



# ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MYANMAR: PROPOSING SOLUTIONS TO DIGITAL CHALLENGES THROUGH ECOSYSTEM AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

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**Abstract:** This research investigates the challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in Myanmar, with a focus on those navigating the digital entrepreneurship space. It examines the impact of Myanmar's socio-political environment, particularly following the 2021 military coup, on business operations, access to financial resources, and overall entrepreneurial development. The study highlights the barriers young entrepreneurs encounter, such as economic instability, infrastructure deficiencies, and limited market access. Through a qualitative research design, data was collected from four digital entrepreneurs via semi-structured surveys, and analyzed using an entrepreneurship ecosystem framework. Key challenges identified include financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and a restrictive policy environment. Despite these obstacles, entrepreneurs displayed resilience through innovative strategies, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, networking, and continual learning. The research also proposes strategic solutions to address these challenges, including fostering public-private partnerships for infrastructure development, improving policy frameworks to protect and encourage digital entrepreneurship, and providing mental health and business skills support for young entrepreneurs. The findings provide practical guidance for policymakers, business incubators, and other stakeholders to create a more supportive ecosystem that empowers Myanmar's youth to thrive in the digital economy. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for systemic reforms and targeted interventions to unlock the full potential of Myanmar's entrepreneurial landscape.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship, Myanmar, infrastructure, policy, entrepreneurship ecosystem framework

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini menyelidiki tantangan yang dihadapi oleh pengusaha muda di Myanmar, dengan fokus pada mereka yang menjelajahi ruang kewirausahaan digital. Artikel ini meneliti dampak lingkungan sosial-politik Myanmar, terutama setelah kudeta militer 2021, terhadap operasi bisnis, akses ke sumber daya keuangan, dan perkembangan kewirausahaan secara keseluruhan. Selanjutnya, artikel ini menyoroti hambatan yang dihadapi oleh para pengusaha muda, seperti ketidakstabilan ekonomi, kekurangan infrastruktur, dan akses pasar yang terbatas. Melalui desain penelitian kualitatif, data dikumpulkan dari empat pengusaha digital melalui survei semi-terstruktur, dan dianalisis menggunakan kerangka ekosistem kewirausahaan. Tantangan utama yang teridentifikasi meliputi keterbatasan finansial, infrastruktur yang tidak memadai, dan lingkungan kebijakan yang membatasi. Meskipun menghadapi berbagai rintangan ini, para pengusaha menunjukkan ketahanan melalui strategi inovatif, menekankan pentingnya adaptabilitas, jaringan, dan pembelajaran berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini juga mengusulkan solusi strategis untuk mengatasi tantangan-tantangan ini, termasuk mendorong kemitraan publik-swasta untuk pengembangan infrastruktur, memperbaiki kerangka kebijakan untuk melindungi dan mendorong kewirausahaan digital, serta menyediakan dukungan kesehatan mental dan keterampilan bisnis bagi para wirausahawan muda. Temuan tersebut memberikan panduan praktis bagi pembuat kebijakan, inkubator bisnis, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya untuk menciptakan ekosistem yang lebih mendukung yang memberdayakan pemuda Myanmar untuk berkembang dalam ekonomi digital. Pada akhirnya, studi ini menekankan perlunya reformasi sistemik dan intervensi yang terarah untuk membuka potensi penuh lanskap kewirausahaan Myanmar.

**Kata Kunci:** kewirausahaan, Myanmar, infrastruktur, kebijakan, kerangka ekosistem kewirausahaan

## INTRODUCTION

Youth entrepreneurs are pivotal in driving innovation, creating employment opportunities, and addressing socio-economic disparities, especially in developing regions like Southeast Asia (Entrepreneurship 2018). Similarly, empowering Myanmar's youth to overcome entrepreneurial challenges is crucial for the nation's economic growth and sustainable development (Jain et al. 2018). However, Myanmar's socio-political environment presents significant obstacles for young entrepreneurs, particularly following the 2021 military coup, which disrupted critical systems necessary for business operations (UNDP 2021). This research

explores these challenges, providing practical guidance on entrepreneurial approaches based on entrepreneurship in the digital space tailored to Myanmar's unique context.

