

Opportunities for Social Media to Support Aspiring Entrepreneurs with Financial Constraints

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Social media offers an alternative source for entrepreneurs to expand their social networks and obtain relevant resources to support their ambitions. Aspiring entrepreneurs with limited access to resources and social networks might rely more on the opportunities that social media tools offer. Aspiring entrepreneurs navigate social media to realize their economic dreams. Yet, those who face financial constraints often face challenges. Because aspiring entrepreneurs are transitioning to entrepreneurship, they must construct and even adapt to new work-role identities and new requisite skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interactions. In a re-analysis of a sub-sample of data from two empirical studies, this work examines how aspiring entrepreneurs living in a financially-constrained environment seek informational, social, and emotional support online and navigate their transition to entrepreneurship. These entrepreneurs obtained informational and emotional resources from observing other members' posts in online communities, including the next steps needed to adapt to their desired small business work roles. However, few publicly disclosed their informational or emotional needs online. We extend existing research on financially-constrained entrepreneurs' use of social media, contributing insights into how these resource-seeking practices limit their exploration of alternative entrepreneurial identities and feedback. We also contribute design implications to facilitate their online disclosure practices, including offering suggestions about ways to respond to questions and other disclosures in ways that restore trust and mitigate identity threats.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in HCI**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: social media; entrepreneurship; transitions; resource-seeking; underserved populations; low-resource communities

ACM Reference Format:

Aarti Israni, Julie Hui, and Tawanna R. Dillahunt. 2023. Opportunities for Social Media to Support Aspiring Entrepreneurs with Financial Constraints. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.* 7, CSCW1, Article 143 (April 2023), 27 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3579619>

1 INTRODUCTION

Supporting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship is essential—entrepreneurship can lead to innovation, productivity growth, job creation, and ultimately economic development [35]. Social networks¹ provide entrepreneurs with access to resources for their businesses, such as informational, emotional, and social support [32, 55]. Thus, social networks are pivotal success factors for

¹By "social networks," we refer to the online and offline social relationships an individual has, including but not limited to friends, neighbors, and relatives [11].

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2573-0142/2023/4-ART143

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3579619>

entrepreneurs [69]. Nevertheless, only some entrepreneurs have access to the same resources, and aspiring entrepreneurs—who we refer to as those working toward micro-businesses ownership—might not have access to well-established networks [37, 52]. Research points to social media² as alternative places for individuals to expand their social networks and obtain relevant resources to support entrepreneurial ambitions [63]. Support found on sites like Facebook Groups and Instagram can be even more efficient than traditional networks [59]. Finding like-minded others and seeking anonymous feedback is more easily performed online, where people can connect despite temporal or spatial boundaries [69]. Additional benefits include the ability to observe and acquire tacit knowledge passively. Kuhn et al. found an association between online communication and business growth [58]. Women and younger business owners were more inclined to rely on online resources for entrepreneurial advice [58]. This framing, however, masks the various digital labors and challenges that financially-constrained entrepreneurs must navigate to realize their economic dreams [6]. While social media are emerging as tools to help facilitate informational and emotional support [90], the benefits are realized by those that feel comfortable disclosing their identity and resource needs [26]. Because aspiring entrepreneurs are transitioning to entrepreneurship, a path that is not so straightforward, they must construct and even adapt to new work-role identities [47]. Limited access to financial resources intensifies the pressures that accompany becoming an entrepreneur and constructing one's role. Past research has suggested that in financially-constrained communities, perceived online norms [49, 71], requisite communication skills [6, 36, 92], and privacy concerns [6, 42], may inhibit them from publicly disclosing their work-role identities and resource needs online. Resource-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs must also adapt to and acquire new skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interactions.

In this investigation, we focus on aspiring entrepreneurs living in financially-constrained environments and examine how they seek informational, social, and emotional support online. Our goal is to understand how they leverage social media platforms as aspiring entrepreneurs (i.e., their transition to becoming entrepreneurs) and the challenges they navigate in these transitions. To do this, we address the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do aspiring entrepreneurs living in financially-constrained areas leverage social media platforms for informational and emotional support as they navigate work-role transitions to entrepreneurship?
- **RQ2:** What challenges do they face as they leverage social media platforms for this purpose and how do they work around these challenges?

We address our questions by drawing from a sub-sample of two empirical studies in Metropolitan Detroit, an area we identified as resource-constrained based on its estimated poverty rate of 25% and median household income of \$27,838 at the time data was collected [27]. Aspiring entrepreneurs in our study aimed to own formal and informal micro-businesses, and all had less than five full-time employees. These types of businesses constitute the majority of small business ownership in financially-constrained communities in the United States [62]. The studies we drew from consisted of semi-structured interviews with small business owners or those actively trying to become small business owners.

We analyzed a sample of 19 interviews focusing on individuals who started their businesses within three years of the interviews or were starting their businesses. We re-analyzed the data according to established phases of work-role transitions [5, 47]: *exploration* of possible and desired work-role identities, *provisional trial* of work-role identities, and an *evaluation* of individuals' current and desired work-role identities. We found that participants used social media platforms such as

²Social media refer to internet-based channels that facilitate selective self-presentation and one-to-one and one-to-many interactions among individuals [15].

Facebook Groups in the exploration phase to identify the next steps needed to adapt to their desired entrepreneurial work role(s) and obtained validation for their desired identities. However, contrary to prior research that suggests that online platforms are being used more to explore alternate career paths [10, 83], we found that participants rarely used such platforms to explore and consider possible entrepreneurial identities. Instead, they explored possible entrepreneurial identities primarily via their offline interactions with strong and weak ties who either were small business owners or whose professional role(s) entailed supporting small business owners. We saw limited evidence of participants using social media for provisional trial activities, like seeking feedback. Contrary to past studies that suggest that social platforms are being used to obtain feedback on work-role identities [56, 67, 95], we found that our participants rarely used such platforms to obtain feedback in this way. Finally, participants conducted self-evaluations by obtaining informational and emotional resources from observing other members' posts in online communities. However, they expressed challenges with disclosing their informational or emotional needs. For instance, in addition to the emotional labor of managing their digital identities [6], participants reported difficulties navigating online and offline norms, safety concerns, and a limited understanding of how to employ social media to communicate their identities as entrepreneurs effectively.

Our work makes several contributions: First, we provide a deeper understanding of how financially constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' resource-seeking practices on social media do not support specific work-role transition processes and limit them from exploring alternative entrepreneurial identities and obtaining feedback. Second, we extend past work on the challenges aspiring entrepreneurs with financial constraints face when using social media for their informational and emotional needs [6, 42]. Past work has primarily focused on how challenges such as privacy and professional agency shape how financially-constrained entrepreneurs use social platforms for entrepreneurship [6, 42]. Our work identifies additional challenges they must navigate, including safety concerns due to fears of discrimination, harassment, and uncertainty around community norms. We contribute a deeper understanding of how such challenges impact their practices of online self-disclosure and the implications of their transitions to entrepreneurship. Finally, as we show in Table 2, we draw from past HCI and educational scholarship on developing inclusive spaces for marginalized communities [1, 3, 91, 93, 94] to contribute design implications for how social media platforms can better facilitate aspiring and financially-constrained entrepreneurs' online disclosure practices as they seek informational and emotional support online. These include offering suggestions to viewers about ways to respond to questions and other disclosures in ways that restore trust and mitigate identity threats.

