Chapter 4
Harnessing Parasocial Interaction in Entrepreneurial Education:
Virtual Mentoring for Distance Learning

Thanuja Rathakrishnan

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5470-8931

School of Management and Marketing, Taylor's University, Lakeside, Malaysia

Feranita Feranita

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2228-1953

School of Management and Marketing, Taylor's University, Lakeside, Malaysia

Thivashini B. Jaya Kumar

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3265-3191

School of Management and Marketing, Taylor's University, Lakeside, Malaysia

Woon Leong Lin

🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6568-412X

School of Management and Marketing, Taylor's University, Lakeside, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the use of virtual mentors in distance learning for entrepreneurship education. Virtual mentors establish a strong connection with students via sharing personal stories, overcoming the challenges of physical interaction in distance learning. The benefits of learning from global experts are discussed, along with the importance of parasocial interaction for meaningful engagement in the context of distance learning. Virtual mentors provide personalized guidance, industry-specific insights, and networking opportunities, contributing to entrepreneurial knowledge. The chapter contributes to the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurship education and expands the application of parasocial interaction

beyond media and entertainment. It provides practical strategies for educators to enhance the distance learning experiences, leveraging virtual mentors to provide real-world insights and facilitate networking. Overall, this chapter highlights that integration between parasocial interaction and virtual mentors facilitate entrepreneurial education in distance learning.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Parasocial interaction is a term that refers to a one-sided psychological relationship that individuals form with media figures or celebrities. Despite having no direct personal interaction with that individual, people tend to develop a strong fondness, bond or emotional attachment with someone they perceive as a media or social media persona (Brestovanský & Sekerešová, 2022). This phenomenon has gained significant relevance in the education context, in particularly in distance learning. This book chapter then dive into the scope of entrepreneurial education, as entrepreneurship has been gaining a lot of traction in the past due to their significance and beneficial to themselves, society and to the country.

In the social media and interactive online content era, individuals have the opportunity to establish themselves as media figures, in particularly entrepreneurs in showcasing their expertise, sharing opinions, advices, experiences, memories, "bringing" the students along with their journey – thereby receiving likes and gaining more followers (Aw et al., 2022; Rudeloff & Damms, 2022; Scherer et al., 2022). Parasocial interaction also refers to students building a one-sided relationship and connection with a virtual mentor, often through video content, podcasts, or blogs (Jarzyna, 2021). These virtual mentors can be industry experts, celebrity entrepreneurs, successful entrepreneurs, or social media influencers who are entrepreneurs themselves. This enables the virtual mentors in cultivating a bond - parasocial relationship, where the students feel connected and warm with them; albeit unrequited. Generally, in this type of relationship, the individual will feel emotionally connected to the media figure or character, despite the absence of a pre-existing acquaintance, familiarity, or established relationship between the individuals involved. By capitalizing on parasocial interaction, the virtual mentors can capture the attention and interest of aspiring entrepreneurs (students) making the educational content more engaging and memorable.

One aspect of parasocial interaction relevant to entrepreneurial education is on the legitimacy of the persona themselves. Entrepreneurs who are successful or influencer entrepreneurs often share and upload contents such as personal stories, experiences, and values to engage with their students. By sharing their journey,

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