Myanmar's youth face numerous challenges in pursuing entrepreneurship, compounded by the 2021 military coup that created widespread uncertainty(UNDP 2021). The coup has significantly affected governance, disrupted legal systems, and eroded business confidence, making it difficult for young entrepreneurs to secure investments or plan for long-term growth(UNDP 2021). Economic instability, characterized by high inflation and currency devaluation, further limits access to financial resources, with many youths unable to secure loans due to a lack of collateral and high interest rates(Jain et al. 2018). Additionally, Myanmar's poor infrastructure and limited internet access hinder the ability of young entrepreneurs to leverage digital platforms and e-commerce(Jain et al. 2018). Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering a supportive ecosystem for Myanmar's aspiring youth entrepreneurs.

Several studies have explored youth entrepreneurship and its challenges, particularly in ASEAN countries and Myanmar, which provide a relevant context for Myanmar's situation. One such study titled *"Role and Prospects of Entrepreneurship Development in Myanmar,"* examines the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Myanmar through six key pillars: policy, finance, infrastructure, human capital, markets, and supportive networks("Yangon University of Economics Master of Development Studies Programme Role and Prospects of Entrepreneurship Development in Myanmar Mie Mie Yu Thwin Master of Development Studies Programme Role and Prospects of Entrepreneurship" 2018). The study, based on a survey of 260 entrepreneurs, identifies infrastructure as the most critical obstacle, followed by challenges in business environment, market access, policy barriers, financial constraints, and human capital shortages. It emphasizes the pressing barriers hindering Myanmar's entrepreneurial growth but stops short of proposing specific solutions, instead calling for systemic reforms across these pillars to create a more supportive environment for entrepreneurship. A similar study titled *"An In-Depth Analysis of the Role and Prospects of Entrepreneurship Development in Myanmar: A Strategic Ecosystem Approach"*

explores the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Myanmar, and business environment(Thidar et al. 2024). Key challenges identified include unreliable infrastructure, limited financial support, and a shortage of skilled human capital. The study emphasizes the urgent need for targeted policy interventions and ecosystem improvements to address these systemic gaps but does not delve into specific solutions. In "New Venture Entrepreneurship and Context in East Asia: A Systematic Literature Review," explores that entrepreneurship research in East Asia predominantly focuses on China, with significant attention given to institutional and cultural factors influencing entrepreneurial ecosystems, strategy, and financing(Hemmert et al. 2022). Findings suggest a need for broader contextualization and comparative studies across East Asian nations to deepen understanding and better account for regional diversity in entrepreneurial practices. These studies provide valuable perspectives but also highlight the need for more specific research on the unique challenges and opportunities facing Myanmar's youth entrepreneurs. The study titled "Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Competitiveness in the ASEAN: An Empirical Analysis," examines the interplay between innovation, entrepreneurship, and national competitiveness across ASEAN countries(Zuhroh and Putri 2021). The study emphasizes the need for targeted innovation policies and institutional frameworks to enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem, enabling sustainable economic growth and competitiveness in the ASEAN region. It also points to the crucial role of innovation in driving inclusive development and fostering resilient economies.

## ***METHODS***

This section outlines the research design, data collection methods, and analytical frameworks employed in the study, "**Entrepreneurship in Myanmar: Proposing Solutions to Digital Challenges Through Ecosystem and Strategic Frameworks.**" The methodology is carefully structured to ensure the collection and interpretation of data in alignment with the study's objectives of addressing challenges faced by Myanmar's digital entrepreneurs.