2 RELATED WORK

Past research suggested that social media facilitate access to informational and emotional support [25, 90], which can be invaluable in helping financially-constrained entrepreneurs to construct and adapt to new entrepreneurial work-role identities. Despite the benefits afforded by such platforms, the question of how to facilitate online disclosure of resource needs still presents challenges, especially in low-income communities. Past research suggests that perceived online norms that deter resource-seeking [18, 49, 71], requisite communication skills [6, 36, 92], and privacy concerns [6, 44] may inhibit individuals facing financial constraints from disclosing their resource needs online, thereby limiting the informational and emotional support they can receive. Drawing from Organizational Management scholarship, we first discuss the process of work-role identity construction and adaptation and the role of informational and emotional support in this process. Next, drawing from HCI and CSCW literature, we discuss the challenges that may inhibit access to informational and emotional support in low-income communities.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Work-Role Transitions

We define work-role(s) as a set of behaviors and expectations associated with a profession or occupation [9]. Transitioning to a new work role often requires individuals to adapt to and acquire new skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interactions [47]. Such changes can reveal discrepancies in an individual's actual and desired work-role identity(ies) and the need to bridge the gaps in these discrepancies [48]. By work-role identity, we refer to all the meanings individuals ascribe to the work-role(s) they occupy, which is continually constructed based on individuals' social interactions with their environment [40, 85]. In the context of entrepreneurship, this may include but is not limited to any behavioral expectations of their entrepreneurial role [70, 81] and claims around who they are and what they do [70, 73]. For instance, an entrepreneurial work-role identity may include claims around one's mission as an entrepreneur and the meanings they ascribe to their products and services. Constructing and adapting to new work-role identities is important; research suggests that identity construction and adaptation are positively associated with workplace adjustment [61], task performance [86], work-role commitment [86], and lower withdrawal and turnover [86]. In the context of becoming an entrepreneur, identity construction and adaptation are important for achieving legitimacy [68, 77], belonging [77, 84], and commitment towards their businesses [72, 77]. For individuals who aspire to become entrepreneurs and face financial constraints, identity construction and adaptation are pivotal as their limited offline access to mentors, peers, and financial resources [37, 52] may pose challenges to successfully starting their businesses. Such challenges constrain their ability to achieve legitimacy, belonging, and commitment.

Work-role transition scholarship has defined the key phases that individuals navigate to successfully construct and adapt to new work role identity(ies) and the role of informational and emotional support in each phase [5, 47]. These include the *exploration* of possible and desired work-role identities, *provisional trial* of work-role identities, and an *evaluation* of individuals' current and desired work-role identities [5, 47]. In the exploration phase, individuals engage in various sensemaking experiences, including observing role models to better consider possible work roles and understand the roles they are transitioning into [5, 47]. Key sources of information that individuals obtain include exposure to possible role(s), what the role entails, how it aligns or doesn't align with their skills, preferences, or values, and the next steps needed to adopt a desired work-role [5, 47]. In the context of entrepreneurial work-role transitions, this may include information about potential skills (e.g., marketing, creating a website) needed to become an entrepreneur. In the provisional trial phase, individuals may experiment with a few of the provisional or temporary work-role identities [5, 47]. They may adopt styles, skills, and strategies of role models and/or peers they've observed. At the same time, they may simultaneously experiment with their own internal models, experiences, and styles they attribute to these roles. A key part of the provisional trial phase is seeking feedback from others to assess whether these experiments are successful or need to be altered. In the context of entrepreneurial work-role transitions, the provisional trial phase entails getting feedback and validation from their environment on the feasibility and viability of their business ideas and identities as small business owners. In the evaluation phase, individuals evaluate and do internal assessments of their work-role identities based on feedback and other interactions from their environment; they then decide on aspects of their provisional identities to keep, adapt, and/or discard [5, 47]. Throughout each phase, emotional support from peers or mentors navigating (or that have navigated) similar transitions is vital as it helps individuals achieve validation for their current and desired work-role identities along with the challenges they face navigating this transition [4, 48].

While informational and emotional support is a key part of each stage of entrepreneurial work-role transitions, access to such support is often limited in low-income communities. Aspiring

entrepreneurs with financial constraints often have less access to role models and mentors who may support these transitions [37, 52, 60] and simultaneously face numerous barriers to starting a business, including limited financial literacy [60] and low financial savings [37, 60]. They must often expand their social networks to obtain this support [37, 52], leveraging both offline community workshops and events [6, 52], and online communities [6, 42]. Avle et al., in their analysis of ethnographic case studies of resource-constrained micro-entrepreneurs in Accra and Detroit, found that many resource-constrained micro-entrepreneurs in Detroit followed Instagram accounts of other entrepreneurs they consider “mentors” to obtain emotional support and information about necessary skills to start their businesses. While the extant literature on financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs’ use of social media suggests that they leverage social platforms as a source of informational and emotional support [6, 42], it is unclear how and whether these interactions support financially-constrained individuals’ work-role transition processes. We contribute an understanding of how social media platforms impact specific work-role transition processes and opportunities for such platforms to better support these transition processes.

2.2 Informational and Emotional Support on Social Media in Financially-Constrained Communities and Challenges to Access

Past research has suggested that social media facilitate access to informational and emotional support [25, 90], which, as described in the previous section, is invaluable in helping financially-constrained individuals navigate entrepreneurial work-role transitions. By facilitating access and visibility to weak and latent ties³ [39] and the ability to disclose selective aspects of their identities and resource needs to relevant ties [17, 88], such platforms theoretically provide individuals with the capabilities to disclose their resource needs to weak and latent ties that may be navigating similar work-role transitions. Indeed, recent reviews of scholarship examining social media use for entrepreneurship [74, 80] suggest that along with marketing, crowdfunding, and networking, social media support small business owners in acquiring information, including new business ideas [24] and relevant advice or support from non-local business owners [58]. Still, much of this scholarship focuses on small business owners with higher educational and socioeconomic backgrounds [24, 58, 74, 80], where individuals may be more confident in publicly disclosing their identities and mobilizing resources found on these platforms.

Implicit social norms, unspoken rules of engagement [82], influence what and how individuals disclose information on social media [14, 50]. Past research has suggested that perceived norms [18, 49, 71] around the appropriateness of asking for help online may deter financially-constrained individuals from publicly disclosing their resource needs. For instance, in an interview-based study examining the factors that facilitated and deterred low-income members’ resource-seeking via a not-for-profit organization’s social media platform, Israni et al. found that participants refrained from requesting resources online due to their perceptions that such requests felt impersonal [49]. Similarly, in an interview-based study examining first generation college students’ use of social media to support their transition processes, Morioka et al. identified that students avoided asking for college advice publicly on social media due to their perceptions of such requests as inappropriate [71]. However, these studies also suggest that facilitating connections among individuals with shared interests and identities may help alleviate some of these concerns. Morioka et al., for instance, identified that participating in Facebook Groups dedicated to supporting first-year college students helped first generation college students feel comfortable seeking advice about college. Similarly, while Israni et al. identified that low-income members of a community-based not-for-profit refrained from publicly requesting resources via the organization’s online platform, they felt

³Latent ties are defined as “connections that are technically available but not socially activated” [39, p. 137].

comfortable disclosing their resource needs offline to cohort members with shared life experiences and/or interests. Recent research suggests that aspiring entrepreneurs with financial constraints are using platforms like Facebook Groups that facilitate information exchange among individuals with shared interests in entrepreneurship [6, 42]. However, it remains unclear how and whether these entrepreneurs disclose their resource needs on these platforms and how community norms may impact their disclosure. Our study aims to address this gap and provides a more nuanced understanding of how such norms may impact their disclosure practices on social media platforms.

A difference in communication norms, including how to ask questions and request resources [6, 92], may also complicate financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' from receiving informational and emotional support online. Effective communication has been identified as a crucial internet skill that may impact the effectiveness of digital media use [36, 89]. In their definition of communication internet skills, Van Deursen and Van Dijk include constructing, understanding, and exchanging meaning with others; making and maintaining connections; attracting the attention of others with messages and profiles; and constructing online profiles and identities. Hargittai and Micheli assert that understanding online norms and using appropriate communicative functions in given social contexts impacts whether and how individuals obtain information. For financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs, constructing resource requests that resonate with providers are important for successful transitions to entrepreneurship. While social media afford ways to connect with and obtain advice from latent ties that may support their work-role transitions into entrepreneurship, cultural or class-based differences in communication may prevent aspiring and financially-constrained entrepreneurs from disclosing their resource needs and obtaining relevant resources. We extend this past research, aiming to contribute a greater understanding of whether and how such challenges impact aspiring and financially-constrained entrepreneurs from acquiring information and emotional support that might be useful to their work-role transition processes.

In addition to perceived online norms and limited communication skills, recent research on financially-constrained entrepreneurs' use of social media platforms [6, 42] suggest that privacy concerns may deter them from disclosing personal information about themselves online, which consequently could prevent them from obtaining relevant informational and emotional support. Hui et al. examined how social technologies impact financially-constrained micro-entrepreneurs' professional agency and found that they preferred to establish trusted relationships with customers offline before feeling comfortable disclosing information about themselves or their businesses online. Micro-entrepreneurs in their study, for instance, screened potential customers via phone and messaging platforms to establish trust before accepting them as followers on Instagram due to concerns about their personal safety and their desire to establish legitimacy around their businesses offline. Additionally, both Hui et al. and Avle et al., found that, although financially-constrained micro-entrepreneurs were encouraged in offline entrepreneurship workshops to disclose personal information about themselves online, many felt uncomfortable with this process, citing general tendencies to refrain from posting personal information online and to be in greater control of the information disseminated. Our study aims to examine how such challenges impact financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' abilities to obtain informational and emotional support as they transition to entrepreneurial work-roles.

While social media afford access to informational and emotional support [25, 90], which may support aspiring financially-constrained entrepreneurs' work-role transitions, research has suggested that perceived online norms [18, 49, 71], difference in communication practices [6, 36, 92], and privacy concerns [6, 42], may inhibit them from disclosing their resource needs and obtaining relevant resources online. However, much of this research focuses on such challenges in the context of customer management [6, 42], college-based transitions [71], or job-seeking [92]. It remains unclear how such challenges impact aspiring financially-constrained entrepreneurs' resource-seeking

practices and their access to informational and emotional support to facilitate their work-role transitions. We address this gap by examining the challenges that financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs face as they seek informational and emotional support via social media and the implications to their work-role transition processes.

3 METHODS

In this study, we draw from a sub-sample of two empirical studies that took place in Metropolitan Detroit that consisted of semi-structured interviews with individuals who were either small business owners or actively trying to become small business owners. Both studies received approval from their university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The present study is a part of a larger study of entrepreneurship that included both empirical studies. The second author lead data collection in the larger study. The authors received IRB approval to access the data from both empirical studies.

In the present study, we re-analyze a sample of these interviews from these studies, focusing on individuals who started their businesses within three years of the interviews or are in the process of starting their businesses. In the next sections, we describe the regional context of our studies, the specific empirical studies from which the interviews were collected, and our analysis methods, which include sampling details.

3.1 Regional Focus

This research was conducted in the Metropolitan Detroit area, which, at the time of data collection, had an estimated poverty rate of 25% and a median household income of \$27,838 [27]. The city is predominantly African American with a history of systemic, racialized, and class-based segregation. While increasing unemployment in the city remains a challenge, with the unemployment rates disproportionately impacting African Americans, the city has been portrayed as a hub for entrepreneurship where individuals can create and generate their own business endeavors [78]. Growth and success of these small businesses is not equally shared among the city's business owners [78] and may disproportionately benefit those with higher incomes and existing resources. However, prior scholarship on entrepreneurship in Detroit highlights the increase of financially-constrained individuals that have started small businesses in the area [2, 6, 21, 42, 54].

The Detroit area is a unique and relevant context to examine our research questions. First, there is a growing number of low-income residents that have or are trying to start small businesses [2, 54]. Second, extant literature suggests that financially-constrained small business owners in the Detroit area leverage social media for informational and emotional support [6, 42].

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Empirical Study: Understanding Work Process and Supports for Microentrepreneurs in Resource-constrained Contexts. The first study we drew from, titled "*Understanding Work Process and Supports for Microentrepreneurs in Resource-constrained Contexts*," was conducted between October 2017 and March 2018 and incorporated semi-structured interviews with 26 small business owners located in the Greater Detroit area. The goal of these interviews was to understand financially-constrained individuals' motivations for starting small business pursuits and how social technologies support and inhibit individuals' professional agency [42].

In this qualitative study, participants were convenience sampled and recruited via in-person interactions at local markets and entrepreneurial events. Participants were also recruited online via public recruitment messages posted on Detroit-based entrepreneurship Facebook Groups and Detroit-based business sub-Reddits, direct messages to service providers on Detroit's Craigslist and Detroit's Airbnb Experiences pages, and emails to micro-entrepreneurs featured in local newspapers. Most participants identified as Black/African American (N = 19) and female (N = 15). All participants

had lived in the greater Detroit area for over 15 years, owned a business that generated income and employed less than five full-time people, and regularly interacted with the people in Detroit. Participants had started their businesses from nine months to 29 years prior to the interview. The demographic composition of participants in this sample represented the racial composition of Detroit per the available U.S. Census data at the time of data collection [13].

The interview protocol included questions about participants' motivations for starting their business, how they accessed required resources, their usage of social technologies, relationships with peers and mentors, publicity strategy, day-to-day work practices, and perception of Detroit. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were compensated \$20 for their time.

3.2.2 Empirical Study: Understanding Online Communities for Micro-entrepreneurs. The second study we drew from, titled "*Understanding Online Communities for Micro-entrepreneurs*," was conducted between February 2019 and January 2020 and incorporated 14 30-minute semi-structured interviews of individuals that had either started a small business or were trying to start a small business and were members of Facebook Groups with topics related to entrepreneurship and small business ownership in the Metro-Detroit area. These interviews aimed to understand how Facebook Groups support and inhibit entrepreneurs in low-income communities.

Participants were recruited via online advertisements posted by the research team in 32 Facebook Groups. Researchers selected Facebook Groups to recruit from that contained the words "Michigan" or "Detroit" and "Entrepreneurship" or "Entrepreneur" or "Business" in the Group to target small business owners in the Metro-Detroit area. Additional groups were selected based on suggestions by participants in the study. Researchers messaged group admins for permission to post the study information to the group. Along with information about the study, researchers shared a link to a short pre-screen survey, which asked participants whether they consider themselves an entrepreneur or business owner, their full-time job, the number of Facebook entrepreneurship groups they were members of, and their primary purpose for joining these groups. Participants selected were all either small business owners or in the process of starting a small business and living primarily in the Metro-Detroit area. While we only sampled a subset of the data, all participants from the original corpus were small business owners who had started these businesses within 15 years of the interview. Most participants identified as female ($N = 12$) and half of the participants identified as Black/African American ($N=7$).

The interview protocol included questions about participants' motivations and perceptions of using Facebook Groups to support and/or help start their small businesses, how they leverage Facebook Groups (e.g., advertising, seeking advice), how they assess the reliability and trustworthiness of other members, and other online and offline resources they leverage to support their small business activities. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were compensated \$20 for their time. At the interview's conclusion, participants completed a short questionnaire about demographics and their use of Facebook Groups for entrepreneurship.

3.3 Data Analysis

From the two studies mentioned, we purposively sampled a total of 19 (12 from the first study, 7 from the second study) interviews to re-analyze. We selected interviews if the participants lived in the Detroit area and had started their small businesses within three years of the interview. We chose to sample participants that had started their small businesses within a similar timeframe, acknowledging how the use of social media and other technologies to support and maintain businesses has changed over time [74, 80] and our goal of understanding how social platforms have shaped financially-constrained entrepreneurs' transitions into small business ownership. Table

1 incorporates basic demographic and background information about the 19 participants whose interviews were re-analyzed from the two empirical studies.

We coded interview transcripts from both empirical studies in Atlas.ti, using a codebook to address our research questions. We used a combination of provisional and open coding [79] to analyze the data based on our knowledge of the literature on work-role transitions and resource-seeking and to remain open to themes that emerged from the data. For our provisional coding, we initially started with topics aligned with our research questions and prior literature such as work-role transition phases (e.g., turning point, exploration, provisional trial/feedback-seeking, integration, evaluation), resource-seeking behaviors online (e.g., reviewing SNS content, disclosing information about one's business), and barriers to online resource-seeking that may inhibit work-role transitions (e.g., effective communication, privacy, interpersonal trust). We then incorporated additional codes based on emerging themes from the analysis including but not limited to following mentors, offline interactions with small business owners, and community norms. The first author conducted four rounds of coding with frequent consultation and meeting biweekly with the other authors to refine the codebook.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 How individuals leverage social media platforms to support their work-role transitions

RQ1 aimed to understand how aspiring entrepreneurs living in financially-constrained areas leverage social media platforms for informational and emotional support as they navigate work-role transitions to small business ownership. As we discussed earlier, work-role transitions scholarship has established that transitioning and adapting to a new work-role may necessitate exploration of new work-role identities, provisional trial of work-role identities, and an evaluation of individuals' current and desired work-role identities [5, 47]. In performing this transition, individuals obtain feedback, emotional support, and exposure to inform and validate their desired work-role identities. We found that participants primarily used online communities such as Facebook Groups to engage in 1) exploring the next steps needed to adapt to their desired entrepreneurial work-roles, 2) evaluating their current and desired work-role identities, and 3) obtaining emotional support and a sense of validation. Key informational resources described in the first two themes included next steps needed to adopt their desired entrepreneurship role and advice that helped them reflect on their current and desired entrepreneurial identities. They rarely leveraged social media platforms to explore possible work-role identities or to obtain feedback.

In the following sections, we discuss how participants leverage social media for these particular phases of their work-role transitions, focusing on specific informational and emotional resources they derive in each phase.

4.1.1 Exploration: Exposure to next steps once a desired small business work-role identity has been established. In the exploration phase, individuals engage in various sensemaking experiences, including observing role models to better consider possible work roles they would like to adopt and understand the roles they are transitioning into [5, 47]. Key sources of information that individuals obtain can include exposure to possible role(s), what the role entails, how the role aligns or doesn't align with their skills, preferences, or values, and the next steps needed to adopt a desired work role [5, 47]. In the context of entrepreneurial work-role transitions, this might entail observing other entrepreneurs, identifying their responsibilities, whether these roles align with their skills and values, and the actions they may need to take to become an entrepreneur. Our findings show that participants primarily leveraged online communities and other social platforms for exposure to the next steps needed to adapt to their small business owner work role once they had established

Table 1. Participant Background: These data came from the pre-screen and the post-interview survey results. Study numbers specify which study participants were selected. *Study 1: Understanding Work Process and Supports for Microentrepreneurs in Resource-constrained Contexts and Study 2: Understanding Online Communities for Micro-entrepreneurs.* Participant names are author-selected pseudonyms. *Participant declined to share this information.

Study	Name	Gender	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Business Type	Number of Years in Business
1	Yvonne	F	20-30	Black or African American	home goods	1
1	Nora	F	50-60	Black or African American	home goods	2
1	Angela	F	60-70	Black or African American	publishing	3
1	Sara	F	20-30	White or Caucasian	jewelry	2
1	Marcus	M	30-40	White or Caucasian	transportation	2
1	Larry	M	30-40	Middle Eastern/North African	food product	2.5
1	Ava	F	60-70	Black or African American	food product	3
1	Sasha	F	40-50	Black or African American	food product	2
1	Michael	M	30-40	Black or African American	clothing	3
1	Sally	F	30-40	Black or African American	cleaning service	3
1	Talia	F	30-40	Black or African American	hair and beauty	1.5
1	Theresa	F	30-40	Black or African American	catering	2
2	Maya	F	20-30	White or Caucasian	education	<1
2	Olivia	F	30-40	Black or African American	education	1
2	Michelle	F	20-30	Black or African American	hair and beauty	<1
2	Gabrielle	F	50-60	Black or African American	education	2
2	Helen	F	20-30	Black or African American	social media	2
2	Brianna	F	30-40	Black or African American	social media	1.5
2	James	M	N/A*	Middle Eastern/North African	social media	1

a desired small business work-role identity. Participants rarely mentioned using social media to consider and explore possible small business owner work-role identities or to imagine what these roles may look like for themselves.

From observations of admins and other group members' posts from the various Facebook Groups they were members of, individuals obtained exposure to advice, skills, training, and awareness of logistical processes (e.g., licensing). They also obtained advice on how to make their businesses successful from other successful entrepreneurs that they followed on LinkedIn and Instagram. Participants leveraged these informational resources to better understand the next steps needed to adapt to their desired small business owner work-role identities.

For instance, Helen, who was trying to expand their social media marketing business, reflected on how Facebook Groups helped them answer questions about owning their business, such as tax and legal advice:

Yeah so, they're really great for just connecting with other people who are in similar situations with you. There's a lot about this business that you're not prepared for, simple things, like how to hire a freelancer or more complex things. How do I file my taxes? Or I have a question about something like that or legal advice. So, I really liked just connecting for those things. I just searched a group or a topic that I have a question about and you get so many, so much discussion about it already. So, that's really the primary reason is just for those questions that I have. I don't really have anyone in my personal life that I can go to for that advice.

As Helen reflects on not having anyone in their personal life to go to for advice, they allude to their perception of Facebook Groups as a supplemental informational resource to combat the lack of strong and weak ties they have offline to support their transition to desired small business work-role identities.

It is important to note that participants primarily leveraged Facebook and other social platforms to explore the next steps only once they had established a desired entrepreneurial identity. Participants rarely leveraged social media platforms to initially consider being an entrepreneur. Instead, they considered possible identities as entrepreneurs via their offline interactions with strong and weak ties who either were small business owners or whose professional role(s) entailed supporting small business owners.

Participants sometimes gained exposure to possible entrepreneurial identities through serendipitous offline observations of other small business owners working in desired roles. For instance, when describing how they came up with the idea to sell her baked goods at hair salons, Theresa, a small business owner who owned a baking business, described witnessing and being motivated by other small business owners who successfully sold food at hair salons:

I actually saw people putting theirs together, and I liked how theirs sold out. I got very motivated when I saw other girls coming into the shop selling perfumes, selling dinner meals. And then you gotta think, it's a lot of women in the hair shop. When they're there, they're like, 'I don't have nothing else to do. I could use a coffee.' Females get hungry.

In other cases, people actively bounced ideas of becoming an entrepreneur via offline interactions with others who were either small business owners or whose professional role(s) entailed supporting small business owners. For instance, Gabrielle, who was trying to start a business to help people continue lifelong learning post-retirement, mentioned reaching out to a local business consulting company during the early stages of their exploration:

I enrolled in courses at LifeLines which is one of the business consulting companies in Detroit, and I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do other than I wanted to start a business, so I had to generate ideas. While there, I met [name of library worker], who works at [Anonymous local library]. She works with businesses, people who are starting businesses or have businesses, and I started meeting with her because she was able to give me more ideas and something that would become profitable.

As Gabrielle mentions above, discussing and getting feedback on her ideas with someone in person who specializes in working with businesses helped her envision and consider possible entrepreneurial identities.

4.1.2 Evaluation of Current and Desired Work-Role Identities. In the evaluation phase, individuals evaluate and do internal assessments of their work-role identities based on feedback and other interactions from their environment; they then decide on aspects of their provisional identities to keep, adapt, and/or discard [47]. In addition to obtaining exposure to the next steps required to obtain and adapt to their desired entrepreneurial identities, participants gained exposure to

advice from various social platforms, including Facebook Groups, Instagram, and LinkedIn. While most participants did not proactively use social media to seek feedback on business ideas, they saw advice in Groups that prompted them to reflect on the gaps between their current and desired entrepreneurial identities. Nora, for instance, who started a business selling handmade candles, discussed the advice she obtained as a member of a female entrepreneur Facebook Group, particularly around understanding that current and potential customers may not see her products the same way she does. Building their trust takes time:

*I'm part of a female entrepreneur group now, and so the lady that's in charge of it, she helps myself as other young ladies as far as moving our business to a new level, giving us a lot of different tools that we can use to help move [my business]. I'm feeling more hopeful now than in the past because **you realize it takes time**. People may sometimes have to walk by your product or see your product for a little while before they decide okay, I'm gonna give it a try. You realize just because you love it and just because you think it's great, it doesn't mean that others are. They're not familiar with who you are. You have all of these well-known businesses that they're already customers of. So **just trying to convert people to trust you** as well as become one of your regular customers and just make sure they're satisfied.*

While Nora did not specifically request this advice from her Facebook Group, she discussed being exposed to various types of advice from her Facebook Group. She mentioned that the Group admin continually made public posts within the group with information members could use to improve their businesses:

We get business kits every month. You get an email from her almost every day, maybe every other day. When new women join, she always posts, and we don't have to give out a hello or welcome or whatever. You go on Facebook, you could [see] every day where she has something posted you can participate in.

Nora's quote demonstrates how exposure to social media platform advice prompts participants to reflect upon the gaps between their current and desired entrepreneurial identities.

4.1.3 Emotional Support: Validation for Current and Desired Work-Role Identities. As discussed previously, throughout work-role transitions, emotional support from peers or mentors navigating (or that have navigated) similar transitions is vital as it helps individuals achieve validation for their current and desired work-role identities along with the challenges they face navigating this transition [4, 48]. In addition to being exposed to informational resources that helped participants understand and reflect upon the next steps and gaps between their current and desired work-role identities, participants obtained emotional support. Specifically, they validated their decision to become small business owners by observing other members' posts with shared experiences. At the same time, they received validation about shared challenges, including their fears of not being successful in starting their businesses.

In Facebook Groups, participants could observe other members' posts about similar struggles and challenges they were going through. Just being able to observe these posts provided individuals with a sense of validation for their current struggles and their ongoing journey to becoming small business owners. Helen, for instance, reflected on the emotional benefits they obtained from reading other group members' posts about the fear of going full-time as a small business owner:

They're just really helpful because when you're starting a business, it can feel very, like you can just feel very lost and overwhelmed by everything. And so, even just having people who are in similar situations. But even just looking at threads that are like, I want to go full time with my business. I'm scared I can't, I can't do it. And then just like reading the

comments of people encouraging and just sharing their stories, it's really, really helpful. I would say that's probably the best. The best thing about that for me, it's just like feeling like you're all in this together and somebody's done this before, so you're not crazy for thinking that you can do it too.

Helen's statement alludes to the validation they derive from observing other business owners disclose their shared challenges.

4.1.4 Limited Provisional Trial. As individuals explore and consider possible work-role identities, they may experiment with a few of these provisional or temporary work-role identities [47]. They may adopt the styles, skills, and strategies of role models and/or peers they've observed. At the same time, they may simultaneously experiment with their own internal models, experiences, and styles they attribute to these roles. They use their own internal reflection and feedback from others, especially weak and unknown ties, to assess whether these experiments are successful or need to be altered. In the context of entrepreneurial work-role transitions, the provisional trial phase may entail getting feedback and validation from their environment on the feasibility and viability of their business ideas and work-role identities.

While the majority of participants reported deriving informational and emotional benefits simply from observing interactions and content via social platforms like Facebook and Instagram, only two participants reported requesting feedback on their work-role identities via social platforms. Sasha, for instance, who started a vegan catering business, discussed sharing vegan recipes on Facebook. The feedback she received, in the form of follows, likes, and comments, helped her assess the viability of her business ideas and desired work-role identity as a small business owner:

*I traveled around through the South, visited some farms, met people, stayed in hostels, cooked vegan, shared on Facebook. That's how I started. I would do challenges with myself. I got to eat off of three of four vegetables for the week. And I would share the dishes online. So it started up a few people started following me, and then it was 300 people started following me. Now I have over 80,000 people following me all around the world. On my Facebook page. Just from me starting off sharing what I do. I thought I was doing big. And people were like, "How can we get your food? You make stuff look really amazing and really simple" **And that was so important to me because I like teaching people to look outside of their norm when it comes to food.** When people say, "Are you an artist?" I am an artist when it comes to that.*

Sasha's quote reflects the importance she places on the feedback she received when sharing her business ideas on Facebook and her internal assessment of the viability of her work-role identity as a small business owner and an artist. Sasha reflected on the value of business owners' sharing and getting feedback on their business ideas to identify the viability of their business ideas and how her use of social platforms to obtain feedback "ignited" her business:

People are like, 'Oh but you need this, and this, and that.' No, you need to get followership first. You need to do the things that's not gonna cost you any large amount to invest to test the waters to see if opportunity exist. Because you're gonna invest all that and find out it's a flop. I started with sharing my recipes and the demand was created, not by me... I shared it with my friends and stuff like that. I always cook. You know, I was a cooker. Everybody knows Sasha is going to have an amazing party and amazing food... But Facebook or the social media is what ignited everything... because I can reach a broader audience with pictures.

The majority of participants, however, did not leverage social media as a source of feedback and instead leveraged offline events such as local markets and or offline interactions with others (e.g.,

peers they interacted with in similar work environments) to present their product and/or service ideas and obtain feedback. Larry, who started a business creating and manufacturing healthy snacks, initially obtained feedback on his food products at a local farmer's market:

*So, I went to the farmers market in Royal Oak and ... you know, I wanted to get their **more objective opinions about the product**. Cause you give it to family and friends, and of course, they're only gonna say that they love it! ...So, I took it to the farmers market, people paid me money for it, and then, that's kind of what actually got me thinking about starting a business, officially.*

Larry's mention of the importance of "getting more objective opinions about the product" from people other than family and friends and "that's kind of what actually got me thinking about starting a business, officially" reflects their perception of the importance of early and objective feedback on business ideas from unknown ties and its impact on their commitment to their desired work-role identity.

While participants like Larry and Sasha acknowledged the importance of gaining objective feedback on early business ideas, most participants did not leverage social platforms to obtain this feedback. In the following sections, we discuss various challenges participants reported when using social media that may have hindered their use of social platforms to publicly request information and disclose their desired work-role identities.

4.2 Challenges of Using Social Media to Navigate Work-Role Transitions

RQ2 aimed to understand the challenges aspiring entrepreneurs faced when leveraging social media platforms for informational and emotional resources to support their work-role transitions to small business ownership. As we discussed in section 4.1.4, while participants mentioned obtaining informational and emotional resources from observing other members' posts in online communities, they rarely reported publicly disclosing their informational or emotional needs or their desired work-role identities to obtain feedback. Participants noted challenges that made them reluctant to request informational and emotional support to help with their transitions. These challenges included navigating online and offline norms, safety, the emotional labor of managing their digital identities, and their limited understanding of and confidence in effectively employing social media to communicate their work-role identities.

4.2.1 Navigating Community Norms. While participants acknowledged that online communities provided access to relevant advice and information to inform their work-role identities, they chose not to publicly request or share resources due to their uncertainty about online norms. Brianna shared their hesitancy to publicly offer advice within a Facebook Group due to their lack of understanding of group norms; instead, Brianna discussed privately messaging group members to avoid being reprimanded by the group admin for their actions:

It depends on the question they ask. Sometimes, if I message, it's because I'm not sure I'm allowed to say what I'm going to say in the feed. If I'm offering advice, I might just DM them separately rather than just saying it on the group chat forum... Sometimes, I'm not sure about the guidelines. They (Group Admin) normally delete you or just remind you not to do it, or they will delete you.

In addition to online norms that deterred them from publicly requesting resources in groups, participants reflected on the competitive nature of opening up a small business and offline norms of not sharing information with other small business owners to curb this competition.

Sara reported feeling “lucky” that they found small business owners that were willing to help her via Instagram, reflecting on offline practices where small business owners were reluctant to help other aspiring business owners due to mistrust and fear of idea stealth:

Yeah I mean it's lucky that I found people that are wanting to talk to you. A lot of people don't want to, they think you'll steal their secrets or something. They get nasty too, they think you're gonna copy them or whatever.

Sally similarly remarked on being unable to elicit advice from other business owners when they first moved to Detroit:

*When I first came out here, I didn't feel invited asking people for information... people feel like if they know something, they don't want you to know because they don't want you to get to the information or excel before they do. To me, that's one of the biggest problems here... Just having conversations with other cleaning companies like, 'how did you get this contract?' And everything is like hush hush like, 'oh I don't know.' **You can't really ask anybody for that information cause they don't wanna give it to you and you can't really find the information so it just makes it a little more difficult.***

Sally's quote alludes to their perception of offline norms of not asking other business owners for help and withholding information. Such offline norms may have deterred participants from requesting resources in online communities.

4.2.2 Balancing Safety and Informational Benefits. Participants also avoided publicly requesting information in certain online communities due to prior experiences of discrimination or harassment. While they avoided publicly requesting informational needs, participants remained members of these groups to observe beneficial information exchanged within them. Helen avoided publicly asking a question to a Facebook Group. Helen recalled being belittled by other members after posting a question to the group:

I love that group, but I do not post in that group because the few times that I have asked a question, people talk to me like I'm stupid. So everybody, there's no such thing as a stupid question, I'm a believer of that.

Instead, participants sought Facebook Groups, which made them feel comfortable being vulnerable to other members, specifically those that limited membership to individuals of specific shared identities. Helen, for instance, described a women-only group she was a member of, whose norms enabled her to feel comfortable and vulnerable in the group:

*Yeah, so there's one called [Facebook Group Name], which is really good. It's a huge group but they keep it really organized and some of these groups are really spammy or cluttered, but this one is really organized. So, I like that. I don't know, I go back and forth between the gender thing because **I don't want to exclude myself necessarily. But it is also nice to kind of have a safe space for all women.** On any online medium, there's definitely discrimination that happens, like trolling that I've experienced, which is frustrating. So, it's nice because it's a pretty safe space... **I feel very comfortable being vulnerable in that group.** That and some of the other groups I'm in, I wouldn't necessarily want to open myself up to you. It's so frustrating how many dates I've been asked on, on LinkedIn. So, it's just nice knowing that that's probably not gonna happen in a group like that.*

In this quote, Helen acknowledges the importance of shared identity in facilitating her sense of psychological safety. By contrasting this to other groups that she “*would not necessarily want to open [herself to]*”, Helen acknowledges the importance of feeling psychologically safe to disclose her identities to other group members. At the same time, Helen reflects on not wanting to exclude herself from other groups that do not necessarily facilitate the same sense of safety. While she may

not publicly request resources in these groups, Helen alludes to the informational benefits she may derive from such groups.

4.2.3 Emotional Labor of managing a digital identity and sharing personal information. Nowadays having a social media presence is a necessary part of becoming a small business owner. While participants acknowledged the necessity and benefits of having a digital presence, they expressed the burden of managing a digital identity and their discomfort and hesitancy in sharing information about themselves.

For instance, while Yvonne acknowledged the need to have a social media presence as a small business owner, she expressed her discomfort publicly sharing personal information about herself:

I know I need it. I just have to take the time to actually dig in and really start it. I have an Instagram, but I post like, every two weeks or something. Oh, it's really bad. So, yeah. I know I need it, I just need to start it. It is a lot of work! Taking pictures and talking to other people. It feels kind of weird to share so much of yourself for the business aspect of you, and mixing that. But, I feel like that's this direction that people are going with businesses these days. Yeah, they want to know your personal aspect of the business as well as your products.

Similarly, Nora expressed her challenges trying to overcome natural tendencies to keep her personal life private to construct and maintain a public persona for her customers:

I'm such a private person, I am just not one of those people, I've never been a social media person, so when I started my business I had to get on social media. Now I have to begin [to] post things about myself. It took me a really long time just to put my image on my website because I'm so private... you know some things you just wanna keep private and that's you. You don't want everybody to know everything about you. I'm still limited, but I'm in the process of sharing more and showing me more so people can actually see who [name of business] is. Just making [small business name] I have to allow people to see that. So that's what I mean.

Yvonne and Nora's quotes indicate their acknowledgement of the unspoken necessity of maintaining a digital presence as a small business owner. At the same time, Yvonne's statement that "it feels kind of weird to share so much of yourself for the business aspect of you" alludes to the tension between sharing personal information and the pressure to maintain a digital presence. The emotional labor of constructing and maintaining a digital identity may have also contributed to participants' reluctance to disclose information about their work-role identities in groups.

4.2.4 Limited understanding of how to effectively communicate via social media. As discussed earlier, entrepreneurial work-role identities may include but are not limited to any claims around how entrepreneurs see themselves, their mission, services and products [70, 73]. And being able to effectively communicate one's identity online is critical to obtaining relevant informational support [36, 89]. While participants acknowledged the necessity of creating and maintaining a digital identity as a small business owner, they were unsure how to best advertise their products and services to new and existing clients—they were also unsure whether their communication was effective.

Ava, for instance, described the challenges of managing their Facebook page, and reported wanting to convey the importance of their healthy snack products to potential customers online. However, they felt limited in their understanding of how to best communicate this importance:

I don't think it's stressful it's just that I wish I knew how to put more things on there; that's colorful and make people want to know more about what these chips can do for them as an alternative because that's how I market it; as an alternative organic snack.

Table 2. Summary of Differences between Lower-resourced and Higher-resourced Aspiring Entrepreneurs and Design Opportunities for Social Media Platforms

	Higher-resourced Aspiring Entrepreneurs	Lower-resourced Aspiring Entrepreneurs	Design Opportunities for Lower-resourced Aspiring Entrepreneurs
Exploration	<p>Resources Employed: Leverage social media to explore new domains and career paths and where their skills, interest & market demand are aligned [10, 67, 83].</p> <p>Barriers or Challenges: Lack of time to engage in exploration and lack of mentors or teams to support this exploration [10].</p>	<p>Resources Employed: Participants leveraged offline interactions with local strong and weak ties who were either small business owners or whose professional role(s) entailed supporting small business owners to consider possible entrepreneurial identities and actively bounce business ideas they were exploring.</p> <p>Barriers or Challenges: Lack of interpersonal trust and perceived shared identity [16, 21, 41, 49, 92].</p>	<p>To support exploration: - Increase the visibility and salience of identity cues that convey similar identities in online spaces [29, 30, 76]. - Provide users agency over when and how they disclose information about themselves online. - Help users better understand their online audience so that they can make more informed self-disclosure choices [17].</p>
Provisional Trial/ Feedback	<p>Resources Employed: Leverage social media to gain feedback on early business ideas [43, 45, 56, 67, 95].</p> <p>Barriers or Challenges: Lack of audience feedback, lack of audience awareness and how to attract their attention, and challenges navigating critical feedback [56, 67].</p>	<p>Resources Employed: Participants leveraged offline events such as local markets or offline interactions with other individuals (e.g., peers they interacted with in similar work environments) to present their product and/or service ideas and obtain feedback.</p> <p>Barriers or Challenges: Lack of perceived psychological safety due to fears of discrimination, harassment, and uncertainty around community norms [28, 34, 75].</p>	<p>To support provisional trial/feedback: - Offer suggestions to those in one’s audience about ways to respond to questions and other disclosures in ways that restore trust and mitigate identity threats [3, 94]. - Identify entrepreneurial role models and mentors of similar backgrounds who are already building support groups for entrepreneurs online. - Facilitate the creation of sub-groups within larger entrepreneurial groups that focus on shared interests or demographics.</p>

Instead of grabbing an ordinary potato chip grab a green chip. I would like [to] become a household thing in this country. I would love it.

Maya, who started a business teaching piano to children, similarly described not knowing how appropriate their marketing strategies were or how effective their social media posts were:

I normally just make my posts as short as possible, while also like getting all the required information in there, because I am kind of like a believer that people, they’ll only read like the first like couple of words of a post, you know? Like when you’re scrolling on the Internet, you normally don’t like to stop and read whole paragraphs... So I’m always trying to just get it as short as possible... I just have like a feeling that that’s the most successful type of post, but I know that, that’s not actually true and that there’s a whole world of marketing strategy that I don’t know about.

Ava and Maya’s quotes reflect their self-reported limited understanding and confidence in communicating aspects of their work-role identities online. These perceptions of having limited understanding in employing social media to communicate their work-role identities online may have contributed to participants’ reluctance to request resources online and publicly disclose information about their work-role identities.

5 DISCUSSION

For individuals transitioning to entrepreneurship, identity construction and adaptation are important to achieve legitimacy [68, 77], belonging [77, 84] and commitment towards their businesses [72, 77]. The transition to entrepreneurship, however, is less straightforward than other work-role transitions. Unlike other institutionalized work-role transitions, where individuals may have access to organization-supported training and knowledge along with mentors and peers in similar roles [47], aspiring entrepreneurs must proactively seek access to training and knowledge to develop and market their products and services [66]. At the same time, they remain susceptible to failure and market volatility [66]. Aspiring entrepreneurs in our context often had less access to role models and mentors who may support these transitions [37, 52, 60] and simultaneously faced numerous barriers to starting a business including limited financial literacy [60] and low financial savings [37, 60]. We aimed to understand how aspiring entrepreneurs living in financially-constrained areas leverage social media for informational and emotional support for their work-role transitions and the challenges they face when doing so. We found that individuals primarily used social media such as Facebook Groups to 1) explore the next steps needed to adapt to their desired small business owner work roles, 2) evaluate their current and desired work-role identities, and 3) obtain emotional support and a sense of validation.

We extend existing work on financially-constrained entrepreneurs' use of social media for informational and emotional support [6, 42], contributing insights on how these resource-seeking practices may not facilitate specific work-role identity transition processes such as identity exploration and obtaining feedback on provisional work-role identities. We also identify additional challenges that these entrepreneurs must navigate to obtain emotional and informational support and feedback on their work-role identities; these include online and offline norms, safety concerns, and requisite communication skills. Table 2 highlights our contributions, which include new insights on challenges that aspiring entrepreneurs living in financially-constrained areas must navigate to use social media for their transition processes along with new design opportunities for social media platforms to facilitate their identity exploration and disclosure practices.

5.1 Opportunities to Support Identity Exploration

Person-organization fit research suggests that individuals whose attitudes, values, knowledge, skills, abilities, and personality are more closely aligned to their work roles have higher job satisfaction and performance [57]. Markman and Baron argue that entrepreneurs' success hinges on their skills - their capacity to recognize opportunities and utilize social skills - as well as individual personality traits, including self-efficacy and perseverance [66]. By actively engaging in work-role identity exploration and considering varied entrepreneurial roles, aspiring entrepreneurs are better positioned to achieve this alignment [53]. For financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs, achieving this alignment might be more imperative, given numerous financial and social barriers that may impede their path to entrepreneurship [37, 60].

As we show in Table 2, prior research suggests that social media are emerging as platforms for high-income aspiring entrepreneurs to explore and identify alternate career paths including entrepreneurship [10, 67, 83]. Some of this research has suggested that facilitating exposure to different career domains and mentorship may make career exploration more accessible to individuals that are considering transitioning to another work role [10]. However, our findings in 4.1.1 suggest that, even though social media platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook Groups, facilitated exposure to and advice from other successful entrepreneurs, participants rarely leveraged social media platforms to consider possible entrepreneurial identities. Instead, they gained exposure to possible entrepreneurial identities via their offline interactions with local strong and weak ties

who either were small business owners or whose professional role(s) entailed supporting small business owners. Theresa, one of our participants, for instance, reported being inspired to sell baked goods at hair salons after witnessing other local small business owners selling food at hair salons. Gabrielle, another participant, developed her idea to start a post-retirement learning company via conversations with local business consulting professionals. Through their offline interactions with these role models and mentors, participants like Theresa and Gabrielle gained exposure to possible entrepreneurial identities and actively bounced business ideas they were exploring.

While our findings do not confirm why participants did not utilize social media to consider possible entrepreneurial identities, prior research suggests that lack of perceived shared identity and interpersonal trust may have deterred financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs from leveraging social media in this way [16, 21, 49, 92]. According to Chatman's Theory of Information Poverty, marginalized individuals seek resources from other sources based on whether they share existing life experiences [16]. According to this theory, the "information poor" view "outsiders" - those with different life experiences as incapable of understanding or supporting their needs; "insiders" - those with shared life experiences are trustworthy. Similarly, while social media may afford access to information and advice that could support entrepreneurial identity exploration, prior HCI research suggests that financially-constrained individuals may not take advantage of these resources unless they trust and can identify with the individuals and/or organizations providing this information [20, 21, 23, 49, 92].

How might social media platforms then foster trust to encourage identity exploration among financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs? Prior HCI research on trust emphasizes the importance of fostering interpersonal interactions among individuals such as small talk [8, 8, 12] and commenting and reacting to posts [51, 65]. This research suggests that such interactions encourage relational development and foster interpersonal trust. However, as discussed, financially-constrained individuals may be unwilling to participate in such activities unless they can first identify with and establish trust with the individuals and/or organizations providing this information [20, 21, 23, 49, 92]. For instance, prior HCI research examining online resource-seeking of financially-constrained individuals identified that perceived shared identity as a result of members' shared affiliation to a community-based organization encouraged members' trust in the information shared via the community organization's social media platform [49].

Past HCI research highlights the importance of increasing the visibility of identity cues to promote interpersonal trust and engagement in online spaces, especially for marginalized identities [29, 76]. For instance, Ford et al. identified that women who encountered other women on Stack Overflow threads were more likely to engage sooner in the platform than those that did not [29]. Stack Overflow is an online platform that has historically had less female participation due to various barriers, including discomfort with strangers [30]. Future research could explore whether and how increasing the visibility and salience of identity cues that convey shared identity foster trust to encourage work-role identity exploration on social media platforms. For instance, designers could consider highlighting commonalities such as individuals' shared membership to community-based organizations, their specific entrepreneurial interests, or other facets of their identities such as being a parent, etc. Such cues could help financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs relate to other aspiring entrepreneurs online and establish the interpersonal trust needed to encourage identity exploration.

At the same time, designers must consider individuals' comfort in disclosing such cues. Past research has suggested that financially-constrained entrepreneurs may be uncomfortable disclosing information about themselves online, citing general tendencies to be in greater control of the information disseminated [6, 42]. Similarly, we found that participants expressed hesitancy in sharing information about themselves online despite recognizing the need to build a social media

presence. Platforms could identify how to provide users greater agency and awareness over when and how they disclose information about themselves online. For instance, prior work finds that people often have an inaccurate understanding of how they are viewed online [64], which influences what they choose to share. Building on design implications for supporting self-presentation [17], platforms could consider providing greater visibility about one's online audience to help people make more informed self-disclosure choices and determine whether they are reaching people with shared interests. Furthermore, helping people better understand their audience could encourage users to connect with others in contexts where they feel more comfortable. Future research could examine which identity cues may be more conducive to fostering the interpersonal trust needed to encourage identity exploration while considering financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' comfort with cue disclosure.

5.2 Facilitating Psychological Safety to Support Informational and Emotional Needs

Being able to recognize and act on opportunities is an important trait for entrepreneurs to have [66]. For aspiring entrepreneurs, obtaining feedback on provisional entrepreneurial identities, including business and product ideas, can help them reflect on and uncover what they may have previously overlooked [38, 56]. While social media afford access to weak ties that could provide informational support including feedback [25, 56, 90], the benefits afforded by these platforms are more often realized by those that are comfortable disclosing their resource needs and identities [10, 90].

Contrary to past HCI research that suggests that social platforms are being used by high-income aspiring entrepreneurs to obtain feedback on work-role identities [56, 67, 95], we found that our participants rarely used such platforms to obtain feedback on their provisional entrepreneurial identities. Our findings also echo the results of an online survey of US job seekers that suggest that higher-income job seekers were more likely to use more job-seeking sites and do so more in ways that led to callbacks than lower-income job seekers [19]. Also consistent with prior literature on resource-seeking on social media in financially-constrained communities [20, 23, 49], we found that participants rarely reported publicly disclosing their informational or emotional needs online. Our findings in 4.1.4 suggest that lack of perceived psychological safety may have deterred them from disclosing their resource needs and provisional entrepreneurial identities online.

Psychological safety refers to the formal and informal practices and procedures that facilitate trust within an environment [7]. Prior HCI research and our findings suggest the importance of facilitating psychological safety to encourage individuals to disclose their resource needs and obtain feedback on their provisional identities on social media, especially as they navigate life transitions [28, 34, 75]. Consistent with this past HCI research, we found that participants rarely reported publicly disclosing their informational or emotional needs or seeking feedback on their provisional identities in online spaces that felt unsafe due to fears of discrimination, harassment, and uncertainty around community norms. Instead, they migrated to social media platforms which made them feel comfortable to be vulnerable with other members, specifically those that limited membership to individuals of specific shared identities. However, while much of past HCI research emphasizes the importance of fostering shared identity in online spaces to facilitate a sense of safety and support those navigating life transitions [28, 34, 75], our findings also speak to the informational benefits that diverse identities may provide. While participants avoided publicly requesting information in certain online communities perceived as unsafe, they reported remaining members of these groups due to the perceived informational benefits. Recall how Helen reflected on how information posted on Facebook Groups helped her answer unanticipated questions about her business, such as hiring freelancers. And while the majority of our participants did not use social media platforms to obtain feedback, they acknowledged the importance of seeking objective feedback from people outside family and friends.

Thus, our findings raise another question: *How might social media platforms be designed to facilitate a sense of safety that also enables financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs to tap into the informational benefits of diverse social identities?* To consider this question, we consider educational scholarship on diversity, equity, and inclusion [1, 31, 91, 93, 94]. The question of how to retain and increase the engagement of underrepresented and racially minoritized students remains a challenge faced by many educational institutions [1, 91, 93, 94]. Some of this scholarship suggests that retention and engagement of underrepresented and racial minorities in higher education depends on the perceived fit between students and their environments [1]. When students perceive a mismatch between themselves and their educational environments, they are more likely to experience threats to their personal and social identities which may manifest as perceived social exclusion, discrimination and microaggressions [1]. To increase the perceived fit, much of this scholarship recommends that teachers and institutions reframe identity threats as positive opportunities that are common, transient, and can be overcome [91, 93, 94]. For instance, when providing critical feedback to students, teachers can restore trust and mitigate identity threats by emphasizing the teacher's high standards (and not biases) and beliefs in the students' capabilities (rather than limitations) to meet those standards [94]. Additionally, much of the educational scholarship on diversity, equity, and inclusion discusses the importance of facilitating interactions with mentors and peers of similar racial and ethnic identities [1, 31] to increase perceived fit between students and their environments. For instance, Black students that receive access to teachers that resemble them are more likely to go to college and seek similar career paths [31]. How might such recommendations translate to social media platforms and alleviate the perceived safety concerns experienced by financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs?

Prior HCI research highlights the importance of receiving supportive feedback in response to disclosures [3]. Negative and unsupportive responses may lead to stress, and limit disclosure [33, 87]. Indeed, we found that participants were reluctant to disclose their resource needs on social media platforms where they perceived discrimination when asking questions. Drawing from this past HCI and educational scholarship [3, 94], HCI designers could consider offering suggestions to those in one's audience about ways to respond to questions and other disclosures in ways that restore trust and mitigate identity threats. For instance, if one encounters a post where an individual is seeking feedback, articles or resources could pop up to offer advice on responding to such requests. Future research could examine how such prompts may impact responders' engagement with such posts and financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' perceived safety.

To facilitate interactions with potential mentors and peers with shared identities, designers could consider giving users the option of creating subgroups or small niche communities within a larger online community. Past HCI research indicates that small online communities may be more effective for individuals seeking expertise, perspectives, and knowledge as the goals of these groups are more narrow [46]. Additionally, past HCI research suggests that low-income adults are more comfortable receiving informational and emotional support via *offline interactions* with individuals who share similar interests and goals [22, 41, 49]. For low-income individuals, offline interactions may be important to build trusted relationships with strangers before they feel comfortable disclosing their resource needs and seeking feedback [49]. Future research could examine how smaller online and offline niche groups may facilitate interpersonal interactions between financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs and impact their perceived safety. In addition, prior work has found that there are entrepreneurs on social media who position themselves as coaches for groups of small business owners [45], sometimes focusing on building support groups around a certain identity (e.g., Black women entrepreneurs). Platforms could identify these leaders of growing entrepreneurial communities who share similar backgrounds and suggest them to people seeking feedback.

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Although our interview sample included a diverse group of low-income entrepreneurs with varied ages, businesses, and social media use, our sample is not generalizable. First, we conducted this research in a single Midwestern metropolitan area; thus, our results might not be representative of financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs in other areas of the country or in international contexts. There are opportunities for future research to examine differences between financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs in different locations and contexts. Additionally, while our findings did not reveal salient differences between subcategories in our sample population such as gender, age, and business type, future research is needed to explore how such factors impact financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' use of social media for their transitions. Second, