creating interactive experiences, which is not in companies' control. Instead of expecting spontaneous participation from customers, companies should understand the motivational factors for CE. In other words, companies are in the position to provide beneficial offerings in exchange for customer's attention, time spending, WOM and informational data. Most marketers are aware of the urgent situation of either having a place on social media or non-existence in the new age of CE when comparing with competitors. However, simple presence of CE on social media is not abundantly effective unless the implementers understand the pragmatic need of customers. Besides, Bohling et al. (2006, 187-188) reveal that CE involves complex mechanism of interactive dynamic whose success largely depends on its ownership level, managerial support as well as alignment with internal employees use.

2.2.1.2 Summary

Customer Engagement is a trilaterally involved, interactive process with three parties: 1) the customer, 2) the firm and/or institution, and 3) the focal engagement object (e.g. brand). CE is essentially dynamic, multidimensional contextually based, driven by interactive customer experience, concentrating on certain object and value co-created process, existing in different stages.

Co-creation is a significant demonstration of CE. Other relational terms like participation, involvement, and so forth are considered as antecedents and/or consequence of CE iteration. However, CE surpasses co-creation and transactional activities. CE drives customer loyalty, which is in line with several positive returns, like increased efficiency and enhanced company performance. The practices of Co-creations are more viable in service settings.

From firm level, CE represents a new steam in Customer Management, as in: 1) motivated by strategic urge to develop multiple channel approaches, 2) emphasizing the impact of new social media, 3) acknowledging CE as a beyond transactional behavior, 4) co-creating value for both parties in new product development, 5)

reshaping marketing measurement metrics, 6) modelling WOM stressing on agent-based models.

From customer perspective, the interactive iteration between antecedents and/or consequences and the customers will progress customers through the stages of new customers, repeat customers, and ultimately loyal customers. CE from this angle is proposed as participation and connection of individual with offerings and activities of organization, which leads to cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in interaction.

The prevalent of online social networks opens a new door for CE as in social Customer Relationship Management (social CRM) regarding value co-creation and interactions. For example, practitioners conduct netnography to study customer anticipation and feedbacks. The emergence of social networks urges business to initiate beyond managerial approaches towards endowing customers with collaborative social experience and valued dialogue which offers tangible benefits in exchange of customers' participation, engagement, and valuable information. Unlike systematic traditional CRM, CE on social media is full of uncertainty that needs to be steered by implementers. Presence on social media is merely the beginning of social CRM, which request corporate level ownership position, managerial support, alignment with internal use, and deep understanding of customers' desire. Besides, some researchers reveal that recreational benefits are attached with superior impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, comparing with social benefits or economic benefits. Nevertheless, the emergence of social network introduces new perspective for studying Influential commercial potential, especially when the business of Influential Entrepreneurship is reliant on social network for marketing activities and Customer Management.

2.2.2 Purpose of Customer Engagement

This section will discuss the motivational factors in implementing CE as well as address the general purpose to conduct CE. CE is identified in various fields like social science, business etc. (Brodie et al. 2011, 253-257) In this study, the application of CE is predominantly explored in marketing and management discipline. CE is by essence an advanced development of Customer Management and Customer Relationship Management, which describe customers' manifested beyond

transactional activities towards a certain subject. (Van Doorn et al. 2010, 254; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247-249) Among the interactive, dynamic business sphere, Customer Engagement holds strategic importance in mutually benefiting both sides of customers and firms/brands. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) CE brings on competitive edges in customer services and differentiates on customer service comparing to competitors. (Bohling et al. 2006, 186-187) Most importantly, CE reshapes the contextual base in which participants anticipate in multiple perspectives, namely the introduction of social media impact, modeling of WOM in agent-based model. (Henning Thureau et al. 2010, 324; Libai et al. 2010, 276-277) The growing importance of CE has urged firms and institutions to initiate effective approaches in multiplicity channels. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36; van Bruggen et al. 2010, 338; Verhoef et al. 2010, 249) According to Bohling et al. (2006, 188), successful CE is primarily associated with two important demonstrations, validated customer impact as in customer satisfaction and customer retention, and calculable revenue growth. Other perspectives that determines the success of CE are marginally useful, like improved insights, cost reduction, better employee productivity, internal usage, and specification compliance. Because the above mentioned perspectives add value to the competitive advantages of the business. This evidence is in line with the acknowledgement that business should design marketing strategy to deploy marketing resources and utilize knowledge and insights, focusing externally on customer value and competitive advantages. (Day 1992, 323-328; Slater & Narver 1995, 63-72; Teece et al. 1997, 509-530; Varadarajan & Jayachandran 1999, 120-140; Woodruff 1997, 139-151) In particular, the focal object of this study is in the area of influential entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial thinking is distinguished by its proactive characteristics comparing with the other traditional fellows. (Naman & Slevin 1993, 138-147; Slater & Narver 1995, 68) To be explicit, entrepreneurs pursue competitive advantages by both innovatively surpassing competitors and proactively catering customers' potential need. (Brown 1991, 102-111; Hamel & Prahalad 1991, 81-92; Jacobson 1992, 782-804) To optimize the outcome impact, some entrepreneurs even choose to collaborate with important customers. (Garvin 1993, 78-91; Hamel & Prahalad 1991, 81-92) The purpose of implementing Customer Engagement strategy is synthesized as follows. (See Figure 7)

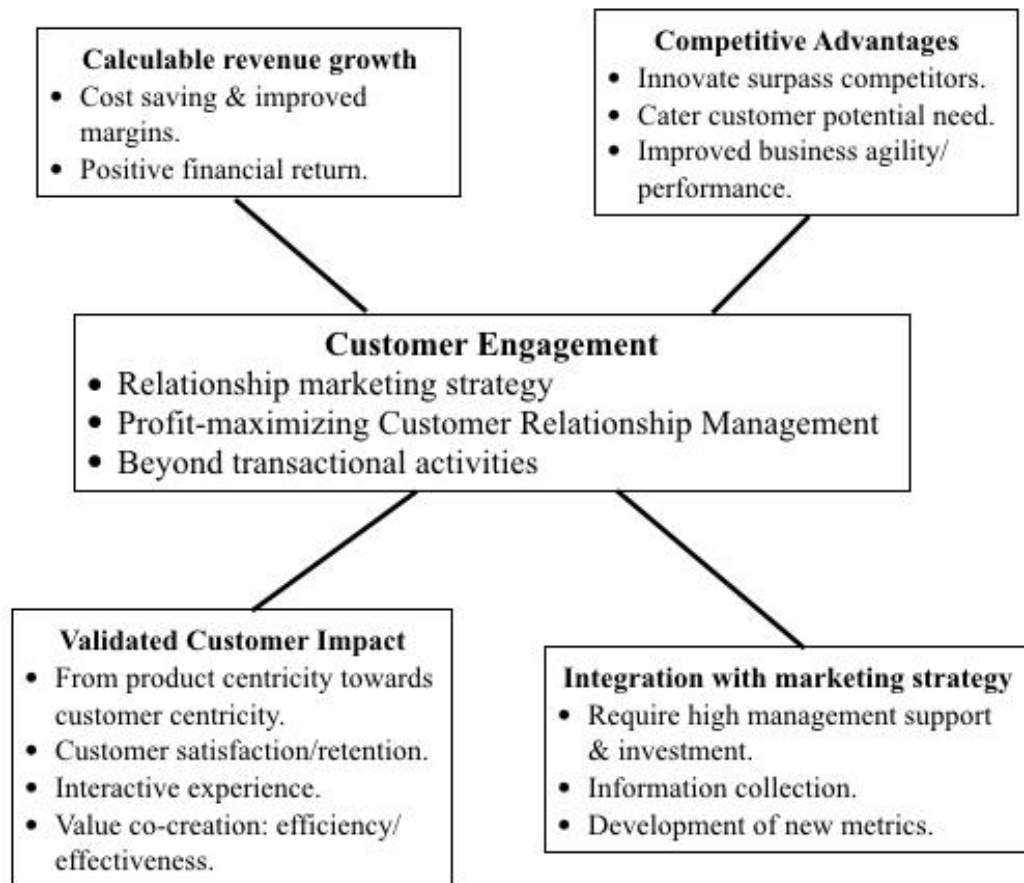


Figure 7 Synthesis of Customer Engagement Purpose

From the perspective of bringing in validated customer impact, the gradual transfer from product-centricity towards customer-centricity has been a major discussion for decades both in organizations and academia. The importance of shifting from mass-media marketing towards interpersonal, targeted and purposefully engagement among customers has been acknowledged for its effectiveness. (Day 1999, 155-177; Webster Jr 1992, 14-15) Despite the slow shift on managerial level, many important activities have raised regarding customer relationship management. (Boulding et al. 2005, 155-164) In essence, the emergence of relative skillsets facilitates business to address customers on a micro section, or even individually. This aims to manage customers as assets that can be evaluated and calculated with metrics. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) New marketing metrics have revolved from the knowledgeable development of CE. Specifically, this notion documents and measures multiple types of customer value, which can be linked with motivators and outcomes, respectively. (Reinartz & Kumar 2000, 17-34; Reinartz & Kumar 2003, 77-97) For example, the allocation of resource can be measured and conduct on

individual customer unit. (Rust & Verhoef 2005, 477-488; Venkatesan & Kumar 2004, 106-124) One thing to note is that the consequential impact on single individual customers is not the focal point, but the CE approaches and the relevant effect on firm value is. (Bolton et al. 2004, 271-288) By understanding the metrics of customer value, the corresponding linkage to the organization, and the internal dynamic of measurements, marketers can thusly collect information and develop insights on customers to determine resource allocation. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) From the practical perspective, to develop metrics from CE initiatives and quantify the corresponding outcomes, studying business case is in need to keep track of the implementation progress as well as to unite the whole organization to commit to CE implementation. The introduction of business case as a tool also assists to justify the investment and evaluate the success in different stages by quantifying ROI with metrics and indexes. The most relevant importance of ROI activities with the successful implementation of CE is to establish metrics to quantify and track CE success, evaluating benefits and costs, and generating a measurable business case. The internal dynamic is that real business case pushes the formation of CE metrics on multiple perspectives, such as revenue per customer, customer retention, and other project-specific metrics. (Bohling et al. 2006, 191)

To evaluate the effects of validated customer impacts, long-term financial return is proved to be positively associated with customer satisfaction for firms dually pursuing revenue effectiveness and cost efficiency. For marketing practitioners and researchers, the challenging part is to simultaneously achieving cost efficiency and revenue expansion, which are two competing managerial initiatives focusing on marketing orientation and operational orientation, respectively. Although there has been debate about what leads to better financial outcomes, whether solely pursuing revenue generation or dual emphasizing on both approaches. The underlying concentration on customer perspective remains undoubtedly critical, such as customer retention and customer satisfaction. (Bohling et al. 2006, 192-193; Mittal et al. 2005, 544-554; Rust et al. 2002, 7-20) CE is considered as a new perspective of Customer Management emphasizing on customer relationship, attached with positive financial expectation, namely strategically enhancement of company performance in terms of sales growth, profitability, and remarkable competitive advantages. (Bohling et al. 2006, 188; Boulding et al. 2005, 157-158; Brodie et al. 2011, 252; Neff 2007, 3-4) Substantial enhancement of firm performance and achievement of

profit increase are directly associated with effective implementation of CE. (Ryals 2005, 252-261) CE through social media is positioned as social CRM that requires marketers to understand the core desire of customers so as to monetize from the relationship management. (Heller and Parasnis 2011, 30-36) The purpose is to establish and sustain a *'profit-maximizing portfolio made of customer relationship'* (Zablah et al. 2004, 477-479)

To achieve better financial return through validated customer impacts, higher investment in CE related activities and technology development is required. By higher investments, business is required to deploy both financial support as well as strategic integration with overall marketing strategy. (Srinivasan & Moorman 2005, 193-199) Many firms and organizations have placed management of customer relationship as a priority, spending heavy investment in related activities. In practice, almost all the market participants perform CE as a regular complementary strategy. But rarely is CE placed as a primary priority by top management. Some senior management even hold a lukewarm attitude towards CE by tagging it as *'useful but not critical'*, which in a certain degree suggests the middle level management and employees that CE is not a primary task to achieve. Eventually the attitude and inactive involvement level of top management towards CE determines the success of implementation. (Bohling et al. 2006, 187-190; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) According to IBM 2010 CEO study, gaining deeper insights about customers is most CEOs' priority. (Berman, 2010) Despite the willingness from top management and huge investment in CE related activities, successful management of customer relationship on corporate level requires managers to simultaneously achieve two objectives, enhancement of customer value and reduction of cost. The combination will create substantial competitive advantages and generate better profitability both in short-term and long-term. (Bohling et al. 2006, 193)

This study highlights root of CE in relationship marketing, as in interactive experience and value co-creation. Understanding the mechanism of how CE adds value to the competitive advantages is vital to marketers to incorporate its CE strategy with enterprise-wide strategy. CE leads to several positive effects, like improved customer experience, enhanced relationship between offerings and customers, steadily expanding customer base, growing acquisition rate of new customers, improved retention rate, and new product development. All in all, the successful implementation of CE assists the organisation to achieve improvements in

three important aspects: more flexibility and higher responsive to opportunities and threats, reducing operational costs and raising margins, and enhanced performance from investor side. (Bohling et al. 2006, 191) As Boulding et al. (2005, 159) pointed out, the root of the CE concept lies within '*dual-creation of value*'. Here dual-creation is preferred instead of co-creation because the former covers circumstances when implementer creates value for one batch of customers through information retrieved from the other batches. This is particular true with regard to firm-customer interaction, reaching a win-win situation. (Cao & Gruca 2005, 219-228) Vargo & Lusch (2004, 5-15; 2008, 1-10) also propose that, Customer Engagement, as in value co-creation process is attached with positive returns, namely increased efficiency and improved effectiveness. (Hoyer et al. 2010, 292) The documentation and utilization of customer information as insights to facilitate the development of firm strategy positioned CE as an enterprise scope strategic information enabler that leads to strategic alignments in other departments such as marketing and sales. The seamless integration of CE with overall marketing and sales strategy leads to greater effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of CE strategy. It calls for top-management support to achieve alignment between CE and overall business strategy, which again brings on the importance of engagement and sponsorship from senior management. After all, though the existent CE has not yet been evaluated as complete success or failure, its potential to promote competitive advantages is undoubtedly unique. (Bohling et al. 2006, 186-187, 191-192) This aligns with the theory of '*profit-maximizing portfolio made up of customer relationship*' by Zablah et al. (2004, 477-479)

Most customer co-creation researches are positioned in Business-to-Business (B2B) context, like OEM (Fang 2008, 100) and IT solution design (Bolton & Saxena-Iyer 2009, 94-95). When CE is adopted as IT tools, the approaches tend to be standardized, and are regularly enabled from bottom-up direction. However, studies based on Business-to-Consumer (B2C) and Customer-to-Customer (C2C) lack attention. As such area is stemming, and the hidden plausible value largely remains unrevealed, but relevant researches are expected to be promising. (Hoyer et al. 2010, 292) Firms gradually recognize the importance of promoting C2C interaction. The development of CE strategy should display the awareness that for some customers, simple authorization of high self-service does not sufficiently extract customer value. The encouragement and facilitation of inter-collaboration and interaction between

similar customers boost the customer service level to the next stage. Consequently, the marketers are strategically urged to develop corresponding moves to stimulate C2C interactivity. (Bohling et al. 2006, 192-193) The development of Internet drives the prosperity of networks based on C2C interaction. Internet provides new platform with convenience and low cost for collecting customer opinion and jointly creating eWOM, which opens a new channel to conduct CE activities and monetize from valuable customer relationships. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Hennig-Thurau 2004, 49-51; Bolton & Saxena-Iyer 2009, 98)

2.2.3 Online Customer Engagement approaches in a nutshell

This section will primarily elaborate Customer Engagement in online social network settings. The initiating side of CE in this context is referring to marketers on general level, and the approaches of CE is visualized below to illustrate the mechanism of CE between participants in online social networks context. (See Figure 8)

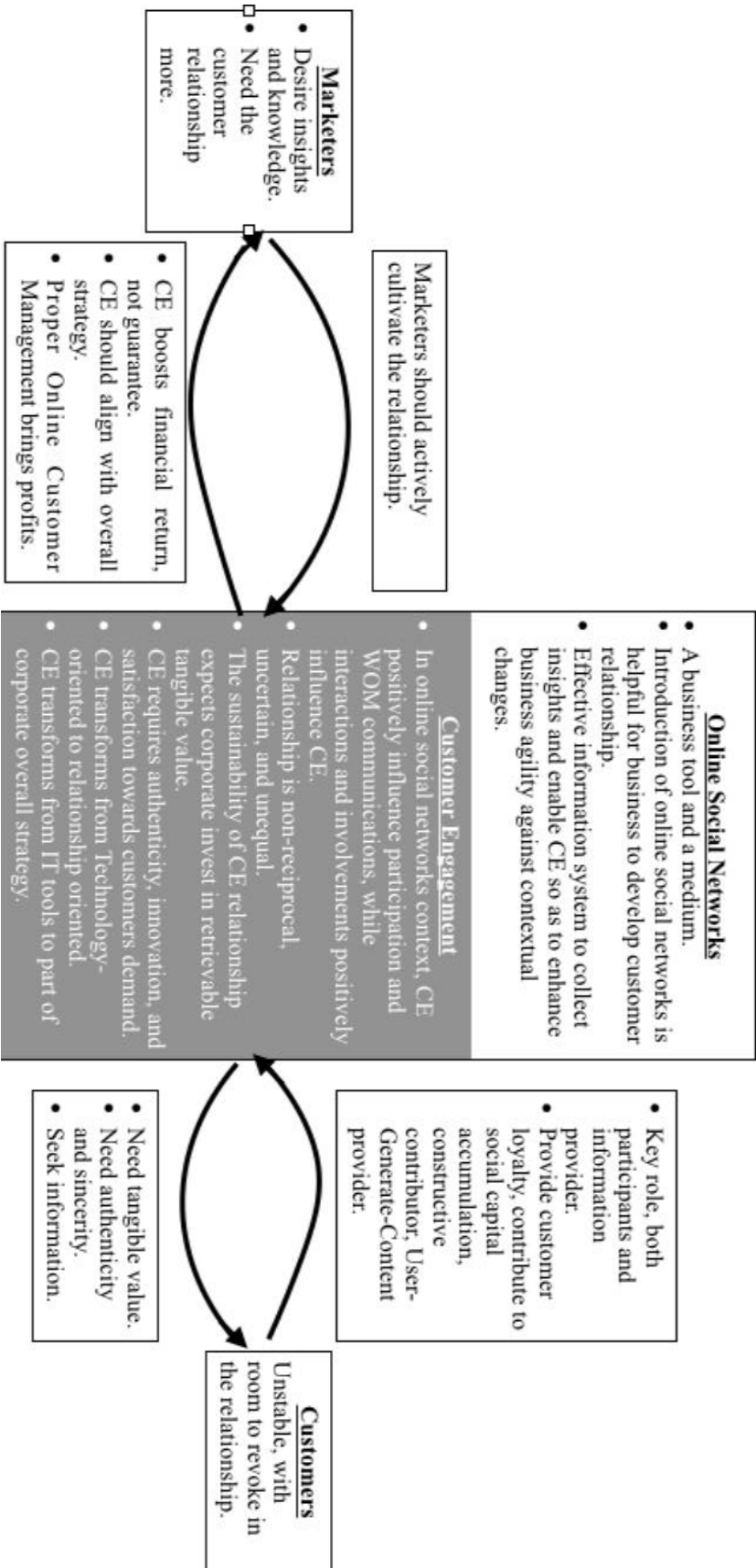


Figure 8 Synthesis of online Customer Engagement approaches in a nutshell.

- **Primary participants: marketers and customers**

The underlying mechanism is that financial return is positively linked with customer interaction satisfaction and retention. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Bohling et al. 2006, 192-193; Mittal et al. 2005, 544-554; Rust et al. 2002, 7-20) The outcomes concerning CE activities determine the effectiveness of initiatives. While the result indicates neither a complete success nor an implication of failure, implying that there is plenty of room to improve. CE should be viewed as an assisting side engine that can essentially boost the financial performance rather than as a profitability guarantee. Management of CE provides with competitive edges on differentiating on customer service. It is considered as a strategic knowledge enabler that brings value to other initiatives such as marketing or sales, and ultimately serves holistic plan. Scholars suggest that deeper integration of CE strategies with overall marketing strategy could be one way to employ CE potential. To better align with overall strategy for development, CE requires senior managerial level support and sponsorship. Jointly pursuing revenue expansion and cost reduction while addressing customer perspective also brings lasting financial return. (Bohling et al. 2006, 184-193; Mittal et al. 2005, 553-554)

Engaged customers, or key active customers, are imperative players in marketing activities, like making referrals or recommendations upon specific offerings, or brands. Besides, they are vital in new product development process (e.g. disseminating information and driving innovative enhancement.) (Hoyer et al. 2010, 293; Kothandaraman & Wilson 2001, 381-383) and in co-creating value and experience. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Brakus et al. 2009; Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004)

Mustak et al. (2016, 256) categorized customer inputs as *'(1) labor and task performance, (2) information and knowledge sharing, and (3) behavior.'* Customers represent valuable asset to the organization. (Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) For that customers are the source of latest information, which enhances marketers' holistic understanding of products, competitors' edges and preferences changes. They are able to provide instant feedbacks and reviews on packages and service. Marketers desire insights and knowledge of all levels. Therefore, seamless collaboration is expected from the initiating side. Marketers are supposed to observe customers' behaviors or even stay close with key customers. (Garvin 1993, 78-91; Hamel & Prahalad 1991, 81-92; Slater & Narver 1995, 68)

The engagement and collaboration with customers is organized as online communities to cater various social and marketing request, which results in commercial needs. (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2) The collaboration via social media acts as an indispensable promoter to foster customer loyalty and accumulate social capital, which turns customers into constructive contributors in value co-creation. (Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533) To enlarge customer base via social media via community expansion will cultivate User-Generated-Content (UGC), which reaps consumer emotional investments and retains community members. (Trusov et al, 2006, 91-92) The management of online communities establishes customer loyalty, and ultimately promotes economic return. (Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86) Ultimately, the utilization of social media channel as a method to conduct CE increases company performance in terms of profitability. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36)

- **The functions of online social networks in Customer Engagement**

Similar research (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) addressing the topic from social media perspective reinforces the theory that marketers are in need of the intimacy with customers more than they assume the customers would return the favour reciprocally. Marketers are urged to understand what customers truly value and pursue.

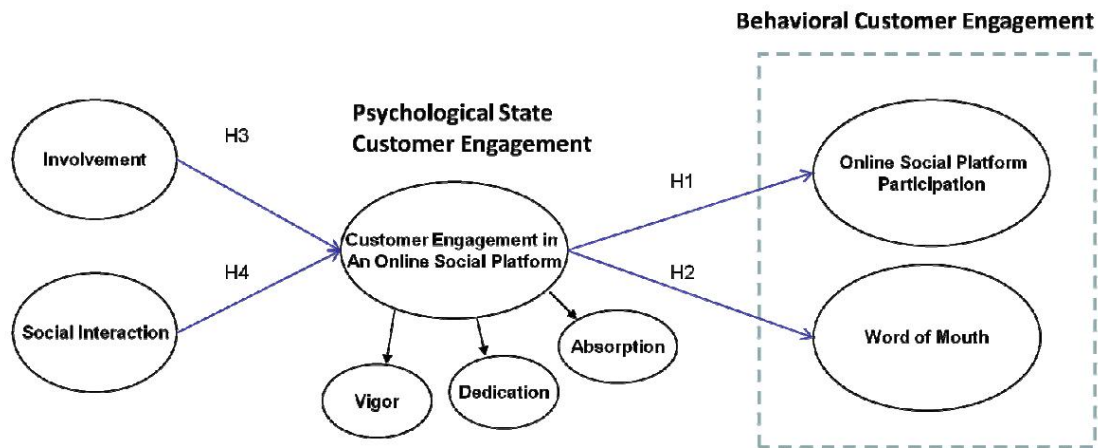
Most firms and organization have been aware of the importance of keeping in touch with customers via social media, otherwise they are out of the game. For that social media has been rapidly thriving as a popular communication channel adopted by millions of users, which urges timely business adoptions as a viable strategic tool. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533) Social media adopted as a business tools includes various functionalities, like competitive information collecting (He et al. 2013, 464-472), new product development (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, 59-68), and promoting collaborations to foster innovation and future changes in business model. (Andrews & Mickahail 2015, 158-172) Firms and organizations are keenly aware that social media functions as an information system that facilitates the collaboration with various users and ultimately enhances business flexibility and responsiveness against contextual changes. The dynamism from effective strategic approaches enables social media as a useful '*information system*', which contributes to overall business competency by utilizing information collected via efficient CE. The expected business competency achievements sustain when

business promptly adapts social media strategy. Thusly, timely modification and continuous enhancement energize business social media strategy in collaboration with users via social media. (Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533) The effects of social media strategy resemble the functionalities attached with efficient CE approaches, in which customers are viewed as resourceful assets.

In this study, the scope of study emphasizes on Customer Engagement through social media platform, which is also viewed as social CRM (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36). Customers who stay in contact with brands and products through online channels tend to display higher involvement and more frequent buying behaviour, for their pursuit of higher transaction efficiency and repeat purchase need. (Grewal et al. 2001, 17-30; Rindfleisch & Heide 1997, 30-51; Venkatesan & Kumar 2004, 109-121) Marketers are fully aware of the importance of collaborating with customers so as to accumulate social capital and foster customer loyalty. Hence social media act as an indispensable medium that allows business to interact and collaborate with wider customer base, when the later ones represent possible constructive contributors. (Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533)

- **Customer Engagement approaches in online social networks**

Conceptual model of customer engagement on social network platform has been proposed on generic level by theorizing from academic studies. (Cheung et al. 2011) (See Figure 9) It summarizes previous researches and presents four basic hypotheses, (1) CE in online social networks positively influences the participation on social media; (2) CE through online social networks positively influences WOM communication on social media; (3) involvement through online social networks positively influences CE through social media; (4) social interactions through online social networks positively influences CE through social media. In other words, proper CE approaches and social participation via social media have formed a circulation of mutual amplification. CE through online communities represents co-created value and interactions, which attracts both academic researchers and practitioners. (Brodie et al. 2013) During the process of management CE through social network, the role of business needs to reach beyond the management of customers, towards facilitating customers with collaborative social experience and valued dialogue. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36)



H1: Customer engagement in an online social platform will have a positive effect on online social platform participation.

H2: Customer engagement in an online social platform will have a positive effect on word-of-mouth communication about the online social platform.

H3: Involvement in an online social platform will have a positive effect on customer engagement in an online social platform.

H4: Social interactions in an online social platform will have a positive effect on customer engagement in an online social platform.

Figure 9 Conceptual Model of Customer Engagement in an Online Social Platform. (Cheung et al. 2011)

The facilitating effect by online social networks towards CE is well recognized by both academia and researchers. Some empirical research argues that information seeking is the primary objective on social network, while the bond developed with new customers by economic benefits may not last. (Gummerus et al. 2012, 870) Another similar discouraging fact is that the customer relationship developed via social media is unequal, which means the connections between business and customers on social media is uncertain, non-reciprocal, and unpredictable. The non-reciprocal relationship leaves customers with plenty of room to revoke, but not much for firms or organizations to reimburse the investment. Under this circumstance, marketers are alerted by sense of uncertainty and unpredictability, and are motivated to develop suitable strategies so as to sustain and strengthen business presence on social media for building up an effective ‘*information system*’. (Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533)

Generally, marketers would assume that customers are willingly participating online social media CE activities. But the assumptions differ from the facts about CE on social media, like (1) many people join social media but only few of them actively engage with posts or contents; (2) social media is used for personal connections like friends and family but not for brands or business; (3) tangible value is expected in exchange for customer participation, interaction, and data provision in online social networks; and (4) social media promotes customer engagement and interaction only when customers are passionately motivated to participate. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36)

The recognition of customer actual need for pragmatic value from the relationship with business on social media should as inspire marketers to proactively identify customer need and launch CE activities rather than passively expecting customers to get involved. The identification of customers' motivational factor on social engagement can be used and monetized to extract real value for marketers reversely. Apart from the offering of pragmatic value, the approaching methodology is crucial for effective CE implementation. For example, over half of the surveyed customers indicated that they choose not to engage with brands through online social networks due to privacy concern and spam risks. The motivated customers need to feel that a company is communicating with sincerity and authenticity before they are actually engaged. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36) Rust & Verhoef (2005, 477-488) also present that in granular segmentation, how different customers react to marketing activities shows great heterogeneity, which calls for different approaching method. They present that relationship-oriented marketing tools are more efficient among loyal customers due to the valued relationship, while the less loyal ones are more responsive to action-oriented programs, like temporary rewards and benefits. Besides, marketers shall as well follow the advancement of technology, because the convenience for users in conducting referral program affects referral action, as the updated technical software contributes to overall referral participation. (Trusov et al, 2006, 91-92) In addition, Heller & Parasnis (2011, 32-36) point out that marketers should be aware that the silent majority on social media holds great potential to get engaged if opportunity is properly seized. Basically the introduction of social media and redefinition of customer relationship herein inspire marketers to rethink customer relationships and to reinvent new method of management. Social media is a distinctive channel for information exchange, and attach great importance in

establishing inimitable customer experience on social media helps to promote transactions within social media experience. Ultimately, the utilization of social media channel as a method to conduct CE increases company performance in terms of profitability.

CE is perceived as a beneficial information booster or insights enabler for overall marketing strategy which enhance business performance with knowledge inputs. (Bohling et al. 2006, 184-193) CE initiatives shall first and foremost serve the purpose of alignment with the integral marketing strategy (Bohling et al. 2006, 184-193)

In the progress of CE, social networks work as an innovative medium of the above information system, which demands continuous attention and adjustments. (Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533) Customers who are active on social media display distinguished characteristics comparing to regular fellows, such as higher involvement inclination, more frequent buying behavior, pursuit for transaction efficiency, and repeat purchase need. (Grewal et al. 2001, 17-30; Rindfleisch & Heide 1997, 30-51; Venkatesan & Kumar 2004, 109-121)

On the other side, when CE is derived from a pure IT tool, it also becomes deprived of the systematic characteristics, and the approaches are effectively championed from the top-down direction. (Bohling et al. 2006, 186-187) The newly initiated CE approaches surpass technology-oriented method and reach tactical customer management period. Nevertheless, the approaches require joint application of advanced technology, core principle insights retrieval, and comprehensive analysis. Even with all the preparation, in some cases CE approaches do not necessarily work as expected. For example, on the other side, inappropriate use of CE metrics leads to potential failure in future operation. (Boulding et al. 2005, 158-161; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247; Zablah 2004, 478-479) As a consequence, further exploration of enhancing CE approaches exists in failed cases, through which determinant factors can be associated with the effectiveness of CE. (Bohling et al. 2006, 192-193)

2.2.4 Customer Engagement approaches from Influential Entrepreneurship

This section will elaborate how Customer Engagement approaches functions, when the initiating role is not general marketers who seek new online Customer Relationship, but are Influential Entrepreneurs. Influential Entrepreneurial CE

approaches holds many detectable similarities with general on-line CE approaches, namely the awareness of customer contribution in value co-creation, management of CE interactivities in building WOM, intentional collaboration with customers to build loyalty, presentation of purposeful authenticity, etc. (Abidin 2013; 2015a; 2016, 14; Abidin & Thompson, 2012, 467-477) The common business orientation leads to similar path of approaching, regardless as Influential or as traditional marketer. Details on CE approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs will be elaborated below. The visualization of Customer Engagement approaches from Influential Entrepreneurship is displayed as follows. (See Figure 10)

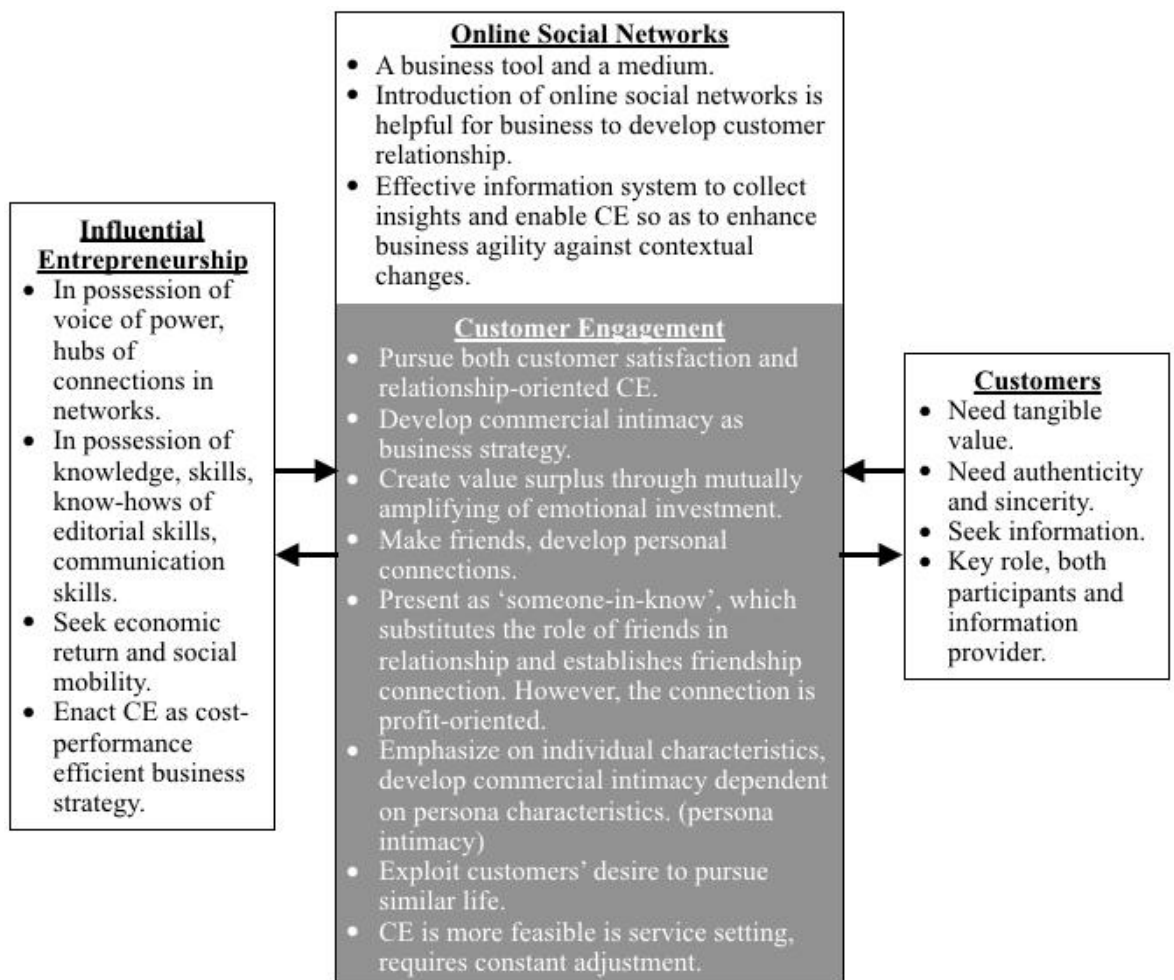


Figure 10 Synthesis of Customer Engagement approaches from Influential Entrepreneurship

Obviously, Influential own dominating voice power in C2C communication and peer influence. (Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) And as it is elaborated in Chapter 2.1, Influential Entrepreneurs possess knowledge

spill-overs and skillsets in editorial skills, communication skills, and marketing sense. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Senft 2008, 25, 116) Besides, they seek economic return and social mobility for Influential activities. (Abidin 2016, 2-4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

The capability of influential urged online marketers to initiate social interactions in customer communities so as to sustain the operation of business. In addition, deep understanding of social networks mechanism leads marketers to shape new forms of consumer patterns, and ultimately to precisely forecast market. (Hinz et al. 2008, 367) Goldenberg et al. (2009b, 10) have identified capability of promoting faster growth and increasing market size in influential. New product adoption by social hubs (Influential) is faster and earlier than average due to the large number of connections rather than innate innovativeness. To elaborate, the speed of adoption is able to be accelerated by influential, while the number of followers determines market size. However, the former acceleration process decides the ultimate product success, which is often taken as an effective forecast in early stages.

Influential Entrepreneurship stressed on cost performance (Keller & Berry, 2003), deliberate engagement of customer, and flexible manufacturing capability. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The co-created value in new product development (NPD) from customer engagement is comprehensively acknowledged and discussed as collaborative activities by customers' active contribution and careful selection of multiple elements for new product package. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Hoyer et al. 2010, 293) In the process of bringing out products to customers, Influential Entrepreneurs blur the image as a marketer, but position as a fellow customer, which create authenticity and credibility. The offering provided by Influential Entrepreneurship is attached with Influential individual characteristics as strong branding effect. The Customer Engagement Management surpasses capturing of customer satisfaction, but approaches to include the placement of involvement, trust, and commitment in creation of '*fans*' customers. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Bowden 2009b, 72) For Influentials, '*fans*' customers are viewed as '*friends*', who are worthy of drawing attention from as well as sustaining an intimate relationship with through multiple channels. The valuable and continuing relationship connecting Influentials and their '*fans*' customers or '*friends*' managed

to nurture the business of Influential. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Abidin 2015a & 2016, 1-16)

This aligns with the findings from Heller & Parasnis (2011, 30-36), stating that most customers are not actively involved in interaction with business or brands through social media unless there is tangible value to retrieve, and most customers regard social networks as a tool to establish personal connections with family and friends. The findings jointly explain the phenomenon of why customers prefer interacting with Influential more than with brands or companies, revealing dynamic mechanism of why *'fans'* customers are actively engaged in interactions with Influentials and willingly receive recommendations. Probably for some *'fans'* customers, Influential Entrepreneurs partially substitute function of personal connections (e.g. close friends) on social media, which establishes *'commercial intimacy'* (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) between both parties. Comparing with business offerings, a recommendation from *'close friends'* seems more trustworthy. In the meantime, the customers' requirement for authenticity and sincerity is well met. Like Heller & Parasnis (2011, 35) pointed out *'...mere participation via social media may not necessarily result in increased loyalty or spending, but a recommendation from friends or family could make a difference.'* Reversely, such *'perceived interconnectedness'* contribute to the popularity of Influential, and ultimately creates tangible value.

Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) take a practical approach to research blogshop industry in Singapore, which is a highly reformed Influential Entrepreneurship that generates surplus value and profit. According to their research, blogshops represent E-commerce, which mainly trade on *'commercial intimacy'* by performing customer engagement practices. By establishing *'commercial intimacy'*, Influentials present role-modelling and role-playing to set *'persona intimacy'*, which is commercial intimacy built upon persona image. In this context, intimacy is employed as a business strategy to motivate value co-creation, so as to extract economic gains and exclusive relationship. The cyber persona intimacy is constructed by emotional attachment, during which value co-creation is detected. (Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) Similar mechanism takes place in service industry where emotional labor is effective constitutes in service delivery. In other words, value surplus is extracted in forms of emotional attachments, and economic

gains is from commercial interactions between Influential and customers. (Fletcher 2009, 321-325)

In the process of CE, the fundamental rests upon persona intimacy rather than traditional product intimacy. This persona intimacy theorizes from commercial intimacy theory, in which value creation happens in the process of transaction. Specifically, Influential Entrepreneurs are selling customers with the possibilities to become the role model they are posturing rather than sell the product per se. The motto of '*Buy my life*' surpasses '*Buy my clothes*' de facto. Influential who host the interaction and engagement hypnotize the audience with illusion that Influential are selfless fashion assistants in helping the customers to achieve ideal femininity and amend inferiorities. The role-modelling tactic impresses the audience that they are seeking advice from someone familiar, who have both achieved career success and homosexual feminine success. However, the relationship is meant to be profit-oriented. And it's never purely extracted out of friendliness. Meanwhile, the business transactions reversely promote the exchange regarding emotional attachment, commercial intimacy and friendship. Apart from the real transactional activities, readers' consumption of blog contents invests emotional value to the frequent exposed salable products, which further convert into economic gains for Influential. Such value-investing activities additionally justify the consumption activities, for that consumers constitute both the producer and the participants of the trend they are engaged in. The scale of customer emotional investment and profit gains depend on the effectiveness of persona intimacy developed by Influential Entrepreneurs, whilst the strength of emotional linkage symbolizes the value co-creation power. When a cohort of customers assembles to form a rapport with Influential, detectable value surplus emerged, which thusly attach customers to the products in return. Amongst this cult of adoration towards Influential, the subject here was idolized and symbolized. In the admiration towards the Influential, fan customers crowding up to seek more consumable content so as to attain more '*vicarious experience*', and the consumption activity define personal identity of customers. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

2.2.5 Enactments of Customer Engagement from Influential entrepreneurship

This section will elaborate on the enactments of CE from Influential Entrepreneurship perspective. The activities that Influential Entrepreneurs conduct to implement Customer Engagements are synthesized as follows. (See Figure 11)

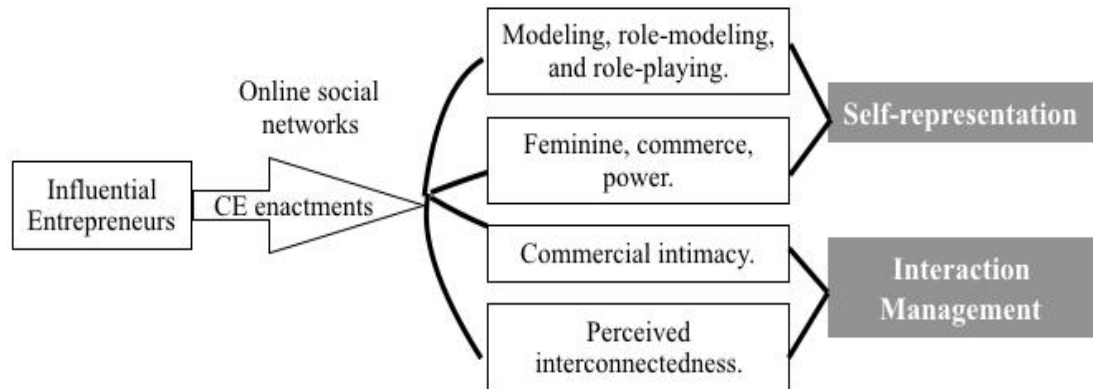


Figure 11 Synthesis of CE enactments by Influential Entrepreneurs.

As Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) state, Influential Entrepreneurship represents a form of online E-commerce, which depends on interactions between Influential and fans (i.e. customers) (Fletcher 2009, 321-325). The fundamental of business is relationship-oriented online social selling activities, which are primarily conducted via social media platform, providing individualized, and customized service. Social media is an innovative information enabler with customer contribution, requiring tactical skills. (Bohling et al. 2006, 186-187, 191-192) The Internet contains marketing potential for marketers to communicate with customers as well as to engage the later party for interactive communications. (Feather 2000) The prerequisite of blooming Influential Entrepreneurship lies in prevalent of online social networks, which represents a convenient information sharing medium, namely in New Product Development (Hoyer et al. 2010, 293), and effective marketing forecast (Hinz et al. 2008, 367). Apart from information dissemination function, Influential Entrepreneurs provide appealing rewards via online social networks to induce interactivities so as to raise referral activities, which spontaneously accumulates WOM. (Trusov et al, 2006, 91-92) Obviously the CE approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs upgrade traditional online CE approaches from the perspective of online community management, which advances the management of collaboration towards loyalty and value co-creation. (Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2) This syncs the core model of general CE model by

Cheung et al. (2011), stating that proper CE approaches via social media and participation activities (involvements, social interactions) will mutually amplify both sides and accumulate social capital, like involvements and WOM.

Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) conclude that Influential Entrepreneurs trade on commercial intimacy, engaging customers in practice to co-create value. Here value is based on persona intimacy, in which deliberately crafted persona triggers value co-creation. (Foster 2005, 8-12; 2007, 707-731) Persona intimacy is similar to product intimacy by corporates. The only difference is that the premium charge is not linked with brands but persona emotional attachments. (Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) Influential delicately craft a benchmark feminine persona to stimulate imitation and consumption activities, implying that: 1) such figure can be achieved through purchasing certain products, and 2) approaching crafted femininity represents success in heterosexual society. The enhancement of commercial intimacy motivates personalized consumption, through which customers attach special emotional meanings to the merchandise. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Such emotional attachment fosters re-investment of emotion into persona. (Foster 2007, 707-731) The external driver of such mechanism attributes to the homogeneity of products. The ones who ace in CE techniques will win higher profits in homogeneous competition. The editing skills of advertorials determines how well the Influential can channel closeness and relatability so as to display and impress intimacy. Posts are scheduled to meet peak user traffic. The process above is described as development of '*commercial intimacy*' and creation of '*fans*' customers through self-representation and interaction management. (Abidin 2014, 125; 2015a & 2016, 1-16; Bowden 2009b, 72; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141)

In specific, Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) summarize Influential Entrepreneurs' CE in three steps: 1) '*Modeling, Role-modeling, and Role-playing*', 2) '*Commercial intimacy and Value co-creation*', and 3) '*Femininity, commerce, and power*'. Furthermore, Abidin (2015a) put forward the model of '*Perceived interconnectedness*' to describe how Influential Entrepreneurs channel intimacy with followers.

- '***Modeling, Role-modeling, and Role-playing***'

Influential Entrepreneurs discreetly display and craft feminine competence to realize distinguished femininity. Influential Entrepreneurs set benchmarks of feminine body for customers, and offer re-fashion advices to customers. This creates

an illusion that customers are soliciting advices from someone familiar. When Influential are involved in product commercial activities, the target product is exhibited with other high-end luxury merchandise, which creates accessibility for luxury goods as well as prestige for endorsed goods. Besides, Influential attribute special meaning to endorsed goods, e.g. matching outfits for special occasions, suggesting the compliance of social norms to perform benchmark femininities. In this case, femininity is commoditized as salable products.

The personal life of influential is commercialized for customers to consume, as achieving attainability and imitability. Consequently, Influential are like actors who are on the stage all the time through broadcasting personal life online. The offline life reflects online persona and testifies the authenticity of crafted online persona. Influential encourages regular check-ups and meet-ups from customers to stimulate interactivity. In this way, the desire to imitate Influential is exploited on the largest scale.

- ***‘Commercial intimacy and Value co-creation’***

Obviously, both traditional marketers on behalf of particular brands and Influential Entrepreneurs are completely aware of the profit-oriented relationship between them and the customers. Unlike business who try to temper the relationship by investing temporary tangible value, the Influential took a different approach by establishing ‘*commercial intimacy*’ with customers, providing engagement opportunities and responsive friendliness. Hochschild (2012) and Abidin (2015a) acknowledges such intimacy commercial transactions as effective business strategies.

Commercial intimacy is ascribed as value co-creation in consumption process, during which Influential charge premium price for crafted persona intimacy. By sustaining emotional attachment, Influential manage to extract surplus value from the interactions. To ensure commercial intimacy, several moves are employed, like endearment, exclusive leakage of behind-the-scene, the unique balance of high-end life with normality (Danesi 2015), and virtual communication sessions.

The aura of representing micro celebrity impresses the audience with both the intimate feelings and appeal of vanity. The batch of followers idolize Influential through social media by vicariously consume lifestyle of the later, which leads to imitative consumption. Hence the underlying slogan is to ‘*Buy my life*’ rather than ‘*Buy my products*’. Through adoration of Influential and emulative consumption,

customers gain '*vicarious experience*' to consume. Such emotional attachments reversely add value to the products, and translate into economic return for Influential.

For those who depend on actual commercial activities as business, multiple previews before the debut date is needed to create hypes. The consumption of merchandise represents commercialization of femininity and the desire to pursue similar lifestyle.

- ***'Femininity, commerce, and power'***

The form of Influential Entrepreneurship represents '*lucrative E-commerce*', in which persona intimacy is enacted as marketing strategy. The key point is that customers perceive intimacy and connection in the form that Influential keenly provide remedies for customers' inferiorities. Regardless of the fact that the relationship is profit-oriented, the ultimate goal is to stimulate more purchase, whether it's virtually or emotionally. Through establishing online community, Influential build up interactive tension between themselves and group of followers. The Influential perfectly balance normality with benchmarked femininities to induce envy and desire. The principal is that the seemingly accessible figure can never actually be attained.

- ***'Perceived interconnectedness'***

Abidin (2015a) further developed the model of '*perceived interconnectedness*', through which Influential Entrepreneurs channel intimacy with followers. The focal point is the impression that Influential convey and sustain against customers, regardless of the profit-orientation truth. The interactivity between Influential Entrepreneurs and their recipients can be summarized as developing '*perceived interconnectedness*' through three main approaches: intentional self-presentation, commercial advertorial, and responsive friendliness. Such '*perceived interconnectedness*' can be explained as: 1) relatability and familiarity in between; 2) accessibility, authenticity and trustworthiness of the Influential; and 3) feasibility of imitation. Perceived interconnectedness forces Influential Entrepreneurs to control their self-representation and manage interaction with customers by building relevance through exclusive disclosure and commoditization of life. (Boyd 2006; Lövheim 2010) The conveyed intimacy impresses audience with the feelings that the consumable posts are authentic and genuine, regardless of the facts that the feelings are objective and perceptive. The frequency, quantity and circulation range together indicate that the Influential is constantly personal life through social media to the

customers. Additionally, customers are invited to interact, e.g. polling for suggestions, solicitation of feedbacks. The perceived interconnectedness mutually empowering and disciplining Influential and customers. From customers' expectation, Influential cope with: 1) differentiating attitude towards followers, bots, and haters, 2) persona management and performance, and 3) satisfying accomplishment at work. (Abidin 2013) The manually developed interconnectedness is classified as commercial, reciprocal, interactive, disclosive, and exclusive. Four types of specific activities will be elaborated below in detail.

- *'Commercial Intimacy'*

Abidin (2015a) emphasized on the commercial essence of the relationship, where intimacy is utilized as a marketing strategy. Personal information and private life are monetized to gain economic return. (Abidin 2015b, Hochschild 2012; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 139-158) This induces customers to develop familiarity with the Influential as if the latter is *'someone in know'*. Customers develop emotional attachment and close relatability with Influential via intimate relationship, due to the Influential who seemingly offers exclusive and intimate emotional exchange.

This is mostly seen in lifestyle Influential, who write mundane and errands as output for readers to consume. The establishment of commercial intimacy promotes potential customer growth, gaining customer support, and building companionship for soliciting improvement advices.

- *'Interactive Intimacy'*

It is widely acknowledged that Influential engage people to amplifying popularity by using various approaches. Senft (2008) identifies that Influential are experts in new techs like blogs, social media, visual stimulation of video and pictures. The interactivities involves both virtual and digital interactions. Virtual interactions offline functions as a compensation of digital interactions. Influential perform persona image in consistence with online persona. In this case, the crafted online persona is channeled to physical settings. In return, the following feedbacks from customers amplifies intimate feelings.

- *'Reciprocal Intimacy'*

The responsiveness from Influential contribute as an important communication skill, which reciprocate to the followers' attention. (Senft 2008, 116) It is a signature of appreciation and acknowledgement to reject social hierarchical evaluation and to

retain commonality. Several social media norms are used, e.g. Retweet, repost, comments, and ask for fan taken photos.

- *'Disclosive intimacy'*

The disclosive intimacy is established through several steps. Documentation of mundane personal life relates Influential to the followers. The unique *'Behind-the-scene'* leakage of photos sets up high-end social life, and convinces readers about exclusiveness. Influential represents commonality to customers. (Danesi 2015, 25) The materials that constructs disclosive posts are often raw, unedited, and amateur, which stimulate instant interactivity and responses. (Boyd 2006) But the truth is similar to the crafted online persona, the exclusive raw disclosure of private events has been delicately aestheticized and packaged. No Influential will engage customers into a full disclosure, either in persona or events. (Goffman 2002)

The generally developed CE approaches will inevitably face concerns from recipients against authenticity, non-reciprocal relationship, temporary profit-driven motivation for engagement and so on. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533) While CE approaches from Influential seem to compensate the flaws by traditional CE.

As it is mentioned in Chapter 2.2.3, the primary concern of CE is the hierarchical asymmetry in relationship may possibly trigger withdrawal. Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477) put forward that, Influential Entrepreneurs are fully aware of the crafted intimate relationship and the underlying business orientation. Here emotional ties are utilized as business strategies, which dissolves the boundary between selfless, helpful figure and exploitative, business-oriented operator. Customers perceive such emotional connection as intimate and friendly, while the intimacy is sustained by commercial motivation rather than friendliness. Additionally, the commercial intimacy charges customers price premium for the emotional attachment. Such strategy is smart, and the costs are marginally low. Even under the circumstances the approaches did not function well, the results might not turn out counterfactual.

The other concern is in the potential failure, and some researchers suggest that lessons lie in failed cases in general. (Bohling et al. 2006, 192-193) Under such circumstances, Influential Entrepreneurs merely sign up for standard entrepreneurial training or so. Most of them are self-taught, and explore to gain experiences. Influential Entrepreneurs have been through imitation of others, trials, and errors to

figure out the suitable marketing tactics. In this case, failure is viewed as a must, rather than something to fear about. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477)

3 AN INTERACTIVE FRAMEWORK

This study proposed to establish a primary interaction framework to describe the relationship and dynamism between Influential Entrepreneurs and their customers, focusing on the effective approaches taken by Influential Entrepreneurs. The framework will be firstly established by theoretical academic review, then compensated and modified by empirical findings. In the following researches of information collection, data analysis, and results interpretation. The framework will be constantly adjusted and revised according to empirical research, hoping to form a complete framework of interaction so as to illustrate the mechanism of approaches.

The literature review presents theoretical background for the research, and this section will summarize the concepts and models discussed above. The interactive framework will construct the preliminary framework, on which the following empirical research will rely. The interactive framework also sets basis for developing interview theme.

This study is developed on the identification of business activities by Influentials as entrepreneurs, in which Influential holds disproportional right of power and conduct particular customer engagement approaches to sustain the business. (Abidin 2016, 2; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Hintz et al. 2014, 2843; Keller & Berry, 2003; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211) It assumes that Influential transforms into savvy entrepreneurs by operating on distinguishing customer engagement approaches as marketing tactics, which symbolizes a transformation from product centric towards customer centric. (Day 1999, 155-177; Webster Jr 1992, 14-15) In the unbalanced relationship, Influential position themselves as '*someone in know*' so as to build commercial intimacy and foster social capital sufficiency, familiarity, and interconnectedness. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Abidin 2015a & 2016, 1-16; Heller & Parasnis (2011, 35; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 139-147, 156-157; Powell 2009; Senft 2008, 25-26) The persona image, lifestyle, and experience are deliberately crafted and commoditized to establish personal connections, which lures consumption activities. Customers attach emotional value to the consumable product and content via interactive channels, capturing vicarious experience and psychological satisfaction from the interaction with

idolized Influential. The psychological investment in return amplifies the projection of emotional attachment to the Influential and consumable goods, which reversely confirms the correctness of the commercial intimacy. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Consequently, from the elaboration of mechanism, it is safe to conclude that the particular CE approaches constitute the determinant factor that sustains the business operation of Influential. The CE approaches are found to be cost efficient in generating economic returns. Meanwhile, the Influential Entrepreneurs are facing a market with fierce homogeneous competition, not to mention that customers are niche demanding groups who possess unique characteristics, e.g. more frequent buying behaviors, and higher possibilities to be engaged. In order to sustain customer base as well as adding value to the competitive edges, Influential Entrepreneurs are keenly making efforts to deliver innovative CE approaches, e.g. emotional investment, collaborations with peers and corporate brands, etc.

Due to the emerging conceptualization regarding Influential Entrepreneurship, a theoretical framework draft (see Figure 12) will help to synthesize related concepts and theory in this study. The following framework is based on traditional CE approaches involving Influential as a side player, which is illustrated by three parties, company, customers, and Influentials.

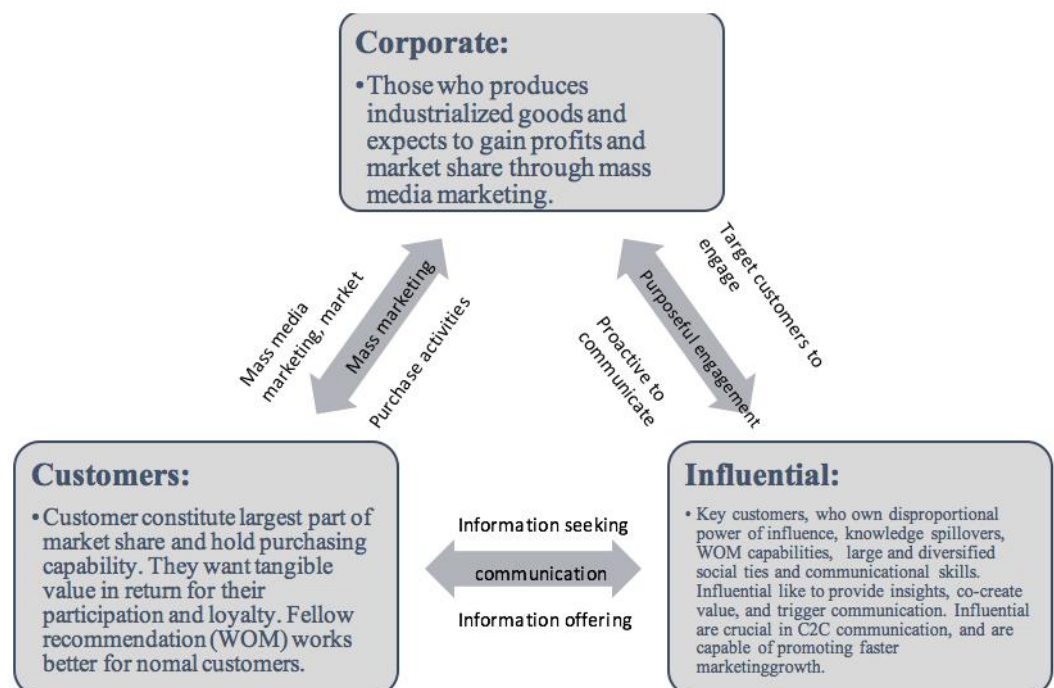


Figure 12 Synthesized framework of traditional CE approaches involving Influential.

The draft theoretical framework (See Figure 12) reflects interactive approaches via mass media and marketing tools, which is already an evolved version of customer management that acknowledges existence of Influential as key customers to engage. (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1966, 205-206, 273) Influential is recognized as valuable player in marketing process for the sufficient knowledge reserves, information centralization, WOM capabilities, value co-creation capability, market know-how, and impactful communication skills. (Burt 1997, 339-345; Keller & Berry, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Hinz et al. 2014, 2843.) Through purposeful engagement with Influential among customers, corporates gain insights and knowledge about market, customer feedbacks, and product development. Meanwhile, corporates benefit from the scale and diversification of social connections from Influential, acknowledging Influential's crucial role in C2C communication. (Bampo et al. 2008, 288; Chan & Misra 1990, 53; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Hinz & Spann 2008, 366-367; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Keller & Berry 2003, Libai et al. 2010, 278; Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 737; Goldenberg et al. 2009a, 36-37 & 2009b, 1, 10-11; Rogers 1976, 290, 292, 299; Trusov et al. 2009, 90-92, 98; Van de Bulte & Joshi 2007, 402, 404, 415-418; Wu & Wang 2014, 51-52) Influential cohorts display higher willingness in interacting and communicating with corporates and other customers so as to bridge structural wholes in social networks, comparing with normal customers. (Burt 1997, 339-345; Chan & Misra 1990, 54-56; Feick & Price 1987, 83-95; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10) For their possession of knowledge and information, normal customers are motivated to establish connections with Influential so as to retrieve helpful advice. Though Influential are perceived as normal individuals, they own disproportional power of Influence in the relationship with other customers, and their advices are deemed as crucial in C2C communication which promotes new product adoption and market growth. (Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1966, 205-206, 273; Keller & Berry 2003) On the other side, normal customers, who constitute the largest part

of marketing, would like to receive tangible value for their participation and brand loyalty. They are mostly engaged in marketing activities through mass media and endorsement. Customer segmentations are based on geographic and demographic information rather than individual base. Besides, WOM from fellows works better regarding normal customers. The primary draft theoretical framework (Figure 12) urges marketers to think beyond mass media marketing to move towards online social media contagion effects, e.g. organize online events for business purpose, collaborate with customers for accumulation of social capital and customer loyalty, netnography, etc. (Brodie et al. 2013; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006,4-5; Hintz & Spann 2008, 366-367; Heller and Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Senadheera et al. 2017, 512-533)

However, this set of theoretical framework transformed with the prevalence of online social networks, when Influential emerged as entrepreneurs to conduct business activities directly with customers. The transformed framework can be summarized as Figure 13, which positions Influential as a major player in CE activities, and zooms in the interactivity between Influential and customers. In this case, Influential incorporate entrepreneurial characteristics for the business orientation attached with CE approaches. Meanwhile, the role of corporates is no longer dominant in the dynamism between Influential and customers.

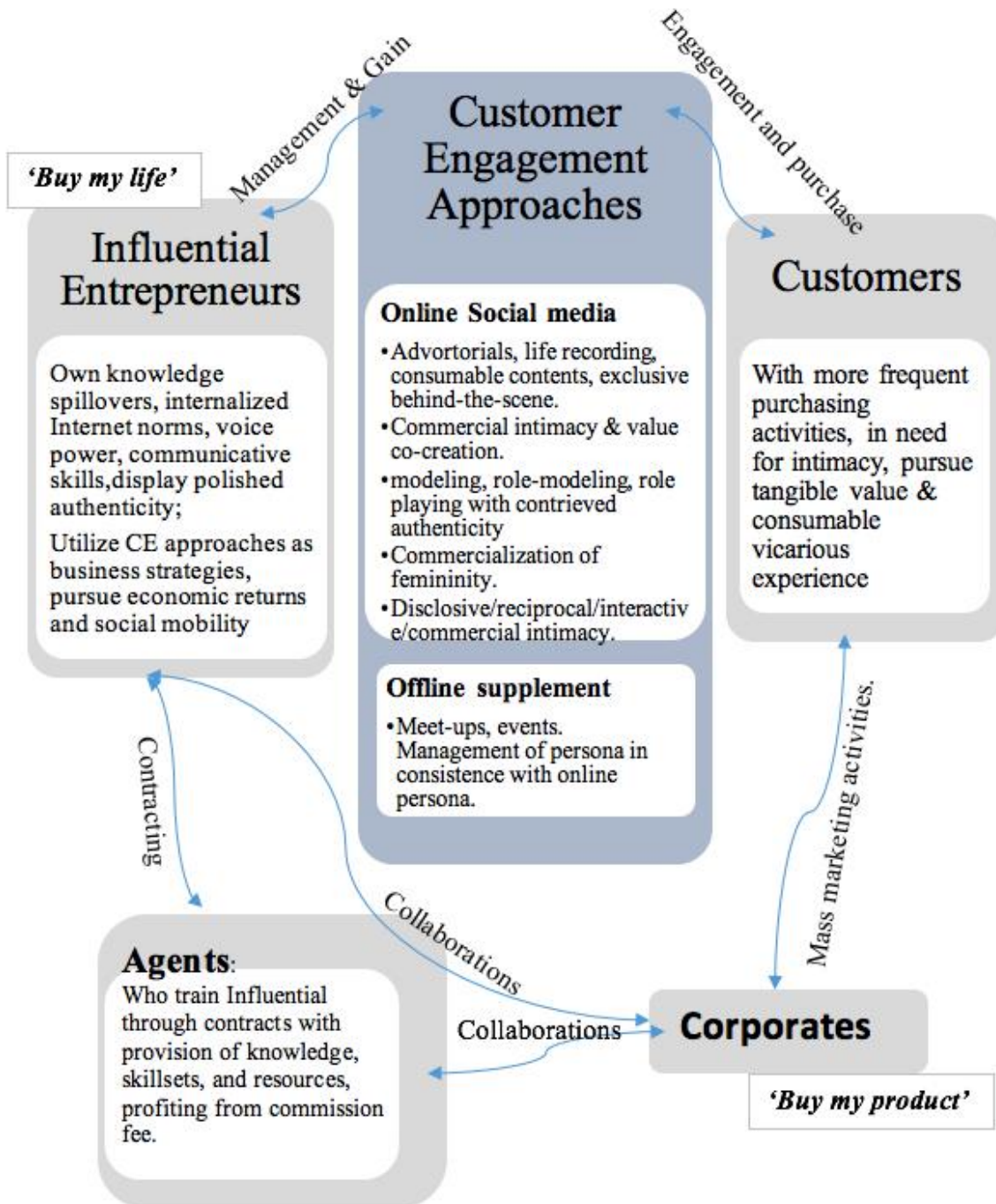


Figure 13 Interactive Framework of Influential Entrepreneurs and Customer Engagement Approaches.

In the evolved version of theoretical framework, new concepts regarding Influential Entrepreneurship, Influential Agents (See Chapter 2.1.3.3), and Customer Engagement approaches by Influential are consolidated so as to scrutinize a complete CE approaches framework that zooms in the interaction between Influential Entrepreneurs and customer. The role of corporates fades, instead, Influential and

customers become major players in the context. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Michael 2017) Influential Entrepreneurs take advantages of the superior possession of knowledge, internalized Internet norms, voice power, and communicative skills to display polished authenticity and enact Customer Engagement approaches as a business strategy, aiming at retrieving economic returns and social mobility. In the process, online social networks functions as a business tool as well as a medium to convey CE activities. (Abidin's 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467- 477; Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) Customer Engagement is triggered by multiple factors including WOM, C2C relationship, underlying profit orientation, and pursuit of fame and popularities. However, the essence of CE is defined as beyond transactional activities, which is affiliated with customers' emotional investment and particular interactions. (Hollebeek 2011, 555-573; Van Doorn et al. 2010, 258; Verhoef et al. 2010, 248-249; Vivek 2012, 127) According to Chapter 2, the primary forms that Influential apply via online social media to engage people amplifying influences are advertorials, life recording, production of consumable contents, and exclusive behind-the-scene leakage of information. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 3-10; Borges 2011, 6-19; Senft 2008, 25; Goffman 2002) During the process of Customer Engagement, Influential establish commercial intimacy and co-create value with customers. Without doubt, the seemingly intimate and authentic relationship is motivated by business orientations. In other words, the established commercial intimacy is enacted as a business strategy that attracts emotional investment and ultimately generate value surplus. Several other techniques are employed, e.g. crafting common persona by modeling and role-modeling, commercialization of femininity to consume, and establishment of disclosive, reciprocal, interactive, and commercial intimacy. (Abidin 2015a; 2016, 1-6, 13-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86; Boyd 2006; Brodie et al. 2013; Danesi 2015, 25; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Hearn 2008, 213; Hochschild 2012; Hoyer et al. 2010, 292; Lair et al. 2005, 335-336; Lövheim 2010; Marwick 2003, 116-117; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Roberts 2005; Senft 2008, 25- 26, 116; Turkle 2008, 122-130; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247) Besides, offline activities (e.g. meet-ups, events.) are organized as a supplement to online engagement. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 3-10)

Customers would expect Influential to manage persona in consistence with online image so as to sustain authenticity. Customers who participate in online engagement are observed to display more frequent purchasing activities, for the pursuit of transactional efficiency and repeat purchase need. (Grewal et al. 2001, 17-30; Rindfleisch & Heide 1997, 30-51; Venkatesan & Kumar 2004, 109-121) Through engagement with Influential Entrepreneurs, they pursue tangible value as well as emotional attachment and vicarious experience. Authenticity and Sincerity are also expected by customers in the relationship, which is coped by rejection of hierarchical evaluation by Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Heller and Parasnis 2011, 30-36) Input from customers is displayed as labor, task performance, information sharing, and behavior, which is utilized by Influential to extract real value. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Mustak et al. 2016, 256; Trusov et al, 2006, 91-92) Comparing with traditional corporate marketing techniques who endorses '*Buy my products*' to charge price premium for brands, Influential Entrepreneurs are monetizing on customers' pursuit of lifestyle by convincing them that similar lifestyle can be purchased and extract surplus value from emotional attachment. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) So far the scale of Influential Entrepreneurs has accumulated to a remarkable size (Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-142) that introduces agency to manage Influential incubation and contracts. (Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3) Agents are those who own knowledge, information, skillsets, and resources. By contracting Influential, agents train and incubate Influential as business operation in exchange for commission fee. In this framework, corporates are positioned as an insignificant player, who conducts mass media marketing with general customers as well as collaborates with agents and Influential to exploit their affluence in niche customer base. (Marwick 2013, 114)

The improved theoretical framework (Figure 13) clarifies Influential Entrepreneurs as active marketers who provide products and services attached with individual image, emphasizing the multi-channeling and broadcasting effects of online social network. In summary, this framework draws the application of Customer Engagement approach as Influential Entrepreneurs with collaboration involving several side players. In the next section, the author will continue narrow down the scope of study to concentrate in particular context as in CE approaches by

Influential Entrepreneurship in China, aiming at concluding concrete results that can shed light on academic and practical implications.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

In research design, an overview of roadmap will be presented so as to clarify methodology and procedures in this study. (Myers 2013, 19) A suitable research design integrates multiple elements to form, e.g. research purposes, research questions, resources at disposal, and the researcher's knowledge, insights and skillsets, etc. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 14, Marshall & Gretchen 1999, 9) In this case, the purpose of this research is to explore the Customer Engagement Approaches initiated by Influential Entrepreneurs under the effects of online social media in specific ethnographic context. The research questions and purpose presented in Chapter 1.3 co-determine the research approaches. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 27; Maxwell 2012, 17)

First, from research purpose perspective, this study aims at establishing an interactive framework for CE approaches in specific context. The nature of the purpose is explorative, which calls on a holistic review on all the relevant concepts (e.g. Influential Entrepreneurs, Customer Engagement, etc.) and an evaluation of the concepts in empirical environment. As it is guided by sub-questions in Chapter 1.3, analytical observation is the primary method to gather information. The undertaken method emphasizes on observations and extraction of information from discussions, where '*human beings constitute important resource of data collection*' (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997, 165). Observations and discussions are utilized as in the form of interviews (See Chapter 4.2), instead of structured measurements and codifications. By personal interactions with the relevant informants in an uninterrupted environment, the author aims to examine the correctness of primary framework and draw conclusions. The method aligns with emphasis from Hirsjärvi et al. (1997, 165), stating that the goal of qualitative research is to reveal new information, rather than generating hypothesis. By combining academic review of concepts and examinations in the empirical settings, this study will ultimately modify or compensate the primary framework so as to develop a better framework to serve the research purpose.

The method of '*Inductive Approach*' defines the action of drawing conclusions from empirical evidence, which is regularly used in qualitative research. On the contrary, '*Deductive Approach*' utilizes logic reasoning to deduce conclusions so as to examine the correctness of theories. And the goal of deductive approach is to

approve or deny hypothesis. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 13-14) Under this circumstances, the researcher does not aim at examine the correctness of theoretical framework, but to make supplement and modifications to the theoretical framework for better compatibility. Consequently, this study contributes to the emerging phenomenon of Influential Entrepreneurship and the affiliated CE approaches via exploratory and inductive approaches. Meanwhile, the theoretical framework deduced from academic review will work as a guide so as to compromise possible conflicts between theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence.

As for data collection, a qualitative method of interview is the most appropriate method, considering available resources (time, money, available contacts, etc.) and research purpose. As Hirsjärvi et al. (1997, 165) state, data collection through qualitative methods constructs important perspective of qualitative research, and informants shall be carefully selected instead of random sampling. Hence this research will deliberate on the candidates for interview instead of random choices of people. In specific, qualified candidates will be selected according to a series of evaluation criteria to ensure the comprehensive collection of insights and information. (See Chapter 4.1)

One thing to note is the interactivity of theoretical framework. Hirsjärvi et al. (1997, 165) suggest that the research plan often changes with the progress of project. The progress of qualitative research is iterative in nature to adjust between different part so as to better serve research purpose. (Fisher 2010, 4; Maxwell 2012, 4) In this case, the research plan is adjusted several times to satisfy the demands from empirical research and to serve the goal of revealing conclusions. In detail, the phenomenon of Influential Entrepreneurship and the relevant business activities are first acknowledged as a novel topic to study. Then by combining with the academic literatures especially from Abidin and her colleagues, the data collection resources are narrowed down to online social network settings. When it comes to the choice of methodology, the novelty and variety of Influential Entrepreneurial activities determined the choice of qualitative approach in this study. To further confirm the selection of data, this study does not exclude Influential Entrepreneurs who marginally conduct business activities, for that some entrepreneurs are not purely profit-oriented type and CE is defined as beyond transactional activities. Consequently, the gap is acknowledged as business activities of Influential Entrepreneurs in the beginning, then it is narrowed down to the Customer

Engagement activities which constitute business activities of Influential Entrepreneurs. Hence with the consistence in research theme, the gap to bridge is modified in detail in the whole research progress.

Another point to clarify is on generalization issue of the theoretical framework. The proposed theoretical framework is deduced from academic review, and further will be modified and supplemented by empirical evidence from China context. However, this study does not indicate that the framework developed in China context can be generalized and applied in all cases. The framework is developed on case-to-case research and analysis, in which the methodology is attached with higher generalizability rather than the results.

The researcher's standpoint to attain knowledge is influenced by view of assumptions, which ultimately influence the way research interprets. Ontology concentrates on the objectively given reality and nature, where universal regularities exist regardless of human consciousness. And epistemology focuses on nature of knowledge to subjectively discover how human beings control and construct the environment. (Burrell & Morgan 2017, 1-3, 5; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2015, 13-14) In this study, a subjective standpoint is utilized to interpret the research, assuming that the constantly changing environment is constructed and shaped by human beings, and that knowledge and skillsets can be subjectively pursued and learnt. To serve the research purpose of constructing a framework regarding CE approach as Influential Entrepreneurs in China context, research questions of what and how are proposed. As Wilson (2014, 16) points out that in qualitative researches, research questions start with how or what in most cases. In this study, both 'what' and 'how' questions are proposed in order to serve the research purpose, which is to describe and explain the actions taken by Influential Entrepreneurs in the context. In the meantime, a descriptive answer requests elaborations on initiatives and mechanism of actions.

Judging from above-mentioned criteria and linkage with this research, a qualitative approach is thusly selected for this research. In contrast with quantitative approach that focuses on the explanatory results from numerical form of statistics, qualitative approach concentrates on descriptive texts to interpret social and cultural dynamics. In other words, quantitative approaches focus on the structures, while qualitative researches concentrates on the processes to meet the demand for explorative studies. (Myers 2013, 8; Ghauri & Grønhaug 2005, 86)

Meanwhile, qualitative research is most appropriate in developing in-depth knowledge with regard to the topic, especially when the research object is newly emerged, and there is not much academic researches to refer to. (Myers 2013, 9) Gerson & Horowitz (2002, 201) defines typical qualitative research as in developing of new concepts. While the purpose of this study is to suggest and supplement an interactive framework which is efficient in reality. In this context, the quality is developed based on subject perceived interpretations and experiences. The interactive dynamics in the approaches are the focal point to scrutinize.

4.1 Research approach

This study is geographically positioned in China, based on data collected in the Influential Entrepreneurship industry in China. And the author's personal connections with some participants and their customers will shed some light on the analysis.

In brief, research methodologies are employed in the following ways, first arrange interviews with Influential Entrepreneurs through personal contacts, then arrange interviews with customers who frequent the E-commerce of Influential. The data collection follows protocol of anonymity to protect privacy of all interviewees. (For interview questions, see Appendix 1.) Due to the cultural relevance, the majority of data (e.g. transcripts, recording) collected is in Chinese. Hence the recording will be transcribed for later review. And all the data resources in Chinese will be translated for better understanding.

The popularity of Influential Entrepreneurship and selection of cases will be evaluated on the following criteria: 1) follower numbers on Weibo and on Taobao platform (Ebay equivalent in China), and 2) mentions on mainstream medias e.g. newspaper, magazine, online forum.

The Author sent out over 100 invitations to Influential Entrepreneurs who qualifies the evaluation criteria in Chapter 4.1, and twelve of them replied. Some replied as 'I don't think I am qualified as an Influential.', 'thanks for liking me.' as a gentle rejection. Some replies with auto-reply as 'I'll talk to you soon.' Among the replies, only four confirm the interview invitation. The majority rest of the sample group, remained silent to the invitation, both from emails and private messages.

As it is scrutinized in theoretical background, Influential are expected to be more approachable, common, and responsive than average. Higher reply rate is expected, including confirmation and rejection towards the invitation. The result again brings out thoughts on the realm of approachability and commonality. It confirms that the Influential figure as approachable, common, interactive, and responsive is perceived rather than authentic. The CE activities of public post, repost, tagging activities towards followers, are selectively display of approachable figure to strength the persona as 'someone in know'. While the real dynamic of follower interaction may not be as much interactive.

Apart from interview contents, one thing to note is that, the author tries to contact as many qualified interviewees as possible to attain a comprehensive of the context, and the scale of potential interview candidates varies from 'micro micro-celebrity' (fans less than 10k on Weibo) to 'huge micro-celebrities' (fans more than 100k on Weibo). Some Influential Entrepreneurs are quite responsive and accessible, while most did not respond at all. It could be that Influential is occupied and allocates limited time for private interaction, or because too many people send private messages which bury up the author's request, or it could be that the account is operated by professional team that is not responsible for private interaction, or even the author's message and hierarchical position is of little interest to the recipient. Nevertheless, the author notices that the irresponsive Influential Entrepreneurs are continuously updating post steams as usual. Besides, the replies and tagging (@+names as reply to) activities never stops as in public posts, which makes the account owner seem responsive, reciprocal, and exclusive. Some fans comment as 'please read my message.' and 'please check inbox.' to updated post, and such comments never raise much attention and are soon buried down by continuous updating comment steams. Such phenomenon reveals that the Influential Entrepreneurs who are active and responsive in public post may not be as enthusiastic in personal interaction itself. The underlying reasons is yet to be discovered, but the fact is clear, that the interactive and reciprocal intimacy is perceptive rather than genuine.

The analysis will be majorly based on the primary data collected from Interview. To keep confidentiality, Influential are mentioned in pseudonym. Insights from people who regularly conduct online shopping activities with Influential Entrepreneurs are drawn to shed lights on this research, by participant-observation

approach. The evaluation criteria towards qualified candidates is drawn from Twitter equivalent microblogging site, Weibo. Weibo normally lets people post updates with 140-characters limitation, to a network of followers. 'Weibo' in Chinese literally means micro-blog. Since 'Weibo' in Chinese resembles the pronunciation of scarf, posting a new micro-blogging is nicknamed as 'knitting a scarf' as well. Weibo asks users 'What's new?', which lead to a continuously updated scattered information stream ranging from mundane, errands, life thoughts, links, video clips, pictures (nine tops), articles, breaking news.

There is no mandatory demand on reciprocity on Weibo, either socially expected or technically required. The reciprocal following rate on Weibo is lower than that of Twitter. Users can subscribe to other users' updates, which is known as following, and the subscribers here are named fans. Hence unlike the social networks bonding with mutual relationships, Weibo users are connected by information. Weibo is information-driven social networks, suggesting interaction behaviors. (Guo et al. 2011, 160, 165-166; Wu & Wang 2014, 51) Weibo is accessible from multiple channels, namely webpage, desktop, mobilized devices, third-party applications, or SMS service. The post of Weibo can be conveniently shared through email, SMS or to other popular platforms like WeChat and live-streaming sites, and vice versa. This vertical integration enables instant posts of talks, photos, news, reports, and live-streaming, as well as immediate reply to others. After first launched in August, 2009, Weibo has experienced exponential growth, achieving over 30% of Internet penetration, which is similar to that of Twitter. Weibo achieved 100 million users in one and a half year after it launched, which is twice faster than Twitter. (Guo et al. 2011, 160) There are around 100 million new posts on a daily basis, and monthly active users exceed 265 million. (Sina Weibo becomes Nielsen's new digital Ad rating data provider in China, 2016) Weibo can be used as a platform for broadcasting to many, or for one-to-one dialogue, or as community for interaction. The technology that Weibo enacted to facilitate communication has fostered its popularity.

Many Influential Entrepreneurs thrive on Weibo and develop the networks of customers on this platform, directing customer traffic to many other monetizing platforms like E-Commerce sites, product links, and endorsement clips. Marwick (2015, 142) pointed out that the popular users who use social media as broadcasting platform for publicity is considered as '*less authentic*', comparing those who actively

communicate and engage with followers. Thusly, we will use Weibo as a tool to identify accounts of Influential Entrepreneurs on Weibo, and understand the process which Influential Entrepreneurs practice CE approaches with customers or potential customers.

It is noted that once the Influential started commercialization, the account is possibly managed by professional teams or other representatives other than the purported individual due to various reasons, like lack of time, need for expertise, or contracted to management agency. Nevertheless, the authenticity by Influential Entrepreneurs is a crucial component for customer engagement. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) It is considered as a '*work ethic*' (Abidin 2016, 14) to personally edit and craft the content of the post. Otherwise, a complete manufactured figure would not account for an Influential Entrepreneur. The author tries to rule out such professional ghost writers. The accounts that is sampled are all officially verified as individual, but that does not eliminate the possibilities that one account might be operated by the non-purported individual. To minimize such manufactured modification, the author examines the sample with multiple criteria (Marwick 2011, 143), namely existence of negative news on hiring management team, the existence of candid post, the voice as first-person, proportion of personal posts against publicity, the spelling errors, the safe-zoned posts or controversial posts, the existence of direct response to customers etc. Apparently, the criteria here are subjective. The best way to guarantee the account exclusively operated by the purported individual is to personally witness the process of account management, again that would be time consuming and meaningless. As the author is positive that Influential Entrepreneurs edited most of the posts, or at least parts of them, for the sake of authenticity, intimacy, and engagement.

This study refers to several technical functions of Weibo as well as approaches developed by Influential Entrepreneurs. The functions facilitated by Weibo are quite user-friendly, namely '@+username' (tagging), repost, comment or comment with picture, like, hashtag, private message. The '@+username' function allows users to address post, identify other users, or send public post referring to others. The 'like' function gives Influential Entrepreneurs an alternative to personally engage with customers, stating a status of acknowledgement. The hashtags are used for multiple purposes, like for campaign, and stating a theme for post, etc. Due to the interactive nature of Weibo, many approaches to manage fans are thusly developed. Here the

practices by Influential Entrepreneurs are referred to as customer engagement approaches due to the commercial nature. There is no standard rules or limitations on the approaches, as the techniques are perceived by customers on a case-by-case basis. The practitioner usually chooses a few approaches, although most of the time they are combined together. CE approaches are diversified and complex, and not mutually exclusive. All sorts of CE approaches are motivated by business orientation. Regardless of the strategy design, the pattern has surpassed singularity towards complexity and plurality. For example, selfie by Influential Entrepreneurs are admired for its aesthetic beauty and commercial value, while selfie may backfire for the occasional mistakes or controversial topic. (Abidin 2013, 2016, 14; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick 2015, 156)

This study will be conducted by fieldwork with Influential and relevant personnel in personal in the form of both physical and digital communications as in interviews, and participant-observation. The essence of this research is explorative typology of CE approach as Influential Entrepreneurs in China context.

4.2 Data collection

This study employs qualitative approach to explore the Customer Engagement Approaches conducted by Influential Entrepreneurship so as to sustain operation of business. The selection of qualitative method is justified in Research Design, and this section primarily discusses the deliberation of specific data collection methods, details of data resources, and research orientations. In total four interviews are conducted for Influential Entrepreneurs. Additional four interviews with customers are put forward to examine the perceptions and feedback against Customer Engagement Approach. (See Table 4 & 5 for details of expert interviewees and customer interviewees.)

Interviewee Information							Interview	
Name	Age	Gender	Years of experience as IE/Starts from Year(Age)	Followers on Weibo (in thousands)	Followers on Wechat (in thousands)	Expertise as Influential Entrepreneurship	Date & Location	Length
Abby	30	Female	11 Years Experience/ 2006 (21 years old)	1200+	900+	Full-time, lifestyle & fashion blogger, v-blogger, owner of E-business, established company as incubation and agents for Influential.	27.12.2017 Office	90 minutes
Beth	29	Female	4 Years Experience/ 2013 (25 years old)	300+	Not Applicable	Part-time, lifestyle & media blogger.	27.12.2017 Private Residence	30 minutes
Carl	33	Male	6 Years Experience/ 2011 (27 years old)	1400+	1100+	Full-time, lifestyle & media blogger, writer, established working studio.	28.12.2017 Working Studio	45 minutes
Dora	25	Female	4 Years Experience/ 2013 (21 years old)	100+	Not Applicable	Part-time, life style & travel blogger, photographer, contracted to photograph studio,	28.12.2017 Private Residence	30 minutes

Table 4 Interview Information of Influential Entrepreneurs

Interviewee			Interview	
Customer	Age	Role in the study	Date & Location	Length
Echo	24	Description of experience and feedbacks towards Influential Entrepreneurs and Customer Engagement Approaches	17.11.2017 Private Residence	45min
Flynn	28		19.11.2017 Private Residence	40min
Glen	29		22.12.2017 Private Residence	35min
Helen	32		29.12.2017 Private Residence	55min

Table 5 Interview Information of Customers

All the interviews are conducted between November and December in Shanghai, China. Two types of interview environments are adopted for expert interviewees, two interviews in working location of interviewees (studio/office), and another two in private residence. For customer interviews, only the environment of private residence is adopted. During the interview session, the environments are undisturbed and uninterrupted to ensure consistence due to the pre-appointment of schedule and pre-sending of interview guides. Interview guide (See Appendix 1.) is used as a guideline towards key topic and questions rather than a stiff structure of Interview. The extent to which the answer is articulated and elaborated is dependent on the willingness, field of professionalism, and degree of expertise. For some questions, answers may not be provided due to confidential contract, or because of the risks in leaking business secrets. Apart from the Interview guide, the research is open to all the additional related issue that the interviewee would like to attach to the interview, preparing to include extra information and unexpected results. The time of interview ranges from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Some interviewees schedule abundant time for interview, while others are a bit occupied. Communication styles influence the length of interview as well, for some interviewees provide short and concise answers, and some would elaborate on the interesting topic and give examples.

Three out of four interviewees of Influential Entrepreneurs agreed to record the interview. The usage of recorder is pre-discussed with candidates, and only one rejection raised due to the contracts with agent company. All the interviewees as customers consented to record the interview for later detailed review. Apart from the recording, the researcher takes interview notes in the middle of the session.

All the interviews are conducted in Chinese, which is the native language of both parties. The researcher later transcribes and translates the record into text to increase feasibility to utilize data in this report. Besides, the researcher tries to minimize the possibility of ambiguity and misunderstanding by using common ideas of translation, rather than machine-like direct translated scripts. All the interviewees have a good level of English, and they are entitled with rights to check the research before it is printed so as to increase precision. The primary data for analysis consists of Interview records, transcripts, and researcher's notes. Later in this section, the researcher will justify the correctness of such data collection method.

The essence of qualitative data collection is to interpret data systematically into themes and categorizations that can be understood by readers. The generation of data does not necessarily involve researcher. For example, the transcription of interviews involves the participation of researcher, while journals or notes from interviewees does not. The quality of data surpasses the significance of quantity. It indicates that a selection of qualified cases bypasses that of mass collection of superficial cases. Fieldwork allows the researcher to get in touch and form a general view of research subject. Consequently, the identification of qualified and in-depth cases is necessary. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 15-18) Through extensive fieldworks, the evaluation criteria for qualified interviewees is presented in Chapter 4.1. Experts of Influential Entrepreneurs are selected on a manageable scale to attain expertise and insights.

Due to the novelty of the topic, the study selects interviews method out of all qualitative study methods to establish a thorough framework to elaborate the dynamic interaction between Influential Entrepreneurs and customers. In addition, the researcher would like to acquire deep insights of research subject via a limited sets of data, the expertise and professional knowledge from interviewees are supposed to be exploited to maximum. The limited resources at disposal also urge researcher to undertake interview as data collection method. In detail, this study chose experts who are experienced in the perspective of Influential Entrepreneurship. By communicating with interview candidates regarding preliminary interview guide, the researcher sets a primary structure of the interview including possible directions of discussions covering research scopes. Then the researcher would embrace all possibilities that emerge during the interview so as to compensate the study. This is in line with Mason (2002, 225) who reveals that the nature of interview is to let people talk and construct knowledge from the conversation, assuming that attainment

of insights can be achieved through proper investigations with expertise interviewees. The flexibility in nature allows abundant and comprehensive findings. Gerson & Horowitz (2002, 204) stated in specific that the engagement of interviewees into talks and communications is directed with interview guide (See Appendix 1.) to guarantee a focused conversation towards research purpose. Unstructured interview may result in endless supply of unnecessary information, which contradicts with the original purpose of manageable qualified data collection. In this case, the researcher keeps an open-mind and an objective view to embrace additional results in data collection.

Mason (2002, 231) emphasizes on the flexibility nature of interview, which allows higher authorization and lower stiffness. It does not equal freestyle interview, but rather structured or semi-structured in style. The topic-centered interview framework is co-organized by both interviewees and researcher, while the impact of researcher is supposed to be minimized in the following discussion stage. This study employs thematic interview guide and networks (See Appendix 1. & 2.) to guide the interview, as in naturally categorization of global themes in Influential Entrepreneurship and Customer Engagement Approaches. The interview guide serves as reference to remind the researcher and interviewees of key questions so as to achieve research purpose.

As Eskola & Suoranta (1998, 15-18) point out that the qualified datasets overtake the number of cases on significance level. In this interpretation, the qualified interviewees as trustworthy data resources are selected through evaluation criteria to make sure that experts with insights and knowledge are included. (See Chapter 4.1) Expert is someone who holds professional insights and recognition on certain topic, who would be constantly consulted within the interpretation of knowledge. And expert knowledge is defined as substantial reserve of information with regard to expertise field of topic, which is not widely accessible to others. (Martin et al. 2012, 29-38) Expert interview is deemed as an effective approach to gather efficient information and insights with expertise field in a short period of time. For that experts possess superior knowledge and connections with regard to research field, which yields fruitful results for the study. Besides, research promotes the participations in professional field, which motivates experts to join the discussion spontaneously. (Bogner et al. 2009, 17-98) Consequently, this research utilizes expert interview to maximize the experts' superior possession of knowledge.

Qualified Influential Entrepreneurs on different stages of development covering different operation aims are reached without bias.

4.3 Data analysis

The interview guideline (See Appendix 1.) and thematic network (See Appendix 2.) is built on two global themes (Influential Entrepreneurs & Customer Engagement approaches) in this study. As it is scrutinized in the previous section (See Chapter 4) the Customer Engagement approaches is viewed as part of business strategy that supports Influential Entrepreneurship, and Influential Entrepreneurs is the focal point to research in this study, the choice of two thematic network is self-explained.

Building thematic work (Attride-Stirling 2001, 385-405) (See Appendix 2.) helps to empirically analyze data from interviews. Also, it allows the researcher to build a comprehensive and systematic picture including multiple arrays of data to increase informative value. (Boyatzis 1998, 210-211) The analysis is both conducted in the middle and after the interview. Three out of four expert interviews are recorded in vocal documents, then the records are transcribed for later analysis. One expert chose not to be recorded in vocal documents, so the researcher took notes during the interview for later review. Additional four interviews of customers are recorded as supporting data to provide feedback information regarding Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs, and notes are also taken in such circumstance. All these records, transcripts, and notes consist raw material for data analysis.

Data analysis is to observe, review, and consolidate all the data collected from the interviewees to establish a comprehensive, logical, and well-structured overview, which is guided by research design. The notes and transcripts of interviews are helpful in data analysis. Careful reading of transcripts helps the author to connect linkage between data and develop cohesive analytical work that combines all the necessary information rather than as an individual interview participant. The creation of analytical work will classify data as in analytical categories and develop concepts to inductively figure out recurring regularities. By clearing out the effective elements that affects the regularities, concrete results are drawn upon the recurring regularities to explore findings. The results are thusly utilized to compare with proposed

theoretical framework. Based on comparison of concrete results and proposed theoretical framework, the results may contribute to compensate the previous theoretical framework in the end. (Gerson & Horowitz 2002, 216-217).

The aim of data analysis is to extract new information from consolidating the results and to attribute explanatory value of collected data. It requests building theory from the fieldwork of collected data, and excluding presuppositions to conduct qualitative analysis. However, data supply is vast and mass, and researcher is obliged to set limits to the data collection so as to handle data in a manageable method for producing fruitful results. The presumptions from researcher should not restrain the development of analysis. Meanwhile, the researcher must keep the mind opened for all possible unexpected results. Consequently, the researcher shall first and foremost identify relative personal understandings and presumptions prior to the research. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 19-20).

Thematic work from Attride-Stirling (2001, 385-405) is employed as methodology to progress and analyze retrieved data. Recurring regularities form categories and create concepts. (Gerson & Horowitz 2002, 216-217) Thematic analysis relies on the identification of theme patterns, which are descriptive, categorizing, or interpretive. The themes can be retrieved either directly on manifest level or implicitly on latent level. In detail, themes can be induced from data or be deduced based on the theory. Concluding patterns of themes with multiple data sets allows the researcher to extract deeper understanding and higher accuracy. (Boyatzis 1998, 210-211) To conclude from above, thematic analysis is selected for its capability in categorizing data with level of themes and interpreting data with precision and accuracy.

To construct thematic analysis, data is arranged in network view to sort out theme levels. Level of themes is organized from basic themes (lowest order theme extracted from data), towards organizing themes (middle level theme that clustering basic themes into similar category), to global themes (highest theme that completely conclude major implications of data). In the process, basic themes are identified and organized, then they are arranged under organizing themes, which will be finally grouped under global themes. The thematic network presents a flat mind-map for analysis instruments rather than final results. It assists the categorization and interpretation of data to screen out patterns. In the end, main themes and patterns are concluded so as to examine with theoretical framework. The final comparison of

empirical theme and pattern towards theoretical assumption will address research questions. (Attride-Stirling 2001, 387-390, 393-394) (See Figure 14)

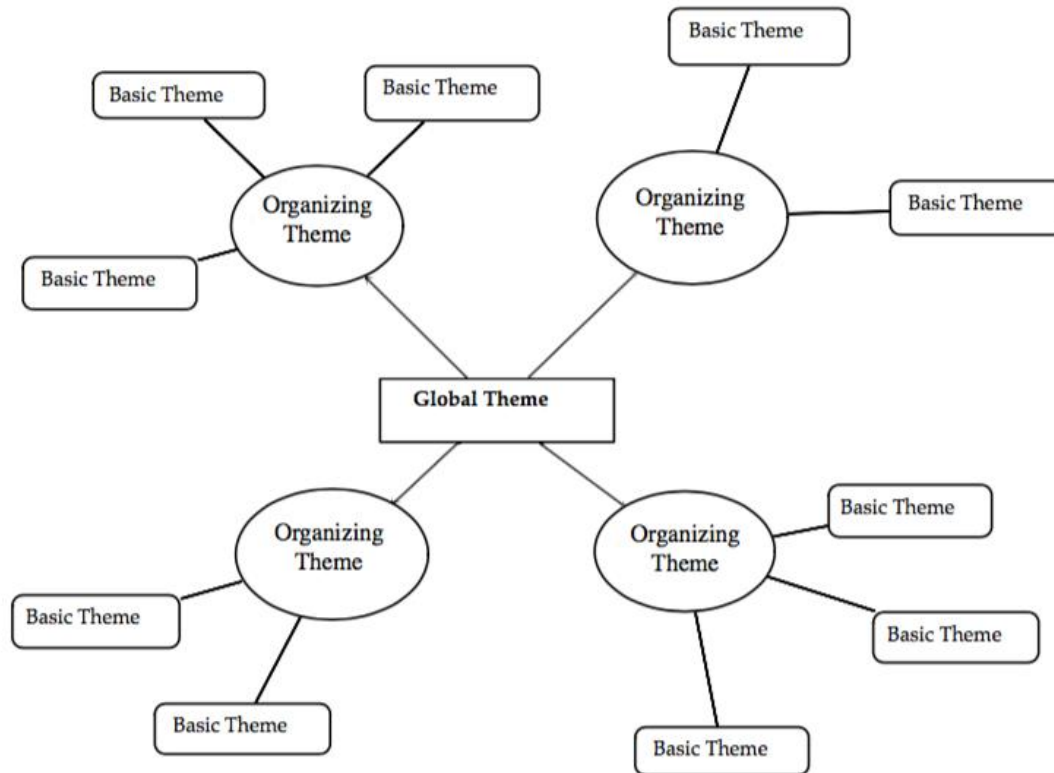


Figure 14 Structure of thematic network. (Attride-Stirling 2001, 388)

The researcher would like to describe and screen for pattern as the analysis progresses, assuming that basic themes and organizing themes will be reflected in related manner. Consequently, raw data is categorized according to theme level, ultimately under two global themes. (See Appendix 2.) Basic themes and organizing themes will emerge from the text with the progress of categorization, description, interpretation, and re-organizing. Then the empirical findings and results will be presented in comparison with theoretical framework to describe how Influential Entrepreneur conduct Customer Engagement approaches as business strategies. (See Chapter 5.) Then the empirical evidence will be integrated so as to supplement interactive framework (See Chapter 3. Figure 13). (See Chapter 6.1) On the completion of final interactive framework, theoretical contributions, practical implications, and suggestions for future research is put forward. (See Chapter 6.2-6.3) The aforementioned thematic analysis network steers analysis progress, and the

trustworthiness and limitation of research is discussed to justify the choice of methodology. (See Chapter 4.4-4.5)

4.4 Trustworthiness

In this study, interview records, transcripts, and notes constitute raw material for data analysis. The quantity and scale of data is controlled within field of experts in a manageable work load. All the raw data was discreetly read to examine inductive information and deductive implications. Data analysis adopts thematic network to process from recognition of themes, categorization of theme levels, and interpretation. Themes represent categorization criteria so as to figure out recurring regularities. In the objective view, the researcher holds an open-mind for irregularities to complement on recurring regularities. To conclude from above, the comprehensiveness of data analysis is achieved. In addition, this study specifically describes all the methodological concepts, progress, and principles with precision, aiming at illustrating a clear research methodology progress to readers. The description and illustration of methodology increases visibility and credibility of the study, which ultimately adds informative value to the empirical findings.

The researcher takes an objective approach to collect and analyze data to extract new information from the empirical evidence. It indicates that researcher shall identify the related individual propositions and presumptions to avoid subjective cognition. However, to completely eliminate researcher's individual understanding is impractical, which requests the researcher to understand the possibility of personal impact on data analysis and state the presumptions in the research. A clear understanding of related presumptions helps in increasing interpretive value and transparency. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 15-20)

Due to the novelty of the topic, this study aims at building the theoretical framework from the ground conception and relationships in between, which states that this study has combined multiple arguments and propositions from literature fieldworks to establish the framework. In establishment of framework and research design, the researcher employs an objective attitude to eliminate individual bias. Accordingly, the researcher is ready to embrace all possible results. Hence, though it is inevitable to rule out the researchers' understanding, the impact can be recognized through identification of related presumptions. In addition, the empirical findings are

supported by a collections of instances from fieldwork to add visibility and credibility.

Certain principles are critical in order to examine the trustworthiness of data collection and data analysis. (See Table 6)

Data	Analysis
Significance	Comprehensiveness
Sufficiency	Readability & Reliability

Table 6 Principles to examine trustworthiness of data. (Mäkelä 1990, 47-48)

Significance of data represents the potential informative value of the data, which makes the subject worth analyzing. (Mäkelä 1990, 48) Though it is hard to define the significance of data within context of social science, this research adds significance to data selection by reducing the supply of data within the field of experts. Additionally, the research adopts thematic networks and objective view to add interpretive and informative value of data. (See Chapter 4.1-4.3) Hirsjärvi et al (1997, 181) defines the sufficiency of data as in the concept of adequateness, which implies that marginal accumulation of data does not produce extra information. Mäkelä (1990, 52) suggests that the researcher is not able to predict the adequateness point regard data collection. Accordingly, the progress of data collection is designed based on pre-planned categories, which refers to a coverage of various field of Influential experts in this study. This research is organized in the assumption that Influential Entrepreneurs are conducting Customer Engagement approaches as effective business strategy, regardless of scale or field of expertise. In literature review, the assumption is confirmed academically. Again, the assumptions held effective in empirical findings, supported by vast similar results. Data collection also includes customer interviews to figure out the perception from the other side so as to support or contradict the argument. Vast similar results emerge as well. So the researcher believes that the adequateness point has been reached, and no further interviews are necessary.

To examine the trustworthiness of data analysis, the principles of comprehensiveness, readability, and reliability are crucial. Comprehensiveness of analysis refers to adoption of systematic methodology to interpret data, rather than random organization of data. As for readability, the analysis of data shall be readable

and understandable towards audience so that the reader could agree to or disagree with the analysis. And reliability request the similar findings achievable via same research principles. (Mäkelä 1990, 47-48, 53-54)

4.5 Limitation

This study is positioned as a qualitative research in the context of Customer Engagement approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs, supported by primary data from interviews. And the case is ethnographically positioned like researches from Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477), and Abidin (2016). By ethnographically positioned, it means that although the activities of Influential Entrepreneurship is detected in other places of the world (e.g. Singapore, Australia, etc.), the empirical data in this study is collected in the context of China. Hopefully the academic value of this study is not limited to the context of China, but also of importance in other contexts. However, this study is more valuable in China context and other socio-cultural close regions.

For the second limitation, although the study is progressing through a relative long period of time, the data is collected within a short timeframe. However, the activities of CE are dynamic with possibilities of changing. In other words, the CE activities discussed in this study is effective in this certain period of time, but the application of CE may evolve when situation changes. As for practitioners, this study is not a principle of action, but rather of reference value to understand the management of CE from the perspective of Influential Entrepreneurship. Therefore, the study of CE here is based in certain timeframe, but also of importance to the following understanding of CE in the future.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Influential Entrepreneurs as emerging business model

This study focused on four interviewees from experts in the Influential Entrepreneurial field, and fortunately enough, the interviewees happen to be on different stages as Influential. They are titled as 1). Abby, Mature Influential, Entrepreneur, founder of incubation and agents company for Influential, Owner of E-business, 2). Beth, Partial Influential who conducts marginal business activities and collaborate with corporates, 3). Carl, solo Influential Entrepreneur who has established working studio, and 4) Dora, Partial Influential Entrepreneur, travel photographer who is contracted to photography studio. One thing to note is that, Influential Entrepreneurs may not develop the same way as it is observed in this study. The development path of Influential Entrepreneurs may or may not follow a certain pathway. In other words, the mature Influential may not be the next stage of a marginal Influential Entrepreneur. Hence, the stage to which the Influential Entrepreneurs develops is only of reference value to evaluate the possible development direction, but not sufficient to absolutely confirm the next stage of a certain Influential Entrepreneur.

This study also introduces four other interviewees as customers who have followed Influential Entrepreneurs and/or frequented business of Influential Entrepreneurs to supplement data collection. The introduction of customer interviewees aims at examining the perceptions and feedbacks against Customer Engagement Approaches from the other side. Aliases are used to protect the privacy and to keep the profile confidential. Due to the diversified portfolio of interview group, the retrieved information displays a variety of data distribution, and many fruitful results emerge.

The empirical findings regarding Influential Entrepreneurs is synthesized as follows. (See Figure 15) In this section, the empirical findings will be presented in three perspectives: characteristics & knowledge, actions, and developments.

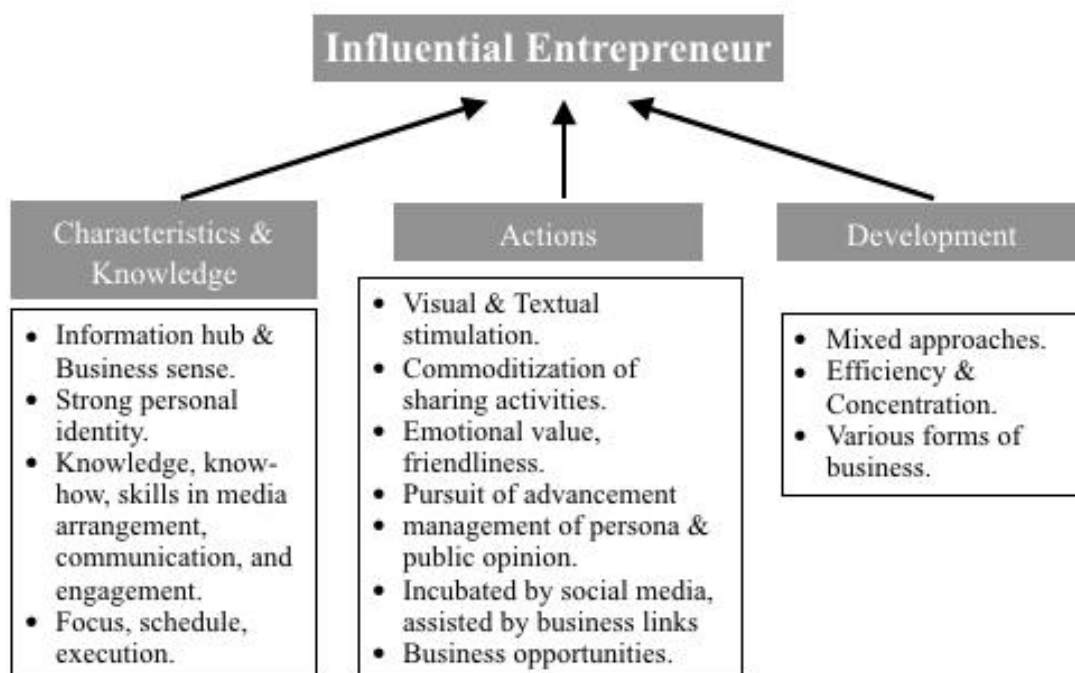


Figure 15 Synthesis of empirical findings regarding Influential Entrepreneur.

5.1.1 Characteristics

- ***Demographic characteristics and personality.***

In general, four interviews are all college graduates, and three of them are from first class colleges. Two Influential Entrepreneurs, Abby and Carl, who have officially established business organizations are both previously from media industry. Another partial Influential Entrepreneur, is currently working as a full-time photographer contracted to photography studio, which can be considered as media industry as well. Beth is currently working in private plastic-surgery organization as public relationship, which is closely connected to femininity related industry.

All the interviewees display Internet activities at an early age, almost as early as the social media platform begins to project influence in normal life. Intentional sharing of lifestyle, recommendations of products, display of working contents are all recognized in the interviews. Internet activities and enactment of sharing activities can be dated back as early as high school and college years, when people are weakly connected via non-friendship relationship. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) In the earliest time, Influential post latest news, information and gossips, and make comments in online

community, where users would discuss on such topics. Users are seeking agreements or deny disagreements on discussion, and the earliest Influential reputation for credible information resource is established. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

'I share student life in arts college as editing videos, photos, and post photos of myself on Douban (An online social media community for people with similar interest).' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'People know me when I start to share outfits photos on Renren (China equivalent version of Facebook) and Qiongyou (similar version of Trip advisor in community edition). Through communications I learnt how to pose in the best figure in photoshooting, and I get to know professional photographers from social media platform.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I was quite active and famous on Tianya (A huge online discussion forum with millions of users), where I edited posts and join discussions.' (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

It's obvious that Influential are incubated by online forums and community.

People are generally concerned about privacy issue online, which hinders sharing activities. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) For Influential Entrepreneurs, the mechanism is quite the opposite. Influential Entrepreneurs share life details with all followers to almost every aspect of life, such as family issue, love stories, and many more. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'Most celebrities would hide love life from the public, but I continuously share the love life between me and my husband. My followers have literally witnessed my life stages from student, single individual, married, and so forth. My husband once talked with me, 'Although you are the one who got sick, I am the one who becomes fragile.' I was so touched, and wrote article about it. Many readers share their love stories in the comment and repost area.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'Every time I post photos of me and my boyfriend on a trip, the number of reposts and comments peaks.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Besides, a persona image of 'interesting, curious, and kind' is identified as a necessary remark for Influential, who are supposed to be liked by public while maintaining individual identical characteristics. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The emphasis on personality identity is crucial to make a presence as an Influential, because

people may get the information from somewhere else, but the persona figure as yourself, is identical. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Knowledge and Skills***

In this section, common knowledge and hard editorial skills as Influential Entrepreneurs will be discussed. Later in Chapter 5.1.2, the soft social skills that might be varied according to individuals will be addressed to. Early Internet activities brought early connections to the internet, as well as accumulation of social connections, learnt skills and knowledge. Influential started activities on Internet platform from an early age, and some can be dated back to high school when social media platform was merely prevalent. The share of photos, lifestyle, and information begins as interest. With discussion with online fellows and professionals, the skills in shooting photos, textual & visual editorials, and norms of communication are established and developed.

In the beginnings, amateur skills are away from professionals. But later when the posts are delicately crafted, business collaborations and professional communications approached to offer opportunities. After several attempts in conducting relevant works, the horizontal view is broadened, and the general understanding of the industry is enhanced. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017 & Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The management of followers and leading of topics is not significantly displayed in the early stages. Level escalation as in professional knowledge and skills, for example, the photography skills as photographer, is highly emphasized. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Rather than a professional expert in a highly specific field, Influential is making progress as a general specialist, who possesses a certain amount of knowledge in several field of study. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The professional skills and knowledge is advanced due to personal pursuit and interest (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017, Dora, discussion 28.12.2017), as well as academically retrieved (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017).

‘Photo editorial skills is deemed as competitive advantages.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Even though at that time, sharing post on social media was not intended to make money, the early activities are seen regularly in Influentials, who accumulated early stages of followers that accompany them for a long period of time across different social media platforms. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) That is the time when Influential begins to seek business opportunities and establish initial business collaborations, even

though some collaborations are presented as products sponsorship rather than financial sponsorship. The accumulation of knowledge and skills helps Influential to accumulate resources in business connections and mark up for costs. Escalation of professional skills is crucial for realizing financial independence as well. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017, Carl, discussion 28.12.2017, Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Communicational skills are identified among Influential Entrepreneurs as a key determinate as well. Influential Entrepreneurs define such ability as '*likeability*', which means the extent to which people like you. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The extent of likeability is expanded to whether people like Influentials' attitude towards topic or the timely provision of news. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

- ***Mindset as Influential Entrepreneurs***

In the interviews, two interviewees are identified as savvy Influential Entrepreneurs with clear development mind map and business orientations. Two others partially rely on Influential as business and conduct business activities.

In the early stages of Influential Entrepreneurs, when the scale of followers was not huge, accumulation of knowledge, skills, connections, and followers is more emphasized than business orientations. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) At that time, the achievements come from sharing of post, empathy of feelings, and engagement activities. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

'The business orientation was not intentionally installed, but rather naturally emerged. The feeling of achievement was to recommend an idealized and cozy lifestyle for people who trust me, rather than making business return. I choose to co-found company to establish Influential business, because two friends who are previously from advertisement company approached me, and we drafted a business plan in detail.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

The timing for steering mindset towards individual entrepreneur was a few years after working, when social resources are connected and vision of industry is established. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) As for the future vision to expand or develop, Influential Entrepreneur was not urging the advancement, but rather adapts to the changes and making progress. 'Without too much pre-installment, the development would be more surprising.' The personal characteristics as Influential is crucial to maintain in the ever changing environment, because aside from the production of contents, characteristics

determines that people will remember you and attach to your personality. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

5.1.2 *Actions*

- ***Skills and enactment***

In details, there are several skills that are crucial for being an Influential Entrepreneurs. Photo editing skills and textual editorial skills are highly emphasized across four interviewees. And this is seen as an indispensable part as an Influential. ‘*Photoshop editorials is a competitive advantage.*’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Skills in photo shooting, photo editing, and editing of post is crafted and advanced with practices in time rather than intensively learnt. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Editing of text, arrangement of visual & textual contents, and the production of attractive contents are learnt skills, which needs years to craft and practiced. Influential Entrepreneurs are capable to produce qualified contents to attract followers and seize the empathetic emotion. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Apart from editorial knowledge and skills in visual stimulation, there are several soft social skills that facilitates Influential Entrepreneurs to establish popularities in followers.

Influential Entrepreneurs are intentionally positioned to be followed and liked by followers. Apart from personality and characteristics, there are several skillsets that can facilitate the likeability. For example, to regard followers as friends and address them with intimate names to conduct friendly communication and organize loyal follower party (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017), private talks with followers to give suggestions (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017), organize casual discussions with followers on news and gossips (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017), and reveal the essence of working content that are previously inaccessible to the public (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017). Interactions with followers is perceived as disclosive, exclusive, intimate and reciprocal as it is scrutinized in theoretical background. However, the perception of intimacy does not reveal the reality completely. Selective disclosure of lifestyle and selective interaction protects the privacy of Influential, as well as saves communication cost as an individual. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The presentation of positivity, enthusiastic attitude, and political rightness is regarded as key to Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘When an individual is privately concerned, he can express any attitude. But things are different when I possess certain amount of influential power, I feel responsible to my words, my image, and my followers.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

The development of professional skills and accumulation of popularity among followers is intended to be in parallel, but in prioritization context, the skill development is deemed prioritized. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017, Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Principle***

The principle of Influential Entrepreneur varies according to different stages of development. As early stage Influential, the point is on execution of activities and responsibility.

‘Action matters to me more than thinking. I’m not the overthinking type, and did not consider too much on the budget and future development. The Influential business is a progress of spontaneous pursuit of photo-shooting skills, action, moderation of plan, and rethink, rather than detailed schedule and arrangement.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The capability of focus is highlighted, as in focus on the development of personal competitive advantages with intention and vision. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Due to the multiple possibilities, Influential have opportunities to develop in several arrays. But the diverged efforts do not produce effective outcomes. Focused energy on expertise field better fits development path. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) When an Influential Entrepreneur reached the level of solo entrepreneurship with individual business organization, the ability to focus on business enactment emerged as crucial.

‘I have limited amount of energy and attention, and I have to focus on specific field to drive the development of business.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘The initial establishment of business may be figuring progress path while making progress, while later when we have a clear idea about market, our vision is narrowed towards specific field of development. And the development path is identified, which allows investments and enables more collaborations.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

The importance of timing as in schedule and plan for development is as well raised by all interviewees.

'I make specific plans and budget controls for the next project, and the rest is all on execution.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'Plans for the next few years is discussed and drafted in detail to direct the path of development. And when we review the plan to examine outcomes, most of them are on the right track.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'Plans are not intended to be too much into detail, but rather as a guideline, a review list for you to examine progress.' (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

Another important principle of being an Influential is on the maintaining an attitude of value proposition correctness. Unlike the majority of online followers, Influential feels higher sense of responsibility towards words, actions, and followers, due to the superior influence power. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential choose to selectively disclosive lifestyle and attitudes to avoid controversial issue. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Even when being in a tough situation, Influential choose to display an attitude of positivity and enthusiasm to produce inspiration and motivation. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Influential Entrepreneurs are business oriented for the sense of marketing. Regardless of the activities in crafted display of figures and contents, or intentional share of knowledge, Influential Entrepreneurs display marketing oriented activities from an early stage in a continuous session.

'I update posts on the travel experience as I travel and photo shoot around, which makes it like live witnessing a travel as it goes.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

As for the controversial issues, the attitude and action from Influential varies from case to case. Influential regards '*haters*' or judgmental followers as inevitable. Ignoring of '*haters*' is frequently used. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) For those who crosses boundary of law enforcement, like jeopardizing intellectual right or defamation, most Influential Entrepreneurs appeal to the law for justice. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The prompt clarification online to the public is deemed effective by some Influential Entrepreneurs as well, due to the concern in public image. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

5.1.3 *Development*

As this study concentrates on the business activities as Influential with their customers, many terms that refer to both parties are used interchangeably to smooth the communication. Influential Entrepreneurs mostly rejects the hierarchical evaluation by referring to customers as fans, friends, and followers. In this section, the findings will follow the gesture, but the profit-oriented nature implies the role as customers, which will be emphasized throughout the study.

Two interviewed Influential Entrepreneurs have established business organizations to formally conduct Influential business. The type of organization is displayed as in company for E-commerce and Influential agency (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017), and individual working studio with assistants and editors. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017). One interviewee as partial Influential Entrepreneur choose to contract to photography studio, titled as photographer and model. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Another partial Influential Entrepreneur collaborate with corporates for marginal income. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

- ***Reasons, Connections, and Partners***

Some Influential would not acknowledge the identity as entrepreneur, for that the income is not dependent on the profitability as Influential. Hence, establishment of formal business organization is not necessary. In this stage, Influential choose to collaborate with corporates and organizations for endorsements and posting advertorials. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The initial intention for contracting to photography studio is for taxation, as well as cost saving as in business resources connection. As Influential is not completely financial dependent on online activities, the connections are mostly casually established. The concentration of business activities is offline rather than online. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘By signing a contract to studio, I have more time to myself, to learn skillsets, gain professional experiences and connections.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Then working studio is established for concentration on content production, development of core competency, and cost saving as in outsourcing of non-core activities. Working studio is small, highly efficient, and by outsourcing non-business functionalities, the business keeps core competency. The studio owner positioned

himself as Influential Entrepreneur with persona figure, who has accumulated business connections from early stages in media industry and later as individual Influential Entrepreneur. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

According to Abby (discussion 27.12.2017), as for formal founding of Influential company and setting up E-commerce, the reasons, professional connections, and partners are more complex. Influential Entrepreneur starts with sharing aesthetically edited photos and posts on Weibo, Douban, and other social media platforms. With the accumulation of popularity and escalation of professional skills, corporate brands approach to file collaborations. Then in a certain stage when she cannot manage working load, it is time to officially transfer into Entrepreneurs with a remark in setting up Influential brand in E-commerce and co-founding Influential company with two other founders. Schedule for development path and business orientation is presented from an early stage. The company is intensively constituted with less than twenty employees as in experienced experts, and the functionality is highly diversified and efficient. For example, the editorial team is hired from a big advertisement company, and the team functions as content planner & editor, and public relationship managements in advertisement. The company did not accept investments from partners at first, although many offers the opportunity. With the clear shaping of business orientation towards incubating Influential, agency issue and E-business, the company starts to intentionally introduce investments. *‘Although we are close to investment, we don’t lack money, and we don’t rush to money.’* In this stage, investment is moderated with business orientation to better fit the overall plan of development. The professional connections and business connections are mostly pulled and maintained from previous working experience in advertisement company by co-founders and employees. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

- ***Cost as being an Influential Entrepreneur***

Being an Influential Entrepreneur is perceived as fabulous, life-adventuresome, and relaxing. While the reality may not function as it seems to be. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The input as in time, efforts, and connection of business sponsorship are beyond expectations of the public.

‘I hardly sleep in the initial stage of entrepreneurship.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘People may think you are ideal and relaxing, enjoying life as travel photographer. In fact, hardly do they know about the heavy equipments I have to carry, about the hard work I put in working, and about the crafting of professional skills.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘In this month, the days I spend at home after work are less than ten days, and for the rest, I was either on business trip, or heading to the other business events.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Hiring expert team is emphasized on the importance by all interviewees, especially for the quick developing stage of business. In Chapter 2.1.3.2 and Chapter 4.1, the discussion on the polished authenticity refers to the editing by Influential in person or by expert team.

‘In the beginning it was Ok. The workload is manageable and I got leisure time to really enjoy the moment and edit posts. Later it was hard and exhausted. There was not much time and resources, like the funding is usually a problem to sustain the operation of business if you solely depend on Influential as a career. Contracting as a live-streaming host provides fixed income, though the input as in efforts and time is not quite proportional. I was operating accounts on five different platforms and two online shops. It was the starting period of time, and I don’t quite understand how I manage to operate on such low income and high cost. Now it’s much better. Not just because I’ve consolidated social accounts to three, also for that I’ve hired expert team to operate the account. My job responsibilities are primarily focused on supervising, strategy design, and as symbolic presence.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

In theory, once there emerged professional editing marks, or the customers feel that they are purposefully targeted for profit exaction, the intimate relationship is at risks. In reality, leakage of hiring of expert team is never classified as a major risk. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Hiring personal assistants is a common saying for hiring professional editor, as the assistants may refer to individual editor or an expert team depends on the scale of Influential. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) With the scaling-up of business, helpful hand is necessary for efficient operation, which is almost a common sense. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Work posted by assistant is occasionally mentioned about, but never really raises huge attention. Meanwhile, the job is personally supervised and revised by Influential Entrepreneurs in person to guarantee authenticity and conveying of idea, which almost equals to the production of Influential

Entrepreneurs. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The situation is in many ways similar to outsourcing of routine work while keeping core competence at hand. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Hiring expert team reduces time cost and increases efficiency. A professional editor offers innovative ideas and introduces skillful editing job, which elevates the visual quality of production under the Influential. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) This is in line with theoretical findings of better textual and visual stimulation adds to Influentials' competitive edges to allocate customer attention. (Dittmar 2007, 58; Ryan & Bernard 2003, 85-109; Senft 2008)

- ***Revenue Channels as Influential Entrepreneurs***

Unlike the general assumptions of making marginal income based on advertorials from corporates, there are several channels for Influential Entrepreneurs to realize the monetary return on the popularity and emotional attachments from customers. Some Influential Entrepreneurs would like to refer to themselves as '*we media*' rather than '*micro-celebrity*', to emphasize on the production of contents rather than persona management. However, the underlying business orientation on commoditization of lifestyle and advertorials linking to personal characteristics reveals the similar nature as in Influential Entrepreneurs. The economic return is extracted from the business-oriented linkage with customers, regardless of the categorization of Influential Entrepreneurs or '*we media*'. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

A synthesis of revenue channels as Influential Entrepreneurs is presented below. (See Table 6.)

Type of revenue channel	Content of activity
Settle on social media platform or news platform	Influential settle and collaborate with online social media platform to write column or produce contents, salaried by popularity of article and reading frequency.
Advertorials	Collaborate with corporates, brands, and institutions to endorse products with delicately edited posts, in exchange for endorsement fee or sponsorship
Public Relationship	Attend PR events, or post PR articles as endorsement.
Brand sponsorship	Long-term collaboration with brands to profoundly endorse the item in multiple perspectives.
E-commerce	Set up e-commerce to integrate the recommendation and endorsement with purchasing activities.
Compensated consulting activities	For those who can provide professional consulting service, many social media platforms have enabled such service.
Invited lectures and training program	For those who are capable to give lectures and training programs.
Publish books	For those who write books, this will bring back copyright royalty.
Acquisition of account	For those who possess extraordinary skills as managing Influential business, corporate may acquire the target account or contract the Influential.
Offline events	Organize online customers to participant offline events, and pull business sponsorship from corporates.
Others	Photography incomes as photographer, or other offline jobs apart from Influential.

Table 7 A synthesis of revenue channels as Influential Entrepreneurs

Some may argue that the incomes as Influential is marginal, the number is quite beyond expectations de facto. Abby presented in her own case that as an Influential company that is officially established less than one year, the advertisement income is about RMB 15 million (equals Euro 1.92 million), the income from E-commerce is about RMB 40 million (equals Euro 5.13 million), which is approximately RMB 3

million to 4 million (Euro 380 thousand to 510 thousand) per month. Although the scale is not remarkable comparing to many E-commerce shops on Taobao, the statistic is quite satisfying among Influential Entrepreneurs who also operate E-commerce. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Actually, Influential Entrepreneurs display a mix of revenue generation approach rather than single approach. For example, writing books, writing columns, and posting advertorials can be interchangeably conducted, and the cost of switching is not as high. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Some brands choose to offer products sponsorship rather than cash return, namely outfits company would provide clothes for Influential in exchange for advertorials. This functions as a markup for daily cost, which regularly happens to Influential Entrepreneurs in early stages. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Interactions within the business structure***

The business organization as Influential company is flat hierarchical rather than traditionally positioned. As most employees are hired from a professional advertisement company, the company culture and regulations follow the gesture. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘We organize brainstorming a lot. Everyone is a student, and a teacher. Every week we have a seminar to share knowledge and experience, discuss topics, and learn from each other. The primary direction is to learn new knowledge, retrieve information, pull connections together, and figure the upcoming development path, for example, in which field shall we focus.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Apart from discussions and brainstorming, employees are multi-tasking experts, and founders would like to encourage deep communication of expertise through organizing team building activities. On general level, the company is small but highly collaborative, efficient, and interactive. It is positioned as an active learning environment for all participants. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘The core competency is affiliated with Influential image, but the interactions behind the curtain is as much important.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

For those who own working studio, or contracted to studio, the negotiating power for business connections is not as much positioned. Outsourcing non-core activities would help in increasing efficiency and saving cost. At this stage, entrepreneurial vision is not as clearly figured out, and management of social connections is not the core of business. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

5.2 Customer Engagement Approaches

As it is scrutinized in theoretical review, that Influential Entrepreneurs rely on Customer Engagement Approaches as business strategies. CE approaches mostly refer to non-transactional activities developed between Influential and the recipients, namely emotional attachment, perceived interconnectedness, and commercial intimacy. This section will summarize the findings and discussions on CE approaches from interview to examine the effectiveness of theoretical reviews. In this section, CE approaches are elaborated from contextual factors, motivations, actions, and participants. The empirical findings regarding Customer Engagement approaches are synthesized as follows. (See Figure 16)

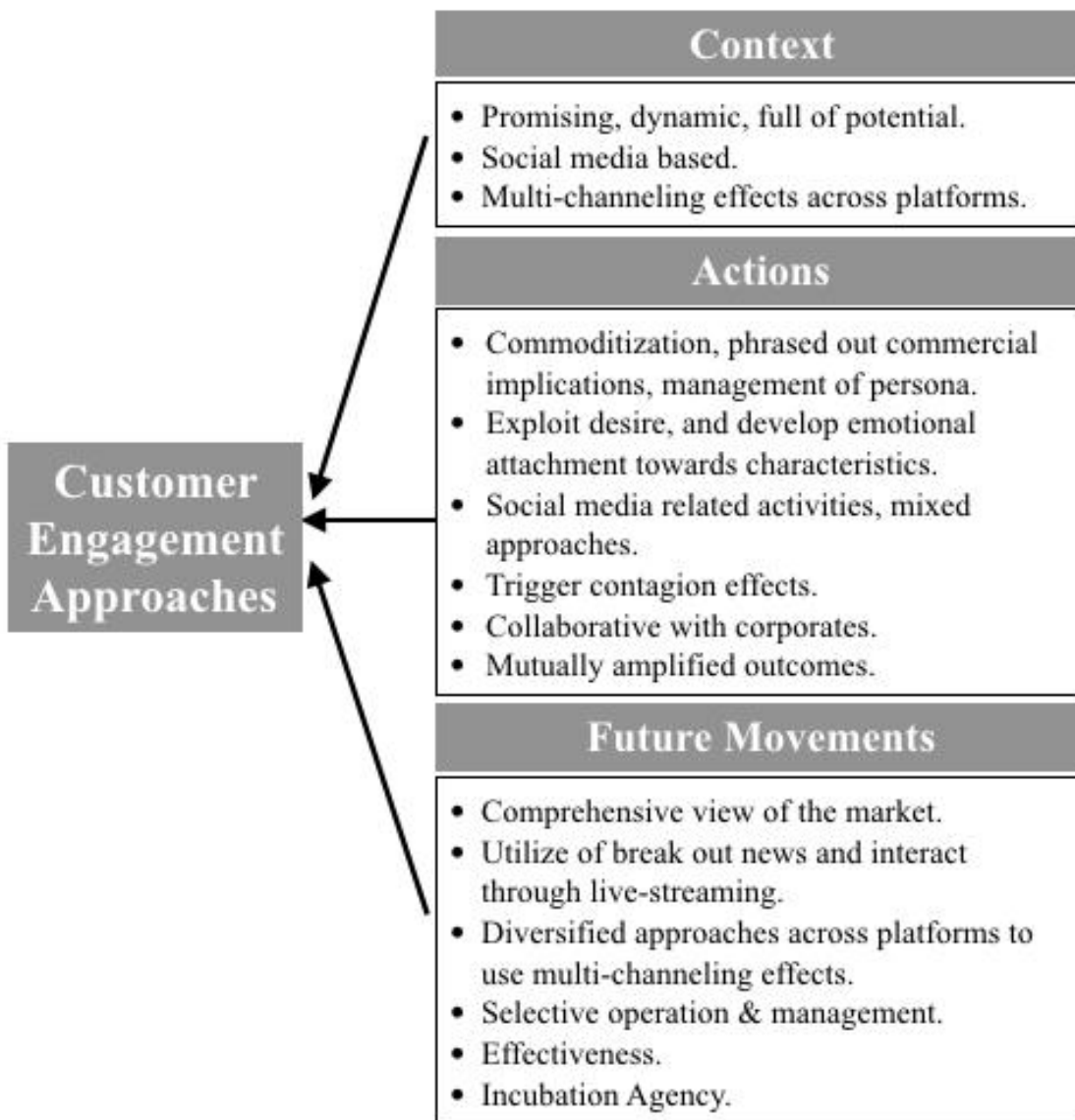


Figure 16 Synthesis of empirical findings regarding Customer Engagement approaches.

5.2.1 *Contextual factors*

The Internet is on a fast path of development, when the situation is considered from social media perspective, the changes and developments are even faster. That partially determines that Influential do not pre-set business expectations, as the situation changes too fast and pre-installation of goals does not make sense. Everyone is eligible to make post online, on such a flat hierarchical platform, which makes the production of content in variety. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘The environment changes too fast, that I prefer to learn and make adaptations accordingly.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘Regardless of the scale of Influence, everyone can establish a self-identity.’ (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

- ***Historical reasons, resources, competitions, and players.***

The business environment of Influential Entrepreneurs is once considered as marginal and under the radar. (Abidin 2016) Influential Entrepreneurs confirms such that when they did not expect big economic returns when they started bloggings and interactions on social media platforms. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

With the emergence and declination of different social media platforms, the style of interaction and communicational orientation varies across social media platforms. For example, MSN space announces complete discontinuation of all services, then Wordpress takes place. The market of Weibo was once dominated by Renren.com (equivalent version of Facebook in China), then Weibo soon made the presence and became market leader. With the rise of Wechat from Tencent corporation, the market share of Weibo is eroded. Wechat focused on the integration of multiple functionalities, like articles sharing, instant videos, posts, public accounts, Micro E-commerce, payment methods, and mini programs. Meanwhile, Wechat narrows the core function as in communication for niche markets and groups of people. The convenience and smooth integration of functionalities in Wechat quickly took a share of cake from Weibo, not

only in the perspective of customer base, but also in the perspective of Influential Entrepreneurs.

The market is highly homogeneous, which means that the competition is fierce, while the customer base is limited. Customers oriented towards different goals of communications are attached to different platforms. Two of the interviewees operate on Wechat and Weibo platforms simultaneously to utilize the multi-channeling effects on different platforms. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) The users of Wechat are exponentially increasing, while the opening rate of top articles pushed by public account is decreasing. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'The opening rate of push articles decides whether people would like to know your stuff.'

The average opening rate of top article on Wechat is less than 0.5%, which means less than 5 people open the push articles among 1000 followers.

'The opening rate of our push articles is more than 5%, sometimes the statistic reaches 10% at peak seasons, which is remarkably good for Influentials on average.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Now that the channeling effects have segmented the market, customers are diverged into several social media platforms. To take advantages of the channeling effects on various platforms is a crucial point for operating Influential business. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Carl (discussion 28.12.2017) took a different approach by operating two public accounts on Wechat platform, aiming at different contents focus: one is for general Influential business for updating fictions, books, lifestyle recommendations, and news comments, while the other is primarily focused on lifestyle introduction and recommendation. Although the second one seems more private and personally oriented. The owner admitted that both accounts are collaborating with other parties and conducting endorsements in exchange for advertisement fee.

Customer would crave tangible value in exchange for business-oriented participation towards corporate account online, but for Influential Entrepreneurs who monetize on the popularity and present themselves as close friend, the dynamic changes. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) Corporate would like to take advantages of the popularity of Influential Entrepreneurs by collaborating with the later with matching characteristics. The collaboration with Influential on social media platforms is in parallel with traditional mass marketing. (Abidin 2016; Abidin &

Thompson 2012, 467-477) Besides, the role of middle man emerges to deliver service as in traineeship, incubation, resources collaboration, and agency. For some Influential, the agency and incubation job is incorporated as one part of business orientations. (Abidin 2016; Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The purpose is to establish a buffering cushion between business resources and Influential. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘Corporates, in many terms, are pushing Influential to produce qualified goods. We are able to negotiate with corporates for collaboration, sign contracts with Influential and supervise their work, and incubate them to maturity. This functions as a close ecology for Influential. Contracted Influential are able to focus on competitive advantages and produce qualified contents and ideas.’
(Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

- ***Strategic adaption towards contextual changes***

The future on Influential Entrepreneurship is diversified while integrated. For social media platforms, integration of too much functionalities will spare the orientation of platform, which thusly dilutes the competitive edges. While too much concentration on one purpose, without development of related function will waste customer base.

More Influential Entrepreneurs are making a presence on Wechat platform, due to the convenience and integration of multiple functionalities without too much complexity, especially the integration of payment method and E-commerce. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The deep communicational relationship between users provides good contagion effects for marketing. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Apart from followers of public accounts, the opening rate of article is partially contributed from non-followers who accidentally read the reposted articles in Moments (Time-lined public post function for Wechat users). Consequently, the Influential Entrepreneurs are not only actively pursuing opening rate by shaping attractive titles for articles, but also seeking potential followers increase and exposure rate by deliberating contents that trigger reposting and sharing in Moments. The entry level movement is to directly trigger reposting with tangible rewards or temporary offerings. While the higher level strategy is to craft contents that seize the emotions of readers, which brings out empathetic value and causes contagious sharing spontaneously. Temporary simulation matters in increasing follower base, but the establishment of market share as in loyal followers matter more. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

The movement of Influential Entrepreneurs can be tracked and predicted, for that they follow the current of customers. Influential Entrepreneurs prefer social media platforms where users are highly motivated and active. The high rate of active users determines the intensity between platform and user, which retains Influential. The retention of Influential and the retention of users mutually amplifies each other for social media platform. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'I have moved across several platforms, namely Douban, Renren, MSN space, etc., mostly with the movement of followers. If the platform is no longer popular, there is no use for me to stay.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Apart from the situation of social media platform, the core competency of Influential Entrepreneur is internalized by Influential, as in the capability to attract people with competitive advantages, production of work content, and professionalism. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential Entrepreneur choose to diversify on the portfolio on different platforms to adapt to communicational norms. Accordingly, the management of followers, editorial tactics, and strategies are adjusted towards followers on different platforms. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

5.2.2 *Motivations*

- ***Goals***

The primary goal as an Influential Entrepreneur is to share mundane life, share information on beneficial products and services, and display of professional life. Namely, fashion Influential presents outfits arrangements and suggestions according to occasions, location, and time, and lifestyle Influential arrange posts with emphasis on poised, elegant, and attainable life products. Such recommendations are mostly commercially supported under an endorsement contract, while some are purely out of personal interest. In some case, Influential would share the details of working as disclosure of professional life, which satisfy Influential need to share and attract attention as well as satisfy the followers' desire to snoop. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential convey the individual attitude, display idealized lifestyle, and seek empathy among followers via edited photos and texts. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I would like to share the products I like, and I put it in our E-shop, which makes it easier for follower to buy.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Influential commonly mixed the focus on life and work, as in blurring the boundary in between. In other words, they are pursuing a new work and life style through conducting Influential Entrepreneurship.

'I work with team, and I enjoy life with them as well. For example, last month we spent a team vacation in a nature reserve, in the mean time we held activities sponsored by a Japanese brand of lifestyle products. Besides, we endorsed a perfume brand from Europe. The combination of products and natural reserve inspires great ideas and produce many materials to work on.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'The rise of social media has opened a new door for Influential, who are allowed to choose from multiple professional opportunities. I'm glad to see that many friends are now able to pick a favorite profession.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The blurring of boundary between work and life, is specifically crucial for Influential who conduct Entrepreneurship.

'I feel exhausted sometime, because people may think that Influential is relaxed and life-enjoying. People assume that you finish the articles in an hour and spent the rest of the day like Saturday. In fact, life for me is like Wednesday everyday, which means you don't remember last time when you had a vacation, and you have no idea when the next weekends will arrive. I hold the belief to myself and encourage myself to focus on core working contents. Sometimes I'm too tired and out of inspiration, I reward myself a holiday abroad.' (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

Despite the benefits of broadcasting to wider and vaster audience of Influential ideas, attitudes, and lifestyle. Influential pursue the advancement of professional skills in practice. The display of contents and posts is through professionally edited visual and textual arrangement. The professional editorial skills in photo and texts constitute parts of competitive advantages as Influential. Consequently, through communication with followers and other professionals online, Influential Entrepreneur realize the advancement of professional knowledge and skills. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

- **Outcomes**

Even if Influential weaken the crave towards economic returns, the financial outcome turns out to be remarkable. Abby reveals that the advertisement income for 2017 is RMB 15 million, and the E-commerce income is RMB 40 million for the whole year. (discussion 27.12.2017) Apart from sales income from E-commerce and advertorials. The revenue channels for Influential Entrepreneurs are diversified and sufficient, enough to support life as Influential. Namely, copyright royalty income, consulting fee, etc. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential emphasize that the income is not an inseparable part for Influential activities, hence they regard advertorials as compensational income, but not as necessary. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Regardless of the attitude towards economic return, the scale of income is attractive enough to sustain career as Influential.

The increase in followers brings popularity, emotional companionship, economic return, and amplified communication effects for Influential. The increase of followers and sharing activities statistics directly reflect the popularity of Influential Entrepreneurs. In the review, it is scrutinized that Influential Entrepreneur monetizes on the popularity from followers. Consequently, the triggering issues that causes increase in followers and popularity will be encouraged by Influential Entrepreneurs to promote potential economic return.

The rise in professional skills, popularity, and followers attracts business-oriented collaborations. When Influential focus on the expertise field to enhance the personal expert skills, the popularity is naturally promoted. Then when the time arrives, corporate business collaborations approach Influential, which changes the previous dynamic as Influential seeking collaborations from corporates. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) For the initial stage, the collaboration might be collaborative-oriented to provide products as reward. But when the Influential becomes more sophisticated, the pay levels up to cash and the price is more worthy. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Many corporate collaborations aim at endorsing products or services, and offers prizes in endorsed products for collaborative Influential Entrepreneur to provide a lucky lottery for followers. Such activities in return motivates increase in followers with tangible value and brand value, which mutually benefits Influential Entrepreneur. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) Due to the mutual amplification effects from corporate collaboration, Influential Entrepreneurs are quite discreet in choosing the suitable brand to collaborate. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I only collaborate with brands from 'Top 500', and before signing the contract. I would request a sample to try and ensure the credibility. I would like to be responsible to my followers.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'I would like to keep the consistence in characteristics with the endorsement I made. Price is not the most important determinant.' (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I know what my followers like, as I grow up as ordinary as them. I would like to give them what they like and what they want to see in me.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The synchronicity in characteristics and the trustworthiness of brand are the most important determinants apart from price of endorsement contract to decide whether the Influential would accept the contract or not. After all, Influential Entrepreneurs are aware that substitutability in production of contents is quite high, comparing with that of personal characteristics, which is hard to copy. Attractions to personal characteristics as Influential develops profound interconnectedness with followers. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Hence the maintenance of consistence in personal characteristics and credibility is a key point for Influential Entrepreneur to sustain the operation of business. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

People may once question that if followers are clear that they are being monetized by Influential Entrepreneurs for economic return, or as in other words, *'being used.'* Influential Entrepreneurs claims that the products and services that they offer are of practical value towards followers. Besides, they have previously identified the credibility of endorsed package. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential argues that, followers are aware of the profit implications within the communications, like the endorsed products by Influential would not be of free offering. However, they are still willing to communicate, interact and trust endorsements and recommendations from Influential, because they are attached to the personal characteristics of Influential, and they trust the long-term credibility behind the offering.

'Because I know what they want, and I make up what they want, like a dream. I give them what they like. Life is desperate, people need something to dream of.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Competitive advantages.***

To attain competitive advantages as a professional Influential is an alluring character for sustaining Influential business. The enhancement in competitive advantages is perceived individually from different Influential Entrepreneurs, according to their field of expertise, business orientation, and personal characteristics, etc. However, there are several pursuits in competitive advantages that generally allure Influential to seek.

The skills in visual and textual editorials, arrangement of visual and textual contents, and professional appreciation of beauty is without doubt the most useful competitive advantages in Influential class 101.

'Photoshop is a competitive advantage.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'Photos are edited, life is crafted. That displays my taste, also my appreciation of life.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Through deliberate interaction with followers and other professionals, the editing skills in photos and texts are naturally advanced.

Influential Entrepreneurs are recognized for competitive advantages in production and communicating speed of information. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

'For break-out of news, reporters might be writing news report, and Influential would already be making post on primary news resource.' (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

Apart from hardware installation as in editing tactics, many soft tactics as in seizing the flow of followers are specifically identified as competitive advantages in Customer Engagement Approaches. Influential considerately establish a stimulating lifestyle that appeals to followers' taste. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) For example, title attracts followers to read the content, but the content ensures the retention of followers and stimulate the popularity. The emotional constitution of title and contents is supposed to seize two things from followers, the emotion, and the moments. To seize the emotion of followers means to cause empathy and emotional movement in followers, which will resonate in feelings and cause deep psychological attachments. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) By seizing the moment, Influential are all promptly responsive towards hot topics, news, information, and any instant incidents. To efficiently follow the trend of topic and produce contents to exploit the desire of discussion and attention marks topic sensitivity as an Influential, which determines whether Influential could utilize the heat of topic to empower themselves. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential who are from ordinary group understand the need of ordinary

people, hence the ability to seize the emotion and moment are both naturally internalized and learnt. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The understanding of followers' desire and demand could not completely describe the competitive advantages of Influential in knowledge perspective. Combining innate knowledge and acquired engagement skills, Influential attain a more comprehensive view of the market, comparing to the followers and other non-Influential. In literature review, Influential stands out as information hubs in social networks. (Abidin 2016, 1-16; Chae 2017, 371; Iyengar et al. 2011, 195, 209-211) Through deliberate engagement with the audience, Influential acquire the knowledge of know-how, understand the trend of market, and provide followers with their pursuit, so as to sustain operation of Influential business.

Influential Entrepreneurs realize that information centralities are important in constructing CE approaches, and the external links as in resources and background are as much important.

'One of my friends, who used to be Influential, has been learning and social networking for a long period of time. Now her income has tripled and the title changed into Actor.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Perhaps this case is not quite common in understand the effects of social networks and backgrounds in competitive advantages. However, this implies that professional connections enable people with more opportunities to choose from.

5.2.3 *Action*

- ***Disposal resources and variables***

Influential gather resources at disposal to design and conduct Customer Engagement Approaches, while many variables may project a shadow on the progress of CE approaches. Such dynamics may in return triggers the reactions from Influential to strengthen the effects, or to phrase out the reverse affect, according to the direction of dynamic.

Influential innately owns resources to design and enact CE approaches, namely, professional visual and textual editorial skills and tactics (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017), capability to cultivate emotional connection and exploit followers' desire to communicate (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017), and knowledge of

know-how (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017). Business and social connections from previous working experience and social networks are quite useful in establishing efficiently functioning approaches, for that the connections will work as hubs to guarantee the effective business orientation. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘One of the co-founder was once working in advertisements and accumulated sufficient working experience, now she is responsible for business collaborations. Our editor left from a famous fashion magazine, and now she is responsible for content generation and editing.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Corporate support, are not mandatory for Influential Entrepreneurs to conduct CE approaches. However, Influential in many ways are more motivated when the engagement is supported by corporate collaborations. Because such collaboration will benefit Influential Entrepreneurs, followers, and corporates. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘With or without corporate collaboration, I will still manage career as an Influential, make posts, and have a good time with followers.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The generation of ideas is a combination of aforementioned resources at disposal, together with external factors, like news, topics on heat, and attractive themes. A successful Influential Entrepreneur would be a master in delivering emotional value and tangible value at the same time, utilizing a mix of factors to support business sustainability. In this case, many issues can be added in the portfolio, even like controversial issues, and acute social instances. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘The bottom line is, don’t cross the boundary of moral correctness.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

To seize the moment, which means to take a ride of social news so as to exploit the desire of the audience in communicating on hot topics, is a key ability for Influential to master. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) To view this ability from another perspective, Influential Entrepreneurs are supposed to adapt the approaches according to the trend of public opinion. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Activities and Implications.***

The virtual and digital activities by Influential Entrepreneurs are varied depends on Influential, target followers and customers, contextual factors, and disposal resources. The online digital activities are mostly in the shape of interaction style and communication regulations by social media platforms. Hence, despite the various approaches strategies detected from different Influential Entrepreneurs, there are general aligned activities that can be classified as typical actions operated by Influential Entrepreneurs. (See Table 8 & Table 9) Although the filtering and evaluation criteria is generated based on Weibo, the activities are not exclusive to Weibo platform, but rather intended to enact across all social media platforms, like Douban, Wechat, Qiongyou, QQzone and many more. The activities listed are delivered with different initiatives, and detailed examples are raised to better understand the action per se. To summarize the table contents, the first two activities of raising discussable topics and posting appealing contents are aiming at creating hypes and attracting people. For the second and third activities in reposting and private talks, Influential Entrepreneurs are aiming at creating engagement opportunities and developing intimacy. Advertorials and Lottery activities are mostly combined together to convey value endorsed goods and enhance engagement under commercial purpose. Lastly, offline events are organized as supplementary activities to enhance intimacy and add value to the authenticity of Influential.

No.	Description of activities	Implications	Example
1	Raising discussable topics on hot news, topics, controversial issues, sense of identity triggering, idea solicitation, companionship craving, via multiple methods, like forum, social media, live streaming, etc.	To raise communication hypes with discussion heat, to accumulate comments, reposts, and likes, which makes it hot contents. Some posts will be displayed on the board of hot search index. This method aims at increasing exposure rate, engagement opportunities, and popularity of Influential.	<p>a. 'I would be wiser if I were that girl on the news, what would you do?' (hot news+ idea solicitation+ discussable topics.)</p> <p>b. 'I was damaged in the disaster, yet I stand up, hug you all for warm support. I want to read about your warm stories please.' (companionship craving, topics, idea solicitation)</p>
2	Post of Appealing titles and alluring contents (including mundane life, professional contents, exclusive disclosure of normally-inaccessible information, latest information and news. This normally displays management of persona and sustaining of characteristics.	Appealing title is to attract people to open your article, and content determines if people would stay, follow, and repost. Both intend to seize the emotion and moments of the audience. It's usually combined with advertorials. Insertion of product links is commonly seen, which optimize the purchasing progress. Some Influential will remind or invite readers to follow for upcoming updates.	<p>a. 'I meet xx (celebrity) on events scene, what a surprise, she is nice and energetic outside the camera.' Combined with photos. (exclusive disclosure+ persona display)</p> <p>b. 'In summer this best fit my mood, fresh and relaxing with multiple functions, I'll post the link in the comments.' (business links+ emotion seizing +information providing)</p>
3	Repost comments of followers with high value in exposure. Comment on follower	The activities trigger more engagement opportunities, increase the possibilities of public exposure, and convey the appreciation emotions of Influential Entrepreneurs towards the contribution of audience.	<p>a. Follower comment: 'I am exactly like you in every aspect, and I hesitate to make a move.' Influential: 'Be proud of yourself and be strong.' +comment. (engagement+ appreciation)</p> <p>b. Follower comment: 'I know the inside story as...' Influential: Repost. (exposure+ engagement)</p>

Table 8 Synthesis of Customer Engagement Activities by Influential Entrepreneurs. (1/2)

No.	Description of activities	Implications	Example
4	Private messages and direct messages.	Pure private messages or direct messages is rarely used. Most Influential utilize the method in another way, to reply private message with potential interactive value, screen-shot the session, phrase out the profile of message sender and post it to trigger discussion hype. The effects in information is in line with No.1. Also it shows that Influential are intimately connected with followers.	'A follower sent me his story, I was moved and touched, and he wants me to post it and let other followers tell him if his action was worthy or not. His name is phrased out. Please, leave your suggestions for him to help someone in desperate.' + screenshots of talk sessions. (display of intimacy+ interactive value+ thoughtful privacy concern for followers)
5	Advertorials like corporate supported events, integrated advertisement with articles, posts and other related contents.	Advertorials aim at conveying the value of endorsed packages to the audience without stimulate antipathy, which is roused by inauthentic connotations and commercial behaviors. It is usually linked with corporate sponsored lottery.	'This phone was highly integrated with multiple functions, high definition of display, fast responsive speed, and quick access to all applications. Photography was never this easy. I can be a photographer, you can, too. Comment your signature post for photograph, tag three friends, and repost, I'll make a lucky draw on one free phone from you all. I'll post the results a week later. Remember to check!' (Advertorials+ integrated with persona figure+ lottery)
6	Lottery activities for reposts, comments and tags, which is mostly supported by corporate endorsement collaborations, and sometimes self-supported.	In the form of lottery of certain reward from the users group who repost, comment with certain contents, tag friends, aiming at information spreading, establishing emotional connection, and increasing exposure rate, respectively. Also, lottery requests followers to return for lottery results, which enhanced the engagement progress.	'I was spotted by followers in xx(location) when we were having lunch. We had a wonderful talk. Xxx (@+follower name to tag) is so sweet. I am so grateful to meet you here.' (offline casual spot + interactive intimacy+ management of persona in authenticity and credibility)
7	Offline events, which is of complementary value towards online engagements.	Offline events are organized and operated in varies forms, like corporate sponsored offline events, meet-ups, casual spot of Influential with sneak-peek photos or selfie. Offline events add to the authenticity and credibility of Influential, contribute to the interactive intimacy.	

Table 9 Synthesis of Customer Engagement Activities by Influential Entrepreneurs. (2/2)

The activities listed above display the virtual actions and the hidden implications by Influential Entrepreneurs. All activities are varied and individualized according to personal characteristics, business orientations, and contextual factors. Influential Entrepreneurs often take a mix of activities to conduct CE approaches, for multi-tasking purpose. For example, the actions in *'Advertorials'* and *'Lottery'* are commonly combined, and the activities of *'Repost, comment, likes'* is often integrated together with other movements (e.g. Private messages.). (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

The contents and styles are designed according to different target group, and are regulated by social media platforms. Some social media platforms like Weibo charges premium price for Influential with need to filter effective and active followers to connect, and Influential have to accept the offer, for that they are reliant on the platform. *'The cost is high, but inevitable.'* (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Live streaming raises as an important communicational method for Influential to communicate with followers, and the instant updates of comments enables instant interaction. Some Influential create followers group for occasional interactions. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

There are certain principles for enactment of activities, as acquired by Influentials from practical experience. The posts of contents and communication styles are supposed to align with the display of persona figures of Influential Entrepreneurs to show consistence and authenticity. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Figure of interactivities and friendliness is warmly welcomed to phrase out the underlying business orientations. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

'We make recommendations, rather than promoting sales.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

'The followers are like my friends, not customers.' (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

The crafted contents and posts are supposed to raise and seize the emotion of people. The title decides if followers would open the post, and the contents determines if they are resonated enough to repost and make purchase. The identification of emotional value among followers is crucial to the effectiveness of CE approaches. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Influential Entrepreneurs concentrate on two aspects when they produce consumable contents: what do I want, and what `do followers want to listen? Even for the contents with sufficient scientific knowledge, the style of writing is supposed to be intriguing and relaxing for followers to read. The reading experience is

expected to provide visual effects like image towards followers. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Hence, Influential Entrepreneurs are in the position to learn and understand what followers demand, and provide them with exact package of offerings. The essence of CE approaches is to exploit the desire of customers in the pursuit of similar lifestyle of Influential. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The more exploitative points and interesting views contains in the topic, the more possible that the article reaches far away. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) The content of article is supposed to touch the point of readers and stimulate sharing activities. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Lastly, to phrase out the business orientations, title is supposed to present useful information for readers, and erasing out the information of specific brand. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘They (followers) are aware that every journey of me is not as simple as it is displayed in the photos, they would be even more conscious if they calculated the travel cost. But do they really care? I make up a dream for them, and they like it, this is what matters most.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘I write articles on professional plastic surgery for those who are interested, and I know that the market for plastic surgery is vast. My followers are keenly interested in such.’ (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

The endorsed products are linked with individual lifestyle of Influential Entrepreneurs, implicating that via purchasing same products, similar life can be attained. *‘I usually recommend beauty products for followers, they are mostly women, and the price is affordable.’* (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The essence is to keep consistence between endorsed products and Influential persona image. In reality, the real life as Influential Entrepreneur cost beyond the affordability of average people. But this is phrased out, and the recommendations seems trustworthy. People rarely bother to find out the truth. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

For corporate sponsored lottery and self-sponsored lottery, it is widely used, but not frequently encouraged. Influential Entrepreneurs regard lottery triggered interaction as excessive business orientations, and it weakens persona figure as individual. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

In addition, the proper rhythm of activities amplifies effects of engagement. Timing includes right interaction occasion, and making post at the appropriate time to stimulate engagement possibilities. The latter one specifically constitutes engagement schedule from Influential Entrepreneurs. For example, Influential Entrepreneurs prepare contents for events and news to seize the emotional attention and raise discussion. Issues like

holidays and scheduled events can be prepared beforehand to increase time efficiency. For break out news and events, the reactions from Influential Entrepreneurs are supposed to be prompt as well, for that the heat of news will fade away in 24 to 48 hours. The point is on the crafting of contents and presenting an existence. Contents crafting should be aligned with persona management and display of value propositions, while people will remember Influential as a constant active figure to interact if Influential are highly reactive to latest information. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) For live-streaming method of interaction, the communication is instant and live, which makes it similar to video calls. An advance notice of upcoming live-streaming events, and a choice of peak viewing hour will jointly promote the effects of live-streaming. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) For some adverse issues, timely clarification of controversial issues is elaborated as a necessity for public relations. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Some Influential Entrepreneurs choose to remain silent on controversial issues, and the ignorant public opinion causes more trouble. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I understand that we are on a public platform, people have desire to peek, and everyone is eligible to judge. Hence as a public figure, you have to accept all, good or bad. It's not big case, be calm. All the judgments are from others; I think the most important part is you understand yourself.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Aside from content productions, Influential Entrepreneurs hold different attitude towards engagement with individual characteristics. They are aware that the substitutability of content provision is high, while the substitutability of persona is low. Consequently, Influential Entrepreneurs would steer the approach by developing emotional connections with followers to sustain operation of business. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Despite the individualized characteristics, Influential Entrepreneurs are supposed to establish a correct value proposition, such as moral standard, legitimate issue, etc. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

The finish of activities enactment is not the official ending of CE approaches. The capability to learn and adjust strategy is necessary for Influential Entrepreneurs. For that the approaches require constant adjustments according to stage of development, contexts, and period of time. To learn from the feedbacks from followers and to interact with them for optimizing tactics opens another opportunity for Influential to advance on the career path. A mature Influential Entrepreneur can examine the effectiveness of

approaches from discussion and observation with followers. In this case, objectivity within customer group is thusly attained, which better facilitate Influential in learning mechanism. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

- ***Future movements***

The market of Influential Entrepreneurship was once predicted as ‘saturated’ on news, for that similar approaches and persona characteristics are active on the market. Such phenomenon causes aesthetic fatigue among the audience to some extent. But the Influential Entrepreneurs themselves are quite confident towards the future of the industry.

‘I believe that we are on the right track, when we keep running, the dawn will eventually come.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘The market is developing, yet changing, constantly. I think the most important to me is to keep personal characteristics. Don’t follow the trend too much, especially the aesthetic trend. Or you fade with the trend, and never stand out.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘I understand the market is changing, and to be what you really are is hard. But if I don’t have faith in myself, let along others.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

Influential Entrepreneurs have reached an agreement that the market is constantly changing, yet full of potential to exploit. They have proposed few steps to cope with upcoming future. The disclosure of life is no longer in total, but rather selective, due to privacy concern. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

‘I would post every detail of life online, but now the disclosure is selective. I understand people have the desire to peek. I would like to keep some private life out of the flash light.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Selectivity also exists in method of interactions for future enactment of CE approaches. Influential Entrepreneurs would prefer activities to lead followers on topic, and control the general directions of public opinion, in the public-displayed form. Methods like private messages and direct messages are used, but not frequently encouraged for the low efficiency and high cost in time and efforts. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

'I do realize one weakness as Influential, which is I am not good at scaling up. For qualitative contents, one article per day is almost the most I can write.'
(Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

Consequently, for the selectivity in contents production. The professionalism in quality matters more than quantities of contents. Besides, to filter the right topic and interesting events is necessary for Influential to enact efficient CE approach. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) To maintain professionalism equals advancement of expert skills, which leads Influential Entrepreneur towards the next stage of development. ((Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'Apart from the management of persona image, the key to success is to be a professional.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

The collaborations with corporates and other business-oriented institutions will continue, for that the corporation consists a significant part of Influential income. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) The corporates with collaborations will benefit Influential Entrepreneurs for rise of popularity, do good to corporate publicity, and tangibly benefit followers. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) Selectivity continues in this section as well, for that Influential Entrepreneurs would sustain the consistence in persona management and credibility as an Influential. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

The future development in Influential Entrepreneurship is in the integrated cultivation of Influential and related area, especially for Influential incubators and agents. In this circumstance, Influential agents and incubators act as a buffering cushion to let Influential thrive in the expertise area, functioning as professional expert focused on specific field, rather than generalist without an aim. The uniqueness in characteristics is important for followers to identify Influential, both as an individual and as a content provider. The follow-ups of hot news and information opens opportunity to increase follower scale, and the uniqueness of contents and personal characteristic decides that they are profoundly connected to Influential Entrepreneur. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) The follow-ups of news and hot topic raise discussions easily, and followers rarely notice the fading speed of news is no more than one week. Consequently, Influential Entrepreneurs who take advantages of hot topics to raise discussion would accumulate popularity easily. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

'I would position the future of Influential in micro-Influential (followers less than 100k), with more personal identity, regardless of advantages or disadvantages. Such display signatures authenticity.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

In empirical data, the utilization of multi-channeling effects on different platforms are detected from interviews. The selection and collection of data is reliant on Weibo as a primary channel, but other social media platforms and the relevant influence is considered as well. The channeling effects by other social media channels is as much affective and huge, and the effects is both acknowledged by Influential Entrepreneurs and customers. In the meantime, the cost for channeling customers through other social media platforms is relatively low, and the return on the investment is marginally remarkable. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) The disadvantages in ignoring multi-channeling effects via multiple platforms will weaken Influentials' communicating effects. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) Wechat public account is mostly mentioned as an effective channel to privately push mail articles and advertorials, and joint operation of Wechat, Weibo, Taobao and offline events is regularly utilized by Influential Entrepreneurs to expand scale of effects. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Customers may be active on one or several social media platforms, so Influential Entrepreneurs who reach out to as many channels as possible increase exposure rate, marketing strength, and interaction possibilities. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) Among all the channels, Wechat by Tencent is primarily utilized for the comprehensive coverage of users in China and thorough integration of multiple functions as in payment methods, article push mailing, shopping connections, exclusive and immediate interaction opportunities. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) Live-streaming platforms give another form of interaction to Influential and followers for instant communication. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) Live streaming platforms like popular at present, like 'Parascope' (live-streaming application on phones and PDAs), and 'Panda', 'Volcano', 'Hongdou', 'Douyu' (all are live-streaming application on phones and PDAs in China).

'If you are active on Weibo, you can be as active on Wechat, and many more. With marginal maintenance cost, much deeper connections are established with the audience. People know you better, and the reposts in moments lead to higher readings and induce more followers. Market is thusly scaled up. To take

advantages of contagion effects of social media does not equal single social media platform, but multiple channels.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

But for some ‘*micro Influential*’ with less followers, the situation might be different. On one aspect, they are not in urgent need of multi-channeling effects, and they do not feel it necessary to hire expert operational team for such activities. They would rather keep the market niche and delicate for a small group of followers. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘I don’t feel it necessary for opening a public account, and I’m not reliant on such activities to be financially independent. Weibo and occasional live-streaming is sufficient for me to interact with followers as an individual Influential.’ (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘I’m not in particular need to open public account, maybe later when the base is scaled up and there comes practical need. I might consider hiring an expert team then.’ (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

5.2.4 Participants

- ***Player roles and Interactions.***

Influential Entrepreneurs inclines to identify roles as in marketer’s perspective, but hardly do they officially acknowledge some follower in particular as ‘value co-creator’, ‘active participants’, or ‘key customers’ in academic terms. Mostly Influential Entrepreneurs reject the status evaluation of followers as customers, which is quite business oriented.

‘I talk with them, like friends, not pure customers.’ (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘They are my followers, also like friends who have known me for a long time. I share life with them.’ (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

‘I make recommendations, not aiming at sales.’ (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017)

The rejection of hierarchical status evaluation is in line with the findings from literature review. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Nevertheless, Abby (discussion 27.12.2017) admits that without doubt, followers constitute the majority part of their target market, if not the whole piece. They are the contributors of sales and business statistics, and they are the information providers of the markets and customer needs. By catering customer needs and soliciting opinions from them,

Influential Entrepreneurs gain knowledge of know-how and sustain business operations. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

'After all, normal followers are those who are closest to the market.' (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

Customers, or followers, can be recognized as part of the reasons of the production and orientations of endorsements and other consumable contents. Merely do customers ponder on the issue like, do I really need the endorsed products? Influential Entrepreneurs claim that some pursuit or desire can be created or activated in customers.

'Contents resonate with emotions, which stimulate sales. For example, Last Lipstick You Ever Need, Be That Girl You Like and Wear that Coat, and it is reflected in Conversion Rate.' (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017)

Some 'recommendations' made by the Influential Entrepreneurs are far from normal purchasing power of followers. But still the followers pay the bill, because they are not only making a purchase, but also pursuing a lifestyle that is linked to the product. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) In this case, both Influential Entrepreneurs and corporates behind the curtain are content controllers to create the desire and purchase need via linking it to the ideal and appealing type of life. (Dora, discussion 28.12.2017)

For that Influential Entrepreneurs and corporates dually control the contents for endorsement. The roles are distinguished. Influential Entrepreneurs are responsible to integrate the products into self-representations, guaranteeing the consistence in characteristics and recommendations. This is to ensure that followers would not resist the advertisements for the abrupt consolidation. Also Influential Entrepreneurs will maximize the effects of information spread and amplification of followers' heat, especially when the increase in sales reflects dividends towards Influential. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Carl, discussion 28.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) While corporates are in the position of supervising, products providing, and other collaborative activities. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017) As for the price negotiation between two parties, it is usually case-to-case dependents. Usually the one with higher bargaining power owns the rights. Sometimes it is attributed to the capability of Influential agents. (Beth, discussion 27.12.2017)

Influential Agency, though merely mentioned on the stage, acts actively as a key role that links Influential Entrepreneurs with business resources and connections. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) Some Influential Entrepreneurs

choose not to hire agents as attorneys, for that they possess sufficient business connections to exploit. (Carl, discussion 28.12.2017) By all means, agents or self-represented Influential, act as a hub to connect all disposal resources and players in this dynamic. They are requested to hold negotiating skills, management tactics, and comprehensive knowledge and know-how. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017) All the interviewees emphasize on the timing as a major determinate in the interactions with players. Timing addresses prompt movements and reactions on the right time. For example, to react timely to the breaking news, to response properly to corporate clients and customers, to ‘co-act’ on the right time slot with other Influential so as to display effective engagement, and to seize the emotions and the timely opportunity when the chance is appropriate, etc.

- ***Feedbacks***

The feedbacks from customers are not positioned as key research objective in this study, but rather as market reflection to examine the agility and effectiveness of CE approaches from the other side of the dynamism. All the interviewees as followers display high frequency habit of using Weibo, together with Wechat, QQzone (a social media platform by Tencent Inc.), and etc. Utilizations of friends’ interactions, entertaining, checking up updates from Influentials are mostly mentioned as frequent activities. The intentional interactions with Influentials are not as frequently mentioned as Influential Entrepreneurs assume.

The general perception of Influential Entrepreneurs is various, depending on the individual. Impressions like frivolity, entertaining, fake, funny, luxury-seeking, market-oriented, self-explaining, special, professional, and wise, are tagging Influential in a mix. Marketing skills as in endorsing products, expanding the scale of market, and catering the need of market is specially emphasized. (Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017) Some Influentials are perceived to be more authentic for daring to display individual personality, not afraid to disagree with the majority, and representation of sense of justice. Such authentic characteristics usually comes along with impression of bad-temper. *‘Micro-micro celebrity with followers less than 100 thousand, and even 10 thousand, are perceived to me more authentic.’* (Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) Sometimes the image of Influential is perceived as negative for the existence of controversial issues, like plastic surgery, inauthentic display of figure, deception on

professional contents, moral issue, etc. (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017; Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017)

To the surprise, all the interviewees as followers display reluctant attitude towards reward-triggered lottery, for the unworthy value of lottery goods, little chance of winning, and sustaining of self-image. (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017; Glen, discussion 22.12.2017) Lottery tactic fits products with higher value, like cash, electronic products, and something particular triggers interest. (Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) The reasons to follow particular Influential are like, the Influential display an individual and wise attitude and personality, Influential display value of entertainments, and seeking latest information and news updates. (Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) Followers incline to participate interactions with friends on social media platform, rather than with Influential directly. (Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) But there are several reasons to join the engagement, like the Influential was followed for a long period of time to prove the credibility as a wise and trustworthy person (Glen, discussion 22.12.2017), the ones who promptly update latest news and entertaining gossips (Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017), Influential on live-streaming are more likely to be interact with (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017), and to view the interactions between familiar Influentials, which is quite interesting (Helen, discussion 29.12.2017).

It is hard to empirically assess the effectiveness of endorsement, even with the statistics like Conversion Rate, the results are vaguely calculated rather than with precision. In this section the effectiveness is evaluated from whether the followers would believe the endorsement and make purchase activities. The reasons that followers would believe the endorsements from Influential Entrepreneurs are listed as, Influential is an expert per se to introduce the product (Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017), the endorsement is not advertising oriented and the Influential is using the product as well (Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017); the Influential is not commercially oriented as a marketing account (Helen, discussion 29.12.2017), the style of Influential is interesting (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017; Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017; Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017), and the long-term trustworthiness and credibility established by Influential Entrepreneurs. (Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) When the effectiveness is discussed from the other perspective, reasons for followers to unfollow certain Influential are like, failed sustaining of persona management such as immoral issues and

idiotic behaviors (Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017), transferring into pure marketing account and loss of individual personality (Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017), pessimistic contents in posts (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017). To assess the endorsement activities on a general level, all the interview participants have made purchasing activities from the '*recommendations*' by Influential Entrepreneurs, and the endorsement activities by Influential Entrepreneurs are deemed as effective.

As for the controversial issues and adverse effects associated with Influential Entrepreneurs, the results are quite in line with the marketing comprehension by Influential Entrepreneurs. Selectivity as in engagement possibilities, contents, and many others is emphasized by multiple Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abby, discussion 27.12.2017; Beth, discussion 27.12.2017; Dora, discussion 28.12.2017) In the meantime, most followers would rather interact with fellow followers in the comments area or reposts, rather than directly communicate with Influential per se. The riskiest issues towards the operation of business as Influential Entrepreneurs are like, inconsistency of persona management, immorality, deception, idiotic behaviors, endorsement of fake products, and inauthenticity. (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017; Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017; Glen, discussion 22.12.2017; Helen, discussion 29.12.2017) Some follower regard the crafted display of mundane life as 'too much efforts', rather than casual and authentic. (Echo, discussion 17.11.2017; Flynn, discussion 19.11.2017) In general, the perceptions on Influential diversifies, and the author notices that bad news are more likely to be impressive than good news. Hence, Influential as an Entrepreneur shall keep in mind that every step is under the radar of the followers. If the business is reliant on the management of persona, the moral boundary is better remained uncrossed.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Bridging the theory with empirical findings.

The purpose of the study is to develop an interactive functional framework regarding the Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs with pragmatic value. The empirical findings and discussions are quite fruitful to bridge the theory with empirical findings so as to develop a new theoretical framework on the CE approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs. This section will address two main purposes, development of new theoretical frameworks combining theory with empirical findings, and answer research questions including sub-research questions.

The concentration of the study is to research the beyond transactional activities in related to Customer Engagement, enacted by Influential Entrepreneurs. The field of the study is ethnographically located in Influential Entrepreneurship in China, focusing on a niche market online. In the following section, the researcher will bridge the theory with empirical findings from two aspects: Influential Entrepreneur, and Customer Engagement Approaches. Finally, the ultimate interactive functional framework on enactment of Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs with pragmatic value will be presented, consolidating empirical findings and theoretical contributions. To distinguish the confirmation of theoretical contribution from empirical findings, and the new constructive empirical findings, the empirical findings are displayed in two forms, underlined symbolizes new empirical contributions, and *italic* symbolizes the confirmation of theoretical contributions. (See Figure 17 & Figure 18) The specific explanation of Figure 17 answers sub-research questions No.1 as in '*What are the unique characteristics that distinguish Influential Entrepreneurship from traditional marketers, especially with regard to Customer Management?*'.

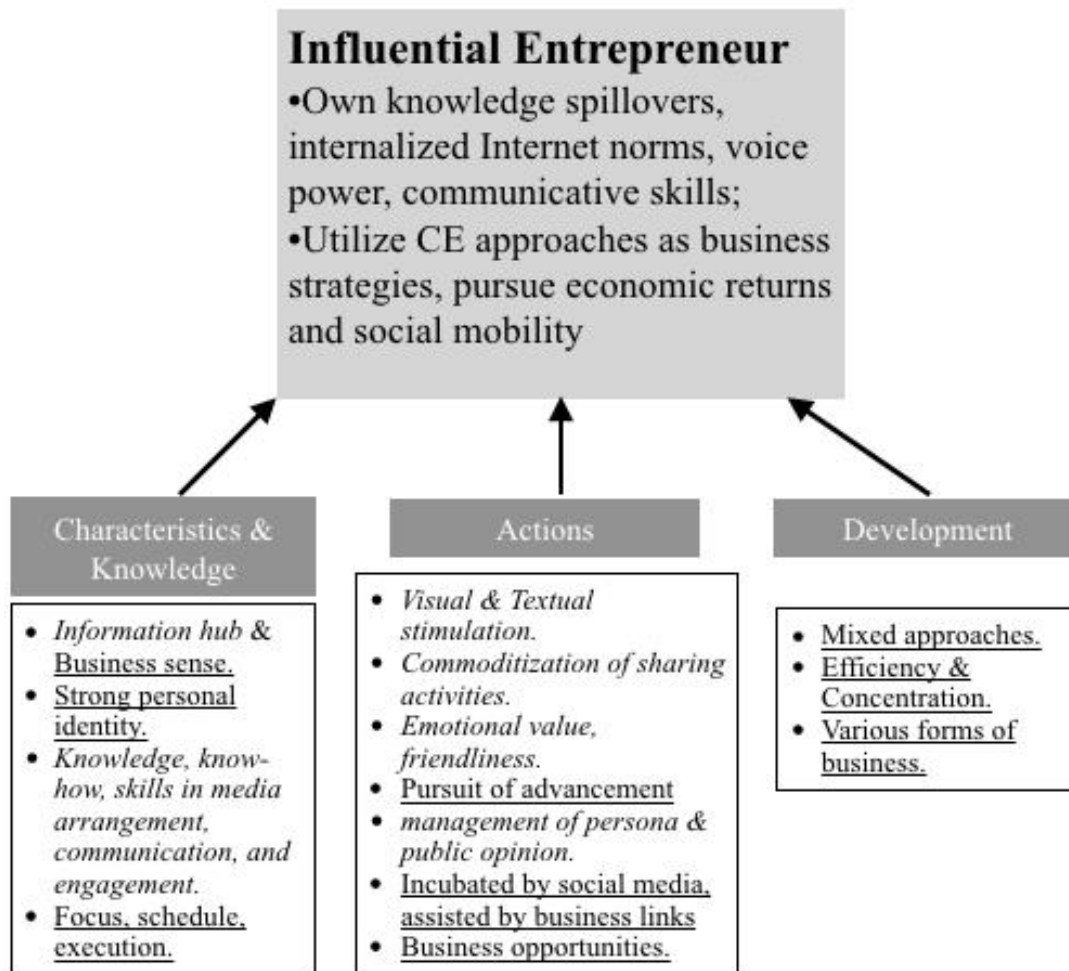


Figure 17 Bridge the theoretical framework with empirical findings in aspect of Influential Entrepreneur

The empirical findings (See Chapter 5) confirms theoretical contributions (See Chapter 2) Influential Entrepreneurs are business oriented individual who are originally from Influential people, with characteristics in information centrality. (Abidin 2016, 1-3, 10, 16; Burt 1997, 339-345; Keller & Berry, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 2, 10; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Hinz et al. 2014, 2843) Influential Entrepreneurs are sufficient in skills and knowledge reserves in aspects of media related area, market view, communicational norms, and engagement behaviors. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-5; Hinz et al. 2014, 2839-2843; Hinz & Spann. 2008, 366-367; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Keller & Berry 2003; Senft 2008, 25, 116) One thing to notice is that the Influential Entrepreneurs self-represent as approachable and friendly, though the reality is perceptive rather than authentic. (Abidin 2016, 1-3, 5-6, 13-16; Abidin &

Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick 2003, 116-117; 2015, 156; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Rojek's 2001; Senft 2008, 16, 116) The empirical findings reveal that Influential Entrepreneurs present strong personal identity, and sense of continuous marketing operation to combine life and work. They are focused individual with execution capability, and follow plans rather than randomly organized.

The previous theoretical research points out that Influential Entrepreneurs use strong visual and textual stimulations towards followers, in which they commoditize sharing activities as in crafted personal life. Comparing with companies who charge premium price for brand, Influential Entrepreneurs charge premium for emotional attachment. (Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86; Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36; Trusov et al, 2006, 91-92) The rejection of hierarchical status evaluation determines that Influential Entrepreneurs are emphasizing equality and friendliness towards followers. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Heller and Parasnis 2011, 30-36) Influential Entrepreneurs display management of and public opinion to sustain business operation. (Abidin, 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 1-6; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Brodie et al. 2011, 256; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Hearn 2008, 213; Lair et al. 2005, 335-336; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 139-157; Mclaughlin 2009, 1101-1104; Patterson et al. 2006, 4-6; Powell 2009; Senft 2008, 25-26; Turkle 2008, 122-130; van Doorn et al. 2010, 258; Vivek et al. 2012, 132) In empirical findings, such viewpoints are confirmed. In addition, empirical findings discover that Influential Entrepreneurs commoditize sharing activities as in professional contents, and latest news, topics, opinions, to raise discussion and promote communication. The presentation of lifestyle and opinion develops emotional attachment in credibility and authenticity. In this case, posts with too much editorial skills may jeopardize authenticity. Influential Entrepreneurs are spontaneous seekers for professionalism, business connections, skill advancement via sharing, communication and learning activities, in which they intentionally display positive value proposition and skillfully manage controversial issues. Influential Entrepreneurs are incubated by social media platforms (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Senft 2008, 25), and assisted by external links as in business connections and working experience. Ultimately, business opportunities naturally emerge with the advancement of professional skills, accumulation of knowledge and business resources.

The business structure is untouched by theoretical contributions, and it is revealed in empirical findings. Influential Entrepreneurs take a mixture of approaches towards revenue generation to sustain business operation. The aim is to focus on core

competency, optimizing efficiency, and enable quick access towards business resources. To attain aforementioned aims, Influential Entrepreneurs undertake various forms of business to satisfy self demand, from solo, contracted, work studio, to establishment of Influential company. It is delighted to find that some Influential Entrepreneurs take the initiative to establish Influential company that integrated business resources to conduct Influential related work, E-commerce, and Influential incubation. Such activities signify a future development direction for Influential Entrepreneurs.

It is clearly revealed that Influential Entrepreneurs rely on operation of Customer Engagement Approaches as key marketing strategies to effectively operate business and charge emotional premium from the followers (aka: customers). (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 2-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Marwick 2013, 114; Michael 2017) The empirical findings and the bridging towards interactive framework is presented as follows. (See Figure 18) The following framework as well answer sub-research questions No.2 and No.3 as follows.

Sub-research questions:

2. How do Influential Entrepreneurs develop and implement customer engagement activities?
3. What are the dynamics of effective Customer Engagement activities by Influential Entrepreneurs?

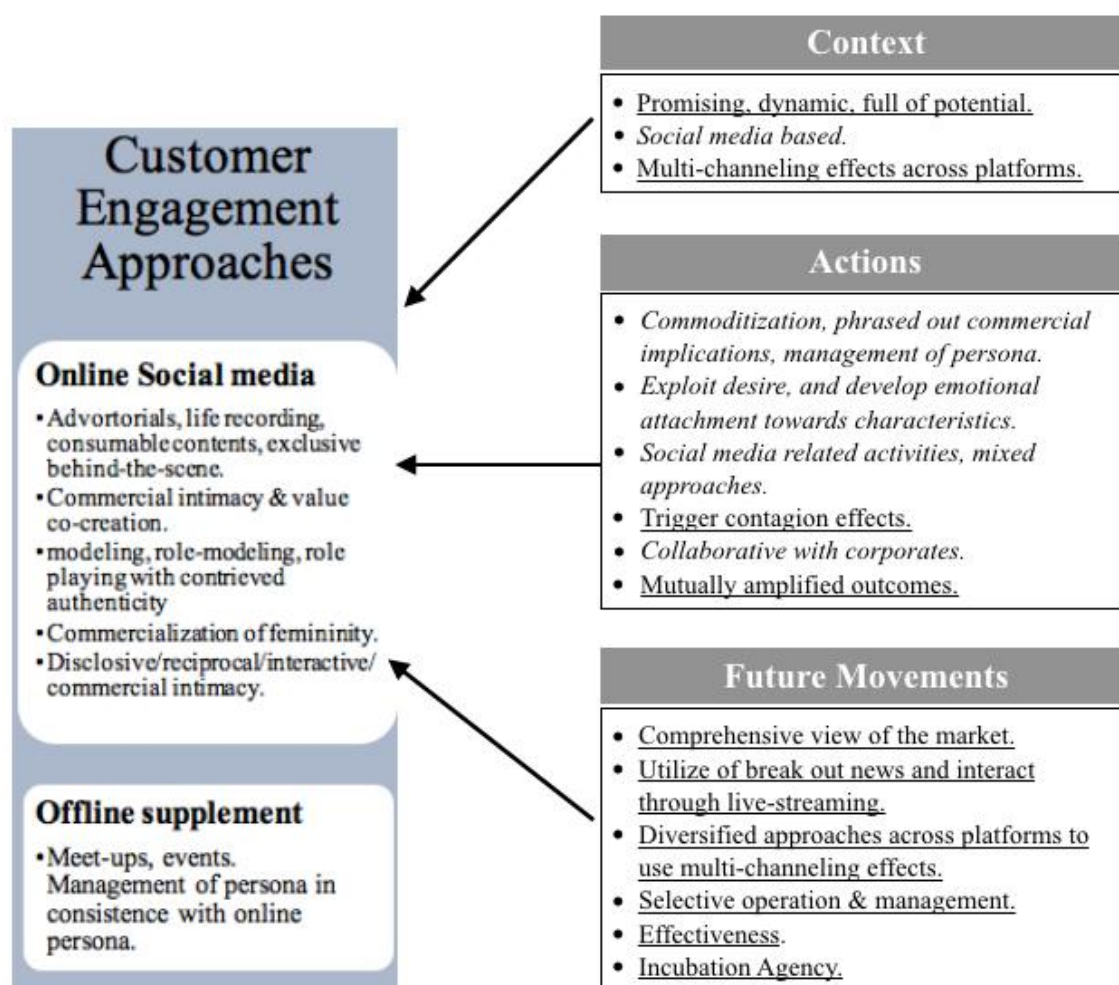


Figure 18 Bridge the theoretical framework with empirical findings in the aspect of Customer Engagement Approaches

In theoretical contributions, the operation of Influential CE approaches are contextually located on social media. This is double confirmed with empirical evidence, which elaborately pointed out that the social media context largely determines the vigorosity of Influential Entrepreneurs, especially from the aspect of user base and functionality. (Abidin 2015b; 2016, 2-3; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Keller & Berry 2003; Littunen 2000; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 155; McClelland 1987; Senft 2008) For example, the scale of followers determines the power of influence. (Goldenberg et al. 2009b, 10) The scaling up of user base attracts more Influential Entrepreneurs to settle on the particular social media platform. Although various social media platforms emerge, aiming at different concentrations, the integrated functionalities with a concentration is more welcomed by Influential Entrepreneurs. As it is pointed out previously, Influential Entrepreneurs are popular across different spectrums. (Marwick & Boyd

2011, 155) In general, Influential Entrepreneurs operate across multiple platforms to utilize multi-channeling effects, so as to amplify popularity. (van Bruggen et al. 2010, 338; Verhoef et al. 2010, 249) The prevalence of social media platforms enables more business opportunities for individuals, especially for Influential Entrepreneurs.

The actions taken by Influential Entrepreneurs to conduct CE approaches are the foci point of this research. In empirical findings, the evidence largely confirms theoretical contributions as in commoditization of lifestyle, phrasing out of business implications, and management of persona online and offline. Influential Entrepreneurs intentionally exploit customers' desire to imitate and pursue similar lifestyle, and develop emotional attachment towards characteristics more than with production of contents. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) They incline to work collaboratively with corporates to attain desired outcomes.

Additionally, the empirical findings would describe the process of CE approaches with a complete elaboration, combining above confirmed theoretical contributions and new empirical findings. For that Influential owns knowledges, skills, and comprehensive market view, they commoditize the posts and activities online to operate business. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-5; Hinz et al. 2014, 2839-2843; Hinz & Spann. 2008, 366-367; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Keller & Berry 2003; Marwick 2013, 114; Michael 2017; Senft 2008, 25, 116) The sharing activities as in personal life, latest topic, information, news, and professional productions are all commoditized. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 2-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Marwick 2013, 114; Michael 2017) The aim is to exploit desire of followers in pursuit of similar life, communication, discussion, and seeking of news feed. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005; Gummerus et al. 2012, 870; (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36) Through such interactions, the emotional attachments is thusly created, so is the demand of purchase. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) The competitive advantages of Influential CE approaches are not only restricted with in editorial skills of contents and commoditization of contents, but also in visual & textual stimulation, emotional resonance, and seizing of prompt opportunity in time. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016,

1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Senft 2008, 25, 116) For some advanced Influential Entrepreneurs, the shopping experience with regard to the endorsement is seamless, for that Influential Entrepreneur combines the activities in business collaborations, commercial recommendations, and contracted product supply. The particular activities conducted by Influential Entrepreneurs are within the definition of social media platforms, and a mixed approaches is regularly selected. (See Table 8 & Table 9)

The functioning progress of Influential Entrepreneurs is circulative and adaptive. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Influential are in responsible of content control to trigger contagion effects online, while maintaining consistence in persona management, authenticity, value proposition, and business collaborations. In the progress, Influential Entrepreneurs development emotional attachment and credibility towards personal characteristics (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Bowden 2009b, 72), which results in low substitutability. However, the intimate relationship is perceived rather than for real. The underlying business orientation is phrased out towards followers. (Abidin 2016, 1-3, 5-6, 13-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick 2003, 116-117; 2015, 156; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Rojek's 2001; Senft 2008, 16, 116) The production of contents and communication activities are scheduled and planned rather than following random time arrangements. (Abidin 2015a) Lastly, Influential Entrepreneurs constantly adapt the approaches according to the market as in followers feedbacks. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) In this dynamism, the job of corporate is collaborative and supervisional. In the business collaboration with corporates, the latter party is more responsible towards products provision rather than content crafts. For some Influential Entrepreneurs, the collaborations are not mandatory, but rather motivational. In specific, for product-triggered lottery, although it is widely used, it is not frequently encouraged, for that customers are mostly reluctant towards such activities, unless the reward is worthy enough. This finding confirms with the proposition that customers managed through economic benefits may not be lasting. (Gummerus et al. 2012, 870).

By delivering emotional value and tangible value, Influential Entrepreneurs gain economic returns (Abidin 2016, 2-4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477), amplified communication effects, popularity, access to business opportunities, and advancement of professional skills. The outcomes are mutually amplified towards

each others, which in return motivates Influential Entrepreneurs to sustain business continuously.

The future movement towards CE approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs are mostly untouched by theoretical contributions, as well. Influential Entrepreneurs are supposed to learn and understand followers for objectivity and comprehensive view of the market, which optimize adjustment towards approaches. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) For example, followers are seeking entertainment value (Biao 2013, 12-14), latest information & news feed (Gummerus et al. 2012, 870), and communicational need online (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 32-36), and that is exactly what Influential Entrepreneurs should incorporated in the offerings. The context in which Influential Entrepreneurs operate in is constantly changing and updating, and the new form of social media in live-streaming enables more interaction opportunities. To take advantages of break out news, Influential Entrepreneurs would raise more discussion opportunities among followers so as to amplify popularity. (Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141) For the limitations in scaling-up, selectivity is suggested as in disclosure of life details, engagement and interaction activities, professional focus, and products endorsements, in which the principle is to sustain the consistence with characteristics. The emergence of various social media platforms enables scaling up possibilities for large Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin 2015b; 2016, 2-3; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Keller & Berry 2003; Littunen 2000; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 155; Mcclelland 1987; Senft 2008) But for micro Influential Entrepreneurs, such utilization of multi-channeling effects might not be necessary, for that fewer followers add more authenticity as a non-marketing oriented individual. Apart from the determination of CE approaches effectiveness in Conversion Rate and market price. Several activities can add to the effectiveness of CE approaches, like professionalism in contents, sustainment of long-term credibility, inobvious commercial orientation, provision of entertainment value, and most importantly, the consistence in management of moral standard, positive attitude, and persona image. The future of Influential Entrepreneurs is not clear yet, but multiple participants have already taken initiatives. One example is the interviewee who took the initiative and establish Influential company to integrate business resource to conduct Influential business, E-commerce and Influential incubation. This signifies efforts from incubational agencies, who connect business resources and Influential to incubate Influential towards

professional, allowing the later party to focus core competency and pursue professionalism.

To consolidate the aforementioned two Figures into the ultimate interactive framework, combining the theoretical contributions and empirical findings, a final interactive framework regard Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs is presented as follows. (See Figure 19) This interactive framework will answer the main research question as description of current Customer Engagement Approaches conducted by Influential Entrepreneurs in the context of China.

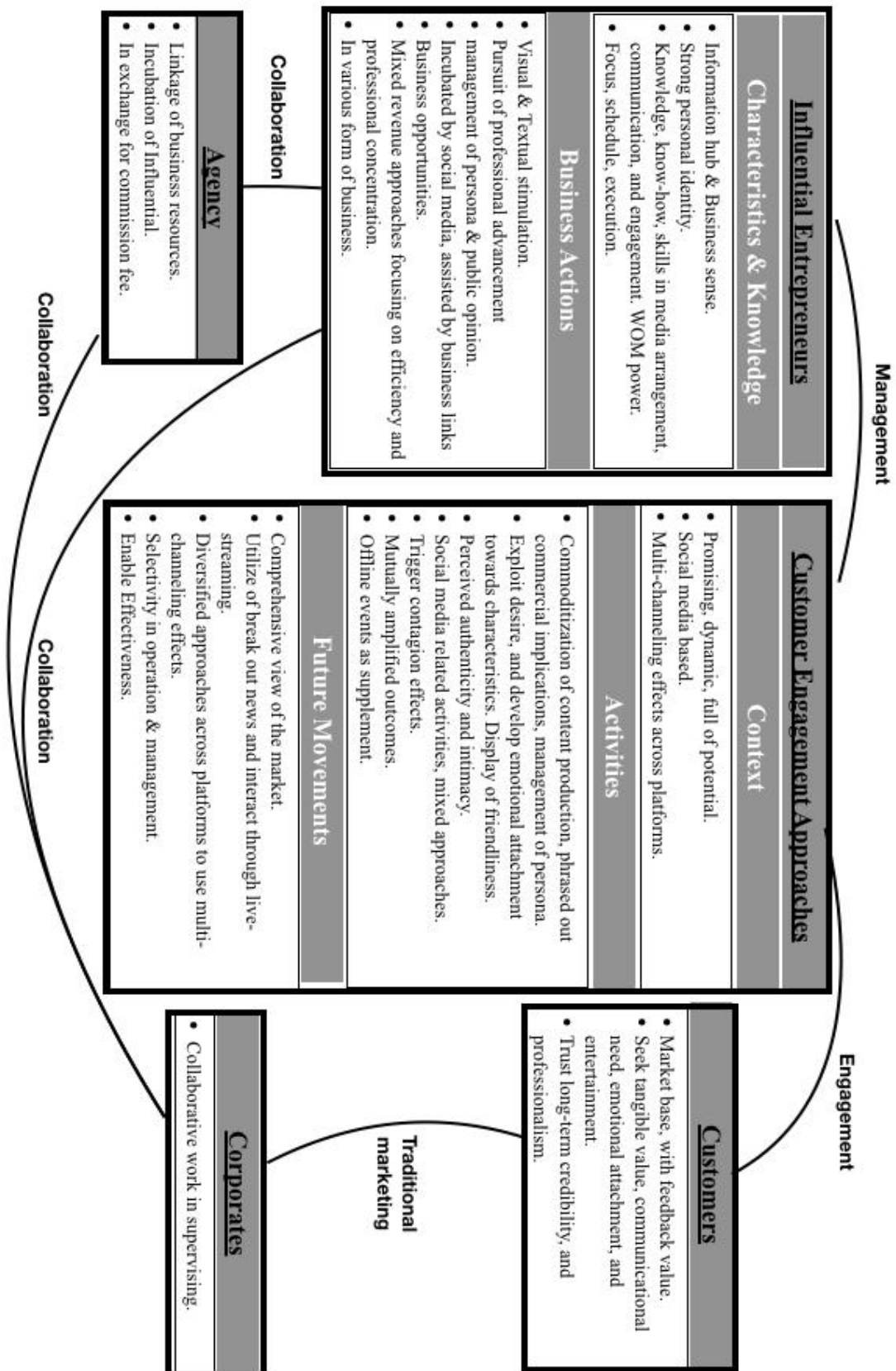


Figure 19 Final interactive framework combining theoretical contributions and empirical findings.

This final framework consolidate theoretical contributions and empirical findings to present current Customer Engagement Approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs in the context of China. The dynamics and results are ethnographically located in China, but the implications is meant to suggest research possibilities for beyond transactional activities regarding Customer Engagement by Influential Entrepreneurs in other context as well.

Influential Entrepreneurs are originally from Influential individual with information centrality, and sense of business. (Abidin 2016, 2-4; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The innate awareness of business orientation urges them to continuous operate marketing activities, which blurs the boundaries between work and life. They possess knowledge, know-hows, and skills in media arrangement, communications, and engagement activities through naturally gains and learning. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-142; Senft 2008, 25, 116) They own greater WOM power over the majority. (Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) In the communication process, they display strong personal identity. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) Their activities are focused and scheduled in execution rather than randomly positioned.

Influential Entrepreneurs display business related actions from an early stage, even when the activities are not economically rewarded sufficiently. They present visual and textual stimulations to attract attention. (Abidin 2015a; Senft 2008) Through communication and interactions, they pursue professional skills advancement. Management of persona and leading of public opinion is emphasized as an Influential Entrepreneur. Influential Entrepreneurs are naturally incubated by social media (Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Senft 2008, 25), with the assistance of external business links and resources. The revenue channels regarding Influential Entrepreneurs are mostly mixed and sufficient to support business. Influential Entrepreneurs operate business in various forms to attain efficiency and professional focus.

The operation of Customer Engagement Approaches is recognized as efficient marketing strategy for sustaining Influential business, which is mostly located online, supplemented by offline events. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 3-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The context of operating CE approaches is dynamic,

promising and full of potential to exploit. Many Influential Entrepreneurs utilize the emergence of various social media platforms as in multi-channeling effects to amplify popularities. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Bohling et al. 2006, 186-187, 191-192; Hoyer et al. 2010, 293)

Influential Entrepreneurs intentionally commoditize sharing activities as in personal lifestyle, professional contents production, and updates of latest discussional topics, while phrasing out the commercial implications. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 3-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Borges 2011, 6-19; Senft 2008, 25; Goffman 2002) In the progress, they exploit the customers' desire in pursuing similar life, seeking news feed, communications, and discussions, to amplify the popularity and develop emotional attachment towards characteristics. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) The rejection of hierarchical status evaluation presents frientliness, which is perceptive rather than authentic. In other words, the seemingly intimate relationship and authentic figures are contrived rather than for real. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Abidin 2015a & 2016, 1-16) Regardless, Influential Entrepreneurs are repsonsible to sustain the consistence in persona management, corporate endorsements, value propositions, etc to ensure authenticity and credibility. (Abidin 2013; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) The specific activities are within the regulations and definitions of particular social media platforms (See Table 8 & Table 9), while a mixed approaches is frequently utilized to guarantee best contagion effects. In the interaction, Influential Entretrepeurs gain multiple tangible returns as in economic returns, popularity, amplified communicational effects, and advancement of professionalism. (Abidin's 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467- 477; Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai ei al. 2010, 278) The outcomes are mutually amplifying towards each other, which reversely serves as a motivation towards Influential Entrepreneurs.

Customers, which refer to the followers of Influential Entrepreneurs, are participating the engagement activities with or without awareness of business orientation. Nevertheless, they constitute the majority of the market base towards Influential Entrepreneurs who are in need of gaining objective view of market need. (Hinz et al. 2008, 367) Customers are seeking tangible and intangible value in the engagements, like reward, emotional companionship, communicational need, entertainment value, etc. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) They tend to trust long-term credibility, and professionalism of content production from Influential

Entrepreneurs. Hence, corporates collaborate with Influential Entrepreneurs to affect niche market, along with affect customers via traditional marketing. In the corporate collaborations with Influential Entrepreneurs, corporates are collaborative and supervisory towards contents production, rather than direct control. In the dynamic, agency for Influential emerge as a new form of business identity to connect Influential with business resources, incubate Influential towards maturity, in exchange for commission fee. (Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3; Marwick 2013, 114)

6.2 Theoretical Contributions and Practical implications

This study aims at establishing an interactive framework (See Figure 19), combining empirical evidence (See Chapter 5) and proposed theoretical framework (See Figure 13) to illustrate Customer Engagement Approaches enacted by Influential Entrepreneurs as effective business strategies. The final interactive framework is proposed in Chapter 6.1. This section will discuss and summarize theoretical contributions as well as practical implications. Although this research has built the theoretical background from a huge amount of literatures, the primary theoretical contribution is contributed to Abidin & Thompson (2012, 467-477), Abidin (2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2016) and Heller & Parasnis (2011, 30-36). This study confirms the concepts and insights from aforementioned literatures, and make theoretical contributions.

The academic researches regard Influential Entrepreneurs are not sufficiently exploited, not to mention that the inadequacy of scholar focus of Influential Entrepreneurship in China's context. Meanwhile, the development of Influential as savvy Entrepreneurship is widely acknowledged, especially in practical field. The efforts and achievements by Influential Entrepreneurs are deemed as remarkable and affective, which is transformed from previous assumptions of marginal and insignificant. (Abidin 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477) In practitioners' view, the adoptions of business model and collaborations are employed on general level, covering a vast variety of marketing area. Customer Engagement Approaches represent beyond transactional activities that retain customers and sustain the operation of business. (Hollebeek 2011, 555-573; Van Doorn et al. 2010, 258; Verhoef et al. 2010, 248-249; Vivek 2012, 127) Emotional

attachments towards persona figures are well established during the interaction. Like corporates that charge brand premium in mass marketing, Influential Entrepreneurs charge emotional premium for endorsed products from the followers as market base. (Abidin 2015a; 2015b; 2016, 2-10; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Marwick 2013, 114; Michael 2017) On the contrary to the investments triggered profit growth (Srinivasan & Moorman 2005, 193-199), the CE approaches by Influential Entrepreneurs are cost efficient and action effective (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Foster 2007, 707-731), which induce profound impact on customer group on a granular section. Consequently, for corporates and other marketing related function departments, to collaborate with Influential Entrepreneurs, especially with those who share much similarities in marketing targets, is highly efficient and beneficial.

The empirical findings also supplement the framework with an emphasis on multi-channeling effects of different social media platforms. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36; van Bruggen et al. 2010, 338; Verhoef et al. 2010, 249) Social media platforms emerge in China's context contains different user interfaces, reflecting diversified interactions functionality orientation. Influential Entrepreneurial merely build private social media platforms or so. Instead, to establish and manage Influential public account for group sending push mails is quite popular to diversify enactments on Customer Engagement approaches. Method of utilizing multiple social media platforms as channeling customers is deemed as effective in scaling up customer base and amplifying contagion effects. At a marginal cost of operation, Customer Engagement approaches based on multi-channeling effects yield disproportional results. In utilization of multi-channeling effects, the editorial skills and emotional resonating connotations in contents are crucial in promoting higher contagion effects. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-4; Senft 2008, 25, 116) As a consequence, operating on multiple social media platforms serves business orientation as an instruments, rather than a competitive advantage. (Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36)

In traditional marketing perspective, financial reports of corporates usually reflect marketing investments induced profit-growth. To interpret the phenomenon in customer management case wise, it implies that customers can be lured with tangible value to provide participation in marketing activities (Abidin & Thompson 2012,

467-477; Heller & Parasnis 2011, 36), which ultimately accumulate popularity of brands and result in market growth. While from Influential Entrepreneurship perspective, the mechanism does not function the same way. Tangible value triggered interaction and participation is efficient, but only temporarily. To use temporary reward to motivate customers for interaction is utilized as a common approach, but not encouraged. To sustain a long-term profound relationship with customers, beyond transactional activities focused on relationship maintenance is more effective. (Boulding et al. 2005, 155-164; Heller and Parasnis 2011, 30-36; Van Doorn et al. 2010, 254; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247-249) This calls for display of persona image, performance of various intimacy, and establishment of emotional interconnectedness. (Abidin 2015a; 2016, 1-6, 13-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Armstrong & Hagel 2000, 86; Boyd 2006; Brodie et al. 2013; Danesi 2015, 25; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 2; Hearn 2008, 213; Hochschild 2012; Hoyer et al. 2010, 292; Lair et al. 2005, 335-336; Lövheim 2010; Marwick 2003, 116-117; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Roberts 2005; Senft 2008, 25- 26, 116; Turkle 2008, 122-130; Verhoef et al. 2010, 247)

Another practical implication emerged from whether the orientation is of profit or of relationship. Interviews from this study all suggest largely similar results of highly profit oriented business model. But the author would not exclude the possibility that some Influential Entrepreneurs are not profit-driven, but relationship-driven to seek emotional value instead of pragmatic return. Nevertheless, for profit-driven Influential Entrepreneurs, the first and foremost task is to pursue economic returns and social mobility. Hence the intimacy provided in the CE approaches is perceptive rather than genuine. For example, the Influential Entrepreneurs performs responsiveness in the CE approaches to address friendliness and commonality. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Hochschild 2012) While the truth is, the subject is publicly responsive to a selection of customers, and silent to the rest majority. The underneath reason is that Influential Entrepreneur possess limited amount of time and energy to deploy, and it is important to apply it in a cost-efficient method. The principle is to establish a perceptively genuine aura of intimacy between them and customers. (Abidin 2013) For the establishment of genuine intimate relationship, the return to investment is simply impractical and worthless.

The success of perceptive truth stays effective towards persona management as well. Though Influential Entrepreneurs represent commonality and attainability

towards customers, they deliberately craft a persona figure that separates themselves from common people as in social capital, mobility, capabilities, and intelligence. (Abidin 2016, 1-3, 5-6, 13-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Marwick 2003, 116-117; 2015, 156; Marwick & Boyd 2011, 140-141; Rojek's 2001; Senft 2008, 16, 116) Customers would on one side enjoy the accessibility of Influential Entrepreneurs, and on the other side pursue Influential equivalent life by purchasing activities of endorsed products. (Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) Aside from the commoditization of lifestyle, Influential Entrepreneurs intentionally produce professional contents and update latest news feed so as to raise discussion and promote communication. Regardless of the content production, the practical need of customers to communicate and discuss on such topic is satisfied, and the Influential Entrepreneurs accumulate popularity and enhance emotional attachment. To sustain the exploitation of such desire, persona management is requested for Influential Entrepreneurs as a routine job both online and offline. (Abidin 2013; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Fletcher 2009, 321-325; Foster 2007, 707-731; Roberts 2005) After all, strong persona identity ensures greater psychological links, which induces long-term credibility and attachments. The other hardware skills like professional editorial skillsets, comprehensive view of the market, and communication know-how, are both innately possessed and progressively learnt from the business-orientated interaction. (Abidin 2015a; Abidin 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Feick & Price 1987, 95; Godes & Mayzlin 2009, 721-722; Goldsmith & Horowitz 2006, 3-5; Hinz et al. 2014, 2839-2843; Hinz & Spann. 2008, 366-367; Hinz & Takac 2014, 2836; Iyengar et al. 2011, 210-211; Keller & Berry 2003; Senft 2008, 25, 116) Through advancement in knowledge and skills, Influential Entrepreneurs manage to adapt to the changes in the market and enable efficiency in Customer Engagement approaches. For example, agency emerge as a new forms of Influential business operator to connect Influential Entrepreneurs with business resources, and incubate Influentials (Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3; Marwick 2013, 114), which allows Influential to concentrate on professionalism advancement and increase efficiency in operation. And corporate collaborations often sustain the operation of Influential Entrepreneurs with practical sponsorship.

The pragmatic progress of business model adoption is far beyond the research development from academic perspective. This study combines the conception of

Influential and Entrepreneurs in a novel way to explore the business strategies within. Besides, the established framework proposed practical implications for marketing participants as in Influential Entrepreneurs, corporates, and other collaborative partners, hoping that they would adopt and utilize the framework to build competitive advantages.

Due to the novelty of research field, the research is mostly based on propositions emerged from theoretical review. Most of the studies regarding Customer Engagement Approaches are considered from perspective of corporates and institutions, while the similar research from Influential Entrepreneurship does not constitute as a significant part. In many scholars' view, Entrepreneurship from Influential is considered insignificant and marginal. However, the CE approaches operated by Influential Entrepreneurs have generated major market changes and economic impact. Consequently, the following propositions are put forward to contribute to theoretical implications.

- *Proposition 1. Influential transform to Influential Entrepreneurship by the affective power of influence and thusly monetize the power of influence.*

Influential Entrepreneurs are those who possess power as Influential, e.g. knowledge reserves, technology view, comprehensive point of view, sufficient information, communicational skills, persuasive tactics, and WOM. By monetizing the power as Influential, Influential officially transforms into Influential Entrepreneurship.

- *Proposition 2a. Influential flourish on the prevalence of social networks. Business fostered with the help of online social networks is amplified by the effect of social network.*

Hypes are created to draw attention, increase online traffic, and create marketing equivalent effect, which ultimately induces economic growth. The emergence of social networks enables multiple business opportunities for participants, and the particular business sphere is promising, dynamic, and full of potential. Combining with the amplifying effect of social networks, Influential Entrepreneurs enlarge the Influence scale from virtual contacts to digital connections. The interaction cost between Influential, and the connections is lowered and the efficiency of communication is boosted.

- *Proposition 2b. Influential monetize on the capability to manage the people who centre around them so as to extract value from the relationship and sustain business activities.*

Influential own superior capability to communicate and interact with people around them, which generate disproportional power of influence over the later party. In the possession of such superior capability, Influential actively monetize on the relationship in order to sustain business activities.

- *Proposition 2c. In specific, Influential exploit the desire of followers in multiple perspective to accumulate popularity, which is later monetized for tangible return.*

Influential exploit the desire of followers in multiple perspectives, like pursuit of similar life, need to communicate and discuss on new topics, and emotional resonations. The various forms of exploitation in desires helps Influential to raise popularity within self-representation, and enable Influential to monetize on the increase of popularity.

- *Proposition 3a. Apart from Influential Entrepreneurs, active participants who constitute customer base of Influential Entrepreneurs are profit oriented, seeking tangible value, in exchange for participation and interaction on online social networks.*

Participants are relationship oriented rather than profit oriented on social media, for that they are more inclined to involve in personal engagement with acquaintance rather than with corporate account. Hence for traditional marketers who would like to initiate Customer Engagement activities, tangible value is required in exchange for spontaneous participation and engagement.

- *Proposition 3b. Influential Entrepreneurs recognize that active customers on social networks are majorly pursuing personal interest, latest news feed, and entertainment.*

Customers are willingly involved in the engagement with families & friends & acquaintances, information seeking, connection seeking through online social networks, which makes it difficult for pure business-oriented engagement. Influential Entrepreneurs are fully aware of such inclination, and develop relationship-oriented interaction approaches to cope with the above mentioned preferences.

- *Proposition 3c. Influential partly substitute the role of families & friends to engage with people on social networks through creation of persona image and retaining commonality.*

In the retention of commonality and individual persona image, Influential craft themselves with authenticity and individualism. Influential actively interact with people as friend-equivalent role to establish intimate relationship, providing emotional value and achieving intimate attachment.

- *Proposition 3d. Endorsement from Influential Entrepreneurs is perceived as recommendations from expertise acquaintances.*

In the recipients' perception, endorsement from Influential Entrepreneurs is perceived as recommendations from familiar friends who are knowledgeable and experienced, which makes the endorsement easier to be accepted.

- *Proposition 3e. In the meantime, Influential hold the role of 'micro-celebrity', for the possession of superior value and hierarchical position.*

Followers would like to see display of role-modeling as in, high value in achievement and intelligence, higher social mobility, fame, work ethic and satisfaction from work, consistent of perceived authentic persona management in the operation of Influential.

- *Proposition 4a. The motivates for Influential to establish such intimate relationship online is business oriented.*

Despite that the Influential Entrepreneurs illustrated the relationship as friendship-oriented and voluntarily, and the fact that customers perceive the relationship as intimate, disclosive, reciprocally, and interactive, the underlying purpose is without doubt business oriented.

- *Proposition 4b. To extract economic return and social mobility, Influential manage Customer Engagement as marketing strategy to sustain and energize business activities.*

The relationship between Influential Entrepreneurs and customers is without doubt motivated by business orientation, regardless the relationship is aesthetically portrayed by both parties. CE approaches are thusly employed as strategic movements to sustain and operate business activities.

- *Proposition 4c. Influential manage Customer Engagement to attain economic return and social mobility through a series of quantifiable events.*

Events includes but not limited to 1) popularity among customers, 2) scale of online traffic and exposure, 3) co-created value as in information retrieval, companionship, labor input, amplification of hype in marketing effectiveness, and 4) emotional attachment towards Influential.

- *Proposition 4d. Influential conduct Customer Engagement through several actions to achieve aforementioned quantifiable events in Proposition 5c.*

Actions include but not limited to, 1) management of persona and crafted figure, 2) commoditization of personal and mundane life, 3) convey commonality, authenticity, and attainability, 4) establishment of intimate relationship, 5) display of high value as in femininity, social mobility, wealth, personality, mindset, intellectual talent (educational background, occupational status, achievement, etc.), skillsets & tactics (working related, communicational related, etc.).

- *Proposition 4e. The role of customers is presented as followers, fans and friends, conveying perception of equality and intimacy.*

Although Influential Entrepreneurs rejects the hierarchical status evaluation, the relationship in between is never truly equal, due to the unbalanced power of influence and the underlying profit-driven essence. The conveyed intimacy and equality is perceptive feelings rather than authentic connections.

- *Proposition 4f. The principle for Influential Entrepreneurs to sustain the operation of business is in the consistence and selectivity.*

Consistence refers to that Influential Entrepreneurs are responsible to maintain consistence in the management of persona, selection of business collaboration, value proposition, etc. Selectivity pointed out that for the weakness in scaling-up, Influential Entrepreneurs are supposed to operate management with selectivity and maximize efficiency, namely, in the interaction opportunity, collaboration selection, disclosure of life, and professional focus.

- *Proposition 5a. Corporates and other collaborate partners take advantages of social media amplifying effects through Influential Entrepreneurs.*

As customers interact with corporates or other public accounts are mostly motivated to participate in activities for tangible value. It becomes difficult for corporates and other institutions to initiate continuous interaction and raise constant attention through direct interaction on social media. Hence, collaborative partnership

is formed with Influential Entrepreneurship to utilize the persona credibility to endorse the target marketing object.

- *Proposition 5b. Agents are able to optimize the operation of Influential Entrepreneurship in exchange for commission fee.*

Through deployment of resources as in skills training, mentoring, information sharing, assigning expert team, agents manage and incubate Influential Entrepreneurs like manufacturers in aspects of better persona management and more skillful engagement approaches. In this perspective, Influential Entrepreneurs are connected to vast resources to optimize business activities as in cost saving, efficiency, expertise, persona figure elevation, Influential scale expansion, and economic gains.

- *Proposition 5c. Some Influential choose not to contract to agents, or choose not to disclose the fact that they hire expert team or are contracted with agents to remain authentic representation as an individual instead of commercial figure.*

Some Influential choose not to sign contract with agents to retain authority, authenticity, and maintain individual image. Some choose to hide the fact that they are contracted or hiring expert team for similar purpose. For that they are concerned that revealing the fact of agent-operated team will harm the image as an authentic individual Influential, which ultimately will substitute the endorsement credentials as a close friend with commercial endorsement credentials as a corporate account.

The above mentioned propositions are added to the scope of study. (See Figure 20) The complemented figure presents theoretical contributions from this research towards all relevant field within scope of study.

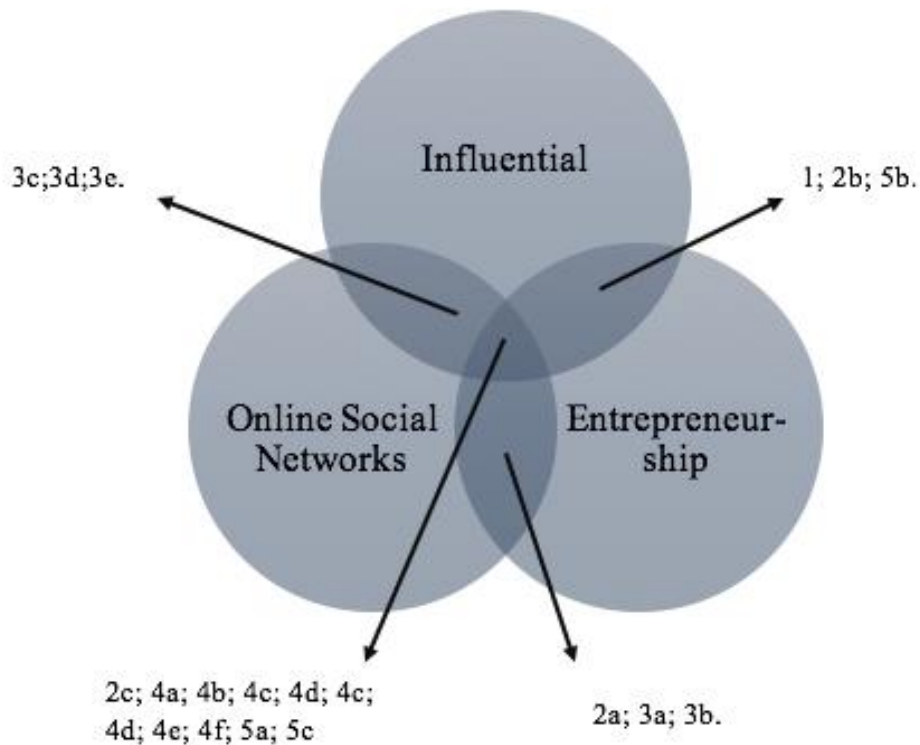


Figure 20 Theoretical Contribution.

Although this study is ethnographically located in China, the theoretical contributions may of reference value for other contexts as well. The proposed propositions above shall be further explored and examined with concrete evidence so as to confirm it or contradict it.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the establishment of interactive framework. (See Chapter 6.1) The empirical finding is based in China's context, but the methodology and theoretical contributions should be of reference value in other context as well. For the contextual limitations, the interactive framework is not sufficiently comprehensive to include all impactful evidence in this field. There is still much to be explored in this field, within other contexts, or with a longitudinal observation.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

As it is elaborated in Chapter 4, this study is primarily reliant on the interview as research methodology, which defines the work qualitative in nature. Due to the

novelty of the topic, qualitative approach is more justifiable so as to form a framework, which can provide as ground framework for further researches in quantitative approaches. Consequently, future researches can take single or a group of cases as research subject to conduct granular quantitative analysis so as to examine the effectiveness and efficiency with regard to particular activity or events. Nevertheless, this study aims at establishing an interactive framework of Customer Engagement Approaches of Influential Entrepreneurship, the examination of effective is merely the foci point. With the development of scale of Influential Industry, further and detailed examination can be achieved with sufficient amount of datasets. This will shed lights on design of CE approaches and provide concrete evidence to the effects of particular action.

This study argues the capability of managing Customer Engagement Approaches constitutes primary business strategy for Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin's 2016, 1-16; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467- 477; Hinz & Spann 2008, 367; Hinz et al. 2011, 68; Libai et al. 2010, 278) In Chapter 2.1.3.5, discussions upon gender constitution regarding Influential business strategy is put forward. Many scholars argue that Influential Entrepreneurship is a gendered labor, for that commercialized femininity under a distorted male gaze contributes to the popularity of Influential Entrepreneurs. (Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3; Abidin & Thompson 2012, 467-477; Senft 2008, 13, 116) Although this research does not concentrate on gender constitution within Influential Entrepreneurial group as a foci point, most the Influential Entrepreneur participants and the majority of customers group are female. The author maintains an objective view to collect data to exclude data selection bias, while the data components still show strong female presence. Consequently, gender perspective could be crucial to further research Influential Entrepreneurship. (Senft 2008, 13, 116; Abidin 2015a, 2016, 2-3) Fletcher (2009, 321-325) proves that attractiveness is related to higher incomes for woman, as in the groups of young graduates. Similar model can be established in the context of Influential Entrepreneurs to explore the linkage between beauty, ability, and wages upon gender segmentation.

The emergence of Influential Entrepreneurship as a research topic is rather novel, for that this field is an intersection of multiple disciplines, like social media, Influential effects, communication science, entrepreneurship, customer engagement, and customer management. Due to the novelty of the topic, the existing studies are

fragmented. Here the author would call on more deep researches on the topic, for the prosperity in practical enactment. For example, the emergence of social media caters the need for people to communicate and seek information. (Gummerus et al. 2012, 870; Heller & Parasnis 2011, 30-36) News report from official media cannot compete with social media for the effectiveness and efficiency, as the witness of the incident might be live posting on-site information when the incident occurs. Consequently, it can be deduced that the instant updates of social media solve people's anxiety for not attaining the first-hand information. To exploit people's desire to seek the first hand information can be a new growth point for social media as well as for operation of Influential Entrepreneurs. From the empirical finding, Influential Entrepreneurs have figured out the necessary approaches as in utilizing and discussing of hot topic, news, gossips and latest information and its relevant effects in accumulating popularity. For future research, the exploitations of people's desire for first-hand information on social media can be a starting point.

Lastly, the study is ethnographically located in China context to establish an interactive framework. The result is location-specific positioned rather than generalized result. The framework suggests a methodology and provide ground theoretical framework to future researches, suggesting the possibility to yield more fruitful results in other context. Hence, to study the phenomenon of Influential Entrepreneurship in other context is advised for scholars.

7 SUMMARY

This study has put forward the significant impact of Customer Engagement approaches in operating business activities as Influential Entrepreneurs. The relationship that established by Influential Entrepreneurs with customers reflects tangible pursuit on both sides. In other words, Influential Entrepreneurs are motivated by economic returns and social mobility, while customers are seeking tangible value as in information sharing, emotional companionship, communicational need, and vicarious experiences. In terms of endorsement and representation, customers' desire to achieve Influential equivalent lifestyle and to communicate regarding latest hot topics is exploited by purchasing activities, for that the belief on achieving such life with purchasing activities is settled as the communicational contents in Customer Engagement Approaches. CE is weighted as cost efficient strategy so as to charge price premium and set new marketing perspective, and this is acknowledged by multiple scholars and practitioners.

An interaction framework of CE approaches with regard to Influential Entrepreneurship is established in this study (See Figure 19), presenting the interactive business strategy that combines collaboration with partners and enactment on customers. The framework describes how Influential put in efforts to employ beyond transactional activities to sustain operation of business and achieve economic and marketing output. Characteristics and actions figures that defines Influential Entrepreneurship are scrutinized in the framework to provide a fundamental ground to acknowledge the significance of the emerged business model, most importantly, the definition settles fundamental ground for building interactive framework. Ultimately, the final interactive framework combines theoretical knowledge and empirical finding will serve as ground work for future studies.

This study adopts qualitative approach to collect primary data in the interview to supplement theoretical framework so as to build a final interactive framework. Primary data is collected with regard to 4 interviewees as experts in Influential Entrepreneurs, and 4 customers who have frequented the former's business as supporting primary data. Interview session is guided and analysed with the help of themed interview guide. (See Appendix 1.) All the interviews are either recorded and transcribed, or recorded as chat history for detailed review.

The work is ethnographically located in context of China, but the result provides ground framework for business strategy of Influential Entrepreneurs in a nutshell, which is of reference value in other context as well. It confirms the investment and value co-creation from customer side to sustain the operation of Influential Entrepreneurship. For the added value as in participation and involvement, customers retrieve psychological value and satisfy the desire to pursue similar lifestyle. Meanwhile, comparing with investment induced profit growth in traditional mass marketing, cost of CE to Influential Entrepreneurs is relatively lower and more efficient. As corporate charges extra fee for brand premium, and Influential charges emotional premium. The multi-channelling effects by Influential Entrepreneurs specifically reveals the low marginal cost for exploiting marginal markets. In the empirical findings, various strategies are adopted by Influential to enact effective CE approaches, reflecting innovativeness in entrepreneurial activities. Through trials and errors, Influential Entrepreneurship quickly set the presence in the market and shows potential in future development. Though the strategy is not systematically organized, the ability to learn and execute is emphasized in Influential groups so as to cope with opportunities and challenges in the highly homogeneous competitive market. The finding reveals a breaking perspective for future marketing activities.

Due to the novelty of this topic, only few academic works can be directly linked to this study. Consequently, this study is built from ground up in order to clearly scrutinize conceptions precisely and allocate concrete evidences to support the argument. The academic work that critically support the argument in this study is from Abidin and her colleagues, who conducted empirical work in Singapore to bridge the gap between Influential and Entrepreneurship academically. This may be attributed to the closeness and relativity in geography and socio-culture. Nevertheless, this study intends to bridge the gap of Influential Entrepreneurs and the Customer Engagement Approaches in the context of China, so as to reflect the endeavours and contributions by participants in the contexts. The business as Influential Entrepreneurs is no longer marginal and under the radar, but rather remarkable and promising. Despite the contextual limitation, this study does not intend to generalize on the topic, but to suggest a methodology and universal impact. The framework shed lights on the innovative development of Influential Entrepreneurship academically, providing theoretical contributions and practical implications for both scholars and practitioners.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1. Interview Guide.

Theme 1. Influential Entrepreneurship.

- What are the characteristics of Influential Entrepreneurship?
 - Are there any demographic characteristics that distinguish Influential Entrepreneurship, especially comparing with the rest marketers or pure Influential?
 - What kind of knowledge and special skills do Influential Entrepreneurs possess?
 - What are the personal characteristics possessed by Influential Entrepreneurs?
 - What are mind-based characteristics that distinguished Influential Entrepreneurship from the majority?
 - Do Influential Entrepreneurs need further elevation and development with regard to knowledge, skills, mind set, etc.?
- What are the actions that defines and signatures Influential Entrepreneurship?
 - How do Influential Entrepreneurs employ the aforementioned knowledge, skills, mindsets, etc.?
 - What are the strategies of Influential Entrepreneurship?
 - Are the actions effective and efficient? If so, in what perspective do the actions take effect?
- What are the structures of Influential Entrepreneurship, especially definition from the perspective of business structure?
 - Are there any reasons for building business in this particular structure?
 - In specific, what is the structure like? (e.g. solo, flat, studio, contract, hierarchical, etc.)
 - What kind of connections do Influential Entrepreneurs possess? How do they function, interact, and collaborate? (Professional connections, casual connections, etc.)
 - How do Influential get to know and keep in touch with the connections?
 - What are the revenue channels of Influential Entrepreneurship?
 - What are the major cost of Influential Entrepreneurship? (time, money, effort, etc.)

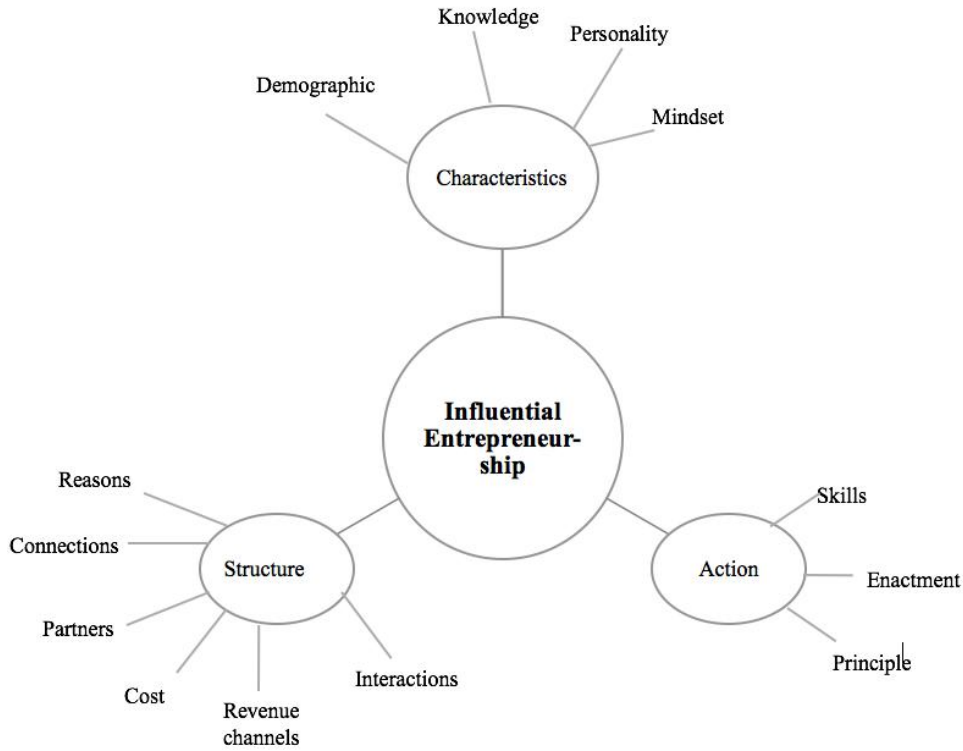
- What are the collaborative partners of Influential Entrepreneurship?
- How will the structure of Influential Entrepreneurs transform in the future?

Theme 2. Customer Engagement Approaches.

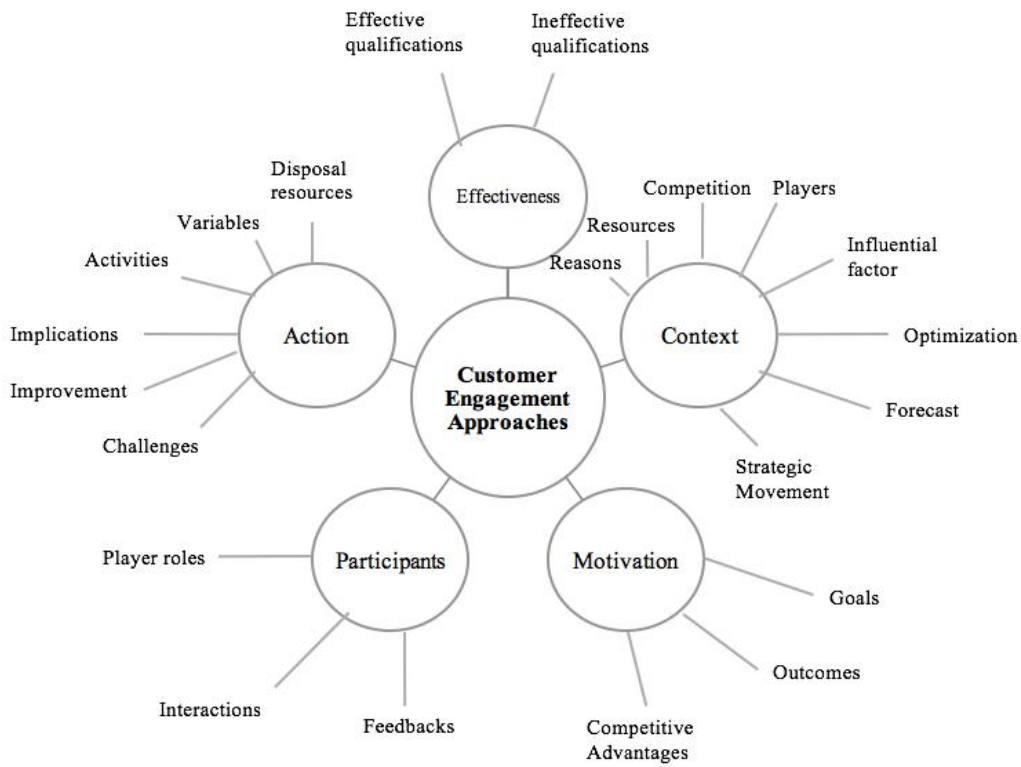
- Definition.
 - What qualifies as effective Customer Engagement approaches, and why?
 - What qualifies as ineffective Customer Engagement approaches, and why?
- Contextual-based questions.
 - What does the context look like with regard to Influential industry?
 - Are there any historical reasons that forms context as it is?
 - What are contextual factor that influence CE approaches? (policy, situation, psychological perception, trend, etc.)
 - Does the contextual factor influence positively or negatively, and why?
 - Is it possible to change or optimize contextual factors?
 - Are there any foreseeable changes or requirements in the context that needs attention?
 - If so, are there strategic movements to cope with aforementioned contextual changes or requirements?
 - What are the types of players (e.g. executers, initiators, participants, agents, value co-creators, etc.) are involved in the context?
 - What are the interactions like between players?
 - What are the available resources for initiating and conducting CE approaches?
- Motivations perspective.
 - What is the basic motivation for adopting CE approaches?
 - What is the goals of CE approaches?
 - What is the forecasted outcomes of CE approaches? Is it good or bad, and why?
 - How do CE approaches affect the competitive advantages of Influential Entrepreneurship?
- Action and strategy perspective.
 - What factors need to be taken into consideration in order to design a set of actions?
 - What is the appropriate working load, length of time span, and other consumption of resources for design such activities?

- What factors need to be weighted in the middle of CE approaches?
- What resources and support can be employed to conduct CE approaches?
- In specific, what types of activities are undertaken in conducting CE approaches? (online, offline)
- What are the roles of players in the CE activities?
- Is there a prioritization sequence of the activities in the above questions? If so, in what way?
- What are the implications of the activities, especially towards different involved players?
- What are the challenges in conducting the activities? (obstacles, troubles, etc.)
- How to cope with the above mentioned challenges? (In what method, to achieve what goal?)
- How will the actions make the players feel and receive? Is it positive or negative?
- What are the long-term goal in CE activities?
- What are the short-term tasks in CE activities?
- How do Influential Entrepreneurs improve CE activities?
- What is the impact of competitions?

Appendix 2. Thematic networks.



Thematic network 1(2)



Thematic network 2 (2)