### ***Research Design***

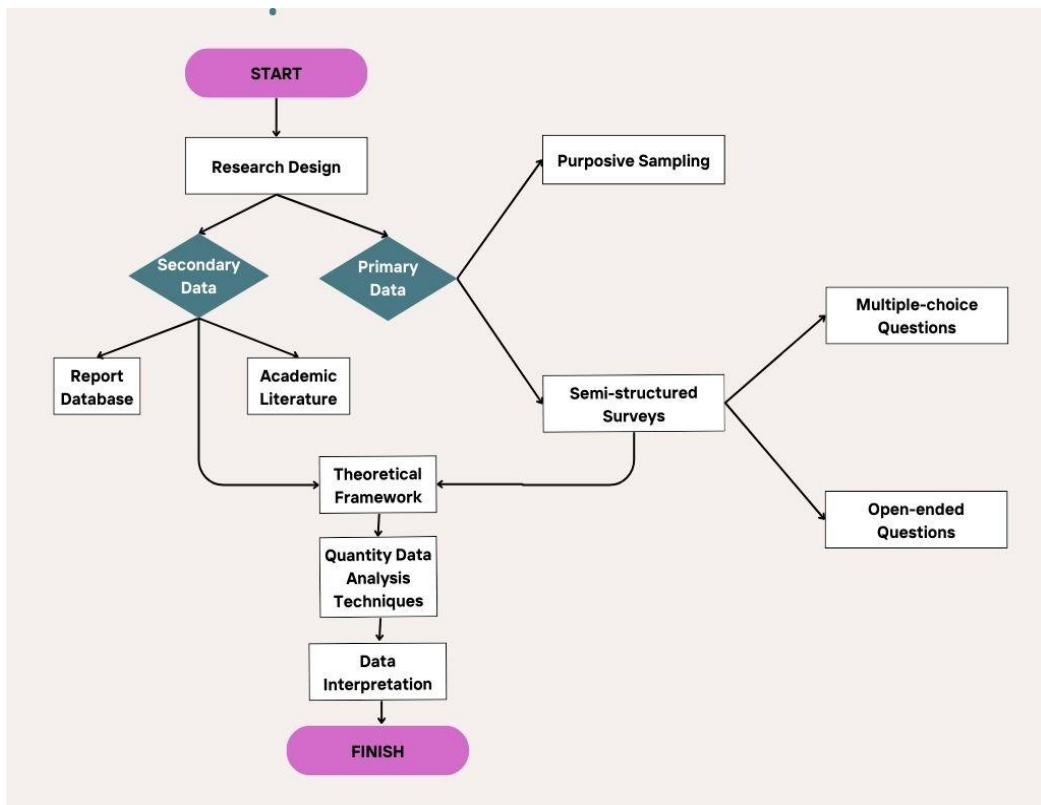
The study adopts a **qualitative research design** to explore the challenges, opportunities, and strategic solutions for digital entrepreneurs in Myanmar. Qualitative research is well-suited for understanding complex phenomena, particularly in dynamic and context-specific environments such as Myanmar's entrepreneurial ecosystem. This approach enables a dive into subjective experiences, perceptions, and strategies of entrepreneurs, particularly in navigating socio-political and economic adversities. Data is analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and to map challenges and strategies within the digital entrepreneurship space. The study applies established entrepreneurship ecosystem framework to identify challenges and propose solutions to the challenges identified. The data collection process involved a **combination of primary and secondary data sources**, ensuring a robust foundation for addressing the research objectives. Primary data was collected through **semi-structured surveys** distributed to four participants, all of whom are entrepreneurs engaged in digital fields such as social media services, online education, and online businesses. This method allowed for flexibility in probing deeper into participants' experiences and eliciting rich qualitative data. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, targeting young digital entrepreneurs operating in Myanmar or connected to its entrepreneurial ecosystem. The selection criteria included individuals actively engaged in digital entrepreneurship, with at least one year of experience navigating Myanmar's socio-economic challenges. The survey featured a mix of **open-ended questions** and **multiple-choice questions** based on six key pillars of entrepreneurship ecosystem to balance qualitative richness and structured responses. Key focus areas included business profile, challenges, strategies and their thoughts on Myanmar entrepreneurship struggles and recommendations.

Secondary data was sourced from academic literature which studies on youth entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and digital business challenges in Myanmar and ASEAN contexts, reports and databases such as publications from UNDP, and other reputable organizations focusing on entrepreneurship in developing countries and policy documents from government and NGO reports

addressing entrepreneurial policies and strategies for Myanmar. This triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility and depth of the findings.

The study employed a combination of **entrepreneurship ecosystem framework** and **qualitative analysis techniques** to interpret the data and derive actionable insights. Entrepreneurship ecosystem is used to address challenges of Myanmar entrepreneurs.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes in the qualitative data collected through surveys. Key themes included financial constraints, resilience in navigating socio-political challenges, and the importance of support networks. Data was manually coded to ensure accuracy and context-specific interpretation, focusing on challenges, coping mechanisms, and strategic solutions. Responses were compared against existing literature to validate findings and identify gaps that could inform future research.



**Figure.1** Research Methodology Flowchart for Addressing Digital Challenges in Myanmar's Entrepreneurship Through Ecosystem and Strategic Frameworks

### *Literature Review*

The digital entrepreneurs in developing nations encounter a fragile institutional framework and an environment characterized by corruption, which significantly hinders their operations. These fragile infrastructures result in the inability to access essential start-up funds, the absence of policies and regulations that protect and support e-commerce, a deficient digital infrastructure, and a lack of digitally skilled and experienced labor capital (Samara and Terzian 2021).

### *Data Result*

The survey concluded with input from four entrepreneurs, including three digital entrepreneurs engaged in social media services, online education, and online business. Moreover, one tarot and fortune-telling service provider shared a brief opinion; however, further detailed information about her business was unavailable. The online business owner resides abroad. The entrepreneurial ecosystem framework is used as a report framework as it provides a comprehensive lens for examining the challenges, and strategies encountered by entrepreneurs. The six factors of the entrepreneurship ecosystem framework are access to finance, policy environment, infrastructure, human capital, access to markets and business environment.

#### **1. Access to Finance**

The survey findings reveal that limited access to financial resources is a significant challenge for young entrepreneurs in Myanmar. All four respondents indicated that they relied solely on personal savings for startup capital, pointing to a lack of formal financial support mechanisms such as loans or grants. This situation highlights a systemic barrier in accessing external financing, which severely limits the ability to scale entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, one respondent shared the difficulties associated with international transactions, noting that Myanmar-issued bank cards were frequently rejected, leading to operational delays. The withdrawal of international funding agencies following the military coup has further compounded this issue, leaving entrepreneurs with fewer viable financial options.

## **2. Policy Environment**

The regulatory environment in Myanmar has been identified as a key obstacle to entrepreneurship. According to one respondent, entrepreneurs face the challenge of navigating bureaucratic processes that require step-by-step reporting for regulatory approval, with certain topics being prohibited by law. These stringent regulations not only hinder the speed of business operations but also discourage innovation and risk-taking, crucial components of a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Such barriers highlight the need for regulatory reforms to create a more supportive environment for entrepreneurs, encouraging innovation and facilitating growth.

## **3. Infrastructure**

Infrastructure inadequacies emerged as a critical concern for the entrepreneurs surveyed. Two respondents, based in Myanmar, reported frequent disruptions due to unreliable electricity and internet connectivity. These infrastructural challenges led to delays and required entrepreneurs to rush their tasks during periods of availability, which ultimately hindered productivity. For instance, the inability to fully charge power banks due to inconsistent electricity supply disrupted essential business operations, affecting overall business performance. These infrastructural barriers limit the ability of digital entrepreneurs to scale their operations and compete in a global marketplace, underscoring the urgent need for infrastructure development in Myanmar.

## **4. Human Capital**

Human capital constraints were another prominent theme in the survey results. Balancing the demands of business, education, and personal life was identified as a significant challenge by the entrepreneurs, particularly those in their early twenties. Two respondents, who were still pursuing undergraduate studies, reported experiencing psychological stress and health issues due to the pressure of managing their businesses alongside academic responsibilities. The survey highlights the importance of providing wellness programs and flexible educational opportunities to support young entrepreneurs in managing these challenges. Addressing human capital issues is essential for fostering long-term entrepreneurial success, particularly for the youth in Myanmar.



## **5. Access to Markets**

Entrepreneurs in Myanmar face considerable difficulties in accessing markets, particularly in the digital space. Survey respondents reported intense competition often being get copied by competitors, undervaluation of digital products, and difficulties in reaching target audiences. One digital entrepreneur noted that clients often engaged in excessive bargaining, resulting in lower pay and compromised content quality. Additionally, the tarot service provider faced challenges due to the suspension of Facebook's monetization services for creators, which led to reduced audience engagement. Despite these barriers, entrepreneurs have employed innovative marketing strategies to maintain their presence in the market, such as collaborating with influencers and analyzing competitors' weaknesses. These adaptive strategies underscore the importance of market awareness and creativity in overcoming barriers to market access.

## **6. Business Environment**

The business environment in Myanmar faces significant challenges, including a hierarchical reporting structure that forces businesses to operate offline to avoid scrutiny. Intellectual property protection is limited, discouraging innovation and the formalization of businesses. The withdrawal of foreign investment and funding agencies has further strained the ecosystem, creating a funding gap and reducing access to critical resources.

Despite these obstacles, Myanmar's entrepreneurial culture remains resilient. Entrepreneurs emphasize a trial-and-error approach and lifelong learning as key strategies for overcoming challenges. One respondent described Myanmar's youth as "warriors," noting their ability to balance business activities with education and skill development, even amid political and economic crises. This resilience highlights the potential for entrepreneurial growth, though the lack of external support systems and intellectual property protections continues to be a barrier.

### *Solutions The Entrepreneurship Framework*

As entrepreneurship ecosystem is used to identify the challenges, same framework would be used to suggest the solutions.

#### **1. Access to Finance**

One significant challenge faced by digital entrepreneurship in developing countries is the limited accessibility to essential funding, primarily due to the scarcity of venture capital markets and the absence of "business angels." However, leveraging family resources as a source of social, human, and financial capital presents a viable opportunity (Samara and Terzian 2021). Additionally, promoting funding initiatives through both public and private channels can further support entrepreneurial growth and development (Samara and Terzian 2021).

Family and friends can provide initial support, while crowdfunding offers a platform to present innovative ideas to the public for financial backing. Additionally, building relationships with accelerators and incubators serves as a valuable avenue for securing funding (Samara and Terzian 2021). For tech-based businesses in particular, financial bootstrapping strategies are crucial. These strategies include negotiating with clients, borrowing from suppliers, hiring inexpensive labor, and developing unique connections with people and institutions (Samara and Terzian 2021).

#### **2. Policy Environment**

The absence of laws and regulations that safeguard and encourage e-commerce and digital entrepreneurs is a major obstacle facing digital entrepreneurship in developing nations (Samara and Terzian 2021). This problem can be solved by state reforms that need more protective legislation for digital entrepreneurs, creating a more safe and supportive environment for digital businesses and e-commerce (Samara and Terzian 2021). To create a more supportive environment for digital entrepreneurs, state reforms must focus on **simplifying regulatory processes, reducing barriers to entry, and facilitating access to essential resources** (Edwards 2021). One key step is **streamlining business registration and licensing**, allowing entrepreneurs to set up businesses quickly through digital platforms while eliminating unnecessary permits and administrative burdens (Edwards 2021). For instance, cities like **Chicago successfully reduced the**

**number of business licenses from 117 to 49**, making it easier for startups to launch and operate efficiently(Edwards 2021). Additionally, **deregulating barriers to entry**, such as repealing restrictive **Certificate of Need (CON) laws** and **excessive occupational licensing requirements**, can foster innovation by allowing businesses to operate across state lines with minimal legal hurdles(Edwards 2021). Moreover, **expanding access to digital infrastructure**, particularly by investing in broadband expansion and reducing regulatory burdens on telecom providers, is crucial in ensuring entrepreneurs have affordable high-speed internet access to run their digital businesses effectively(Edwards 2021). To further stimulate digital entrepreneurship, **tax incentives and funding support** should be provided through **state-funded grants and venture capital programs**, similar to those offered in certain U.S. states to encourage startup growth. Finally, **aligning local and regional regulations** across jurisdictions can significantly enhance cross-border digital trade(Edwards 2021). A notable example is **ASEAN's Digital Integration Framework**, which harmonizes e-commerce and fintech policies to create a unified business environment across Southeast Asia(Edwards 2021). By implementing these strategic reforms, governments can foster a more inclusive and dynamic ecosystem for digital entrepreneurs, driving economic growth and innovation(Edwards 2021).

### **3. Infrastructure**

Adopting Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) has been acknowledged as a workable way to solve issues with digital business infrastructure, especially with regard to access to power and the internet(Hairong and Sautman 2024). For example, Ethiopia has depended on Chinese investments to build its digital and energy infrastructure in spite of power shortages; China has funded and built Ethiopia's biggest hydropower projects and has been instrumental in the growth of the country's fiber-optic network(Hairong and Sautman 2024).

### **4. Human Capital**

Personal relationships are a source of human and social capital that give business owners the support and resources digital entrepreneurs need(Samara and Terzian 2021). Entrepreneurs' mental health is enhanced by stress management and business skills training, particularly when paired with financial assistance(Stephan 2018).

Stress can be reduced by using coping mechanisms including proactive and problem-focused methods(Stephan 2018). Social support from peers, family, and clients improves resilience and lessens feelings of loneliness. Stress recovery is aided by work-life balance techniques, such as distancing oneself from work and leisure pursuits. The long-term wellbeing of entrepreneurs can be further supported by having access to financial resources, mentorship programs, and mental health therapies(Stephan 2018).

### **5. Access to Markets**

Based on the survey, intense competition, undervaluation of digital products, facebook's monetization service are key challenges for access to markets. To accomplish strategic goals, dynamic capabilities—sensing, seizing, and transforming—must work well together(Baumann 2022). Sensing ability is essential for spotting possibilities and dangers, but search operations frequently stay local, which restricts the ability to investigate novel knowledge combinations that are required in a corporate environment that is changing quickly(Baumann 2022). Designing business plans and investment choices are part of capturing capacity, and prompt decision-making is crucial, particularly in digital marketplaces where early entrance offers competitive benefits(Baumann 2022). In order to facilitate efficient value distribution, transformation focuses on coordinating and renewing ecosystem assets while striking a balance between collaboration and competition(Baumann 2022). Strong dynamic skills enable businesses to not only adjust to business ecosystems but also influence them via cooperation and innovation(Baumann 2022).

### **6. Business Environment**

The challenges within the business environment are interconnected with five other key factors. Therefore, addressing these areas is essential for enhancing the overall business environment.

## ***RESULTS AND DISCUSSION***

The findings of this study reveal several significant challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs in Myanmar's digital sector. A primary issue is **limited access to finance**, as all participants reported relying solely on personal savings for business capital due to difficulties in securing loans or grants. This lack of financial support, compounded by Myanmar's political instability and international sanctions, has created a severe funding gap. To address this, the establishment of public-private partnerships and the promotion of alternative financing options, such as crowdfunding or microfinance, could provide essential capital for young entrepreneurs. Additionally, family resources, including personal networks and support from relatives, are often used as an alternative source of funding.

Another major challenge identified is **the restrictive policy environment**. Entrepreneurs highlighted difficulties navigating bureaucratic hurdles, a lack of protective laws for digital businesses, and the absence of clear regulations for e-commerce. The political instability following the 2021 coup has only worsened this issue. Simplifying regulatory processes, creating a more transparent legal framework for digital business, and implementing protective measures for intellectual property could significantly improve the entrepreneurial climate.

**Infrastructure deficiencies**, particularly in electricity and internet connectivity, were also critical barriers for digital entrepreneurs. Power outages and unreliable internet disrupted business operations, especially for those relying on online platforms. The government should prioritize infrastructure development through public-private partnerships to enhance internet connectivity and power supply, particularly in rural areas. This would help create a more stable environment for digital businesses to thrive.

In terms of **human capital**, entrepreneurs reported a lack of specialized skills and challenges related to balancing business management with educational commitments. The stress of running a business while still studying was a common issue. To address this, initiatives providing business training, digital skills development, and mental health support would help youth entrepreneurs build resilience and enhance their capabilities. Flexible educational programs tailored for

entrepreneurs could also allow them to manage both their studies and their businesses more effectively.

Lastly, **access to markets** was another obstacle, with entrepreneurs struggling to expand their reach due to intense local competition and difficulty in finding paying clients. The suspension of Facebook's monetization feature further impacted online businesses. To overcome this, entrepreneurs should focus on strengthening their digital marketing strategies and exploring alternative platforms for monetization. Collaboration with other regional markets through ASEAN initiatives could also help increase their market access.

In conclusion, while Myanmar's youth entrepreneurs face a range of challenges, these issues are not insurmountable. By addressing the gaps in finance, policy, infrastructure, human capital, and market access, Myanmar can create a more favorable environment for digital entrepreneurship, fostering innovation and long-term economic growth.

## ***CONCLUSIONS***

The study identifies critical challenges faced by youth entrepreneurs, including limited access to finance, restrictive policies, inadequate infrastructure, human capital constraints, and market access barriers. However, the research also offers clear solutions, utilizing the entrepreneurship ecosystem framework to address these issues. Key solutions include promoting alternative financing options like crowdfunding, microfinance, and public-private partnerships; streamlining regulations, creating protective laws for digital businesses, and simplifying e-commerce frameworks; investing in public-private partnerships to enhance digital infrastructure, particularly for electricity and internet connectivity; offering business skills development, mental health support, and flexible educational programs tailored for entrepreneurs; and strengthening digital marketing strategies, exploring alternative monetization platforms, and fostering regional collaboration. By addressing these challenges, Myanmar can cultivate a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem that supports innovation, economic growth, and long-term success for young digital entrepreneurs. This study's implications extend

beyond Myanmar, offering valuable insights for similar developing economies seeking to enhance their entrepreneurial landscapes.

This research provides valuable insights for policymakers, business incubators, and other stakeholders invested in fostering digital entrepreneurship in Myanmar. The study underscores the importance of addressing the systemic barriers facing young entrepreneurs, particularly those in the digital and e-commerce sectors, and offers a framework for developing targeted interventions to support their growth. Future research could focus on exploring specific funding models that could work in Myanmar's context, such as microfinance or government-backed funding initiatives. Further studies could also examine the role of government regulations and how specific policy reforms could encourage entrepreneurship in the digital sector. Another potential area of research is exploring the psychological and health impacts of entrepreneurial pressures on youth, with a focus on mental health programs and support systems that could improve the well-being of entrepreneurs. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide actionable recommendations for creating a more conducive environment for digital entrepreneurship, not only in Myanmar but also in other developing countries with similar challenges.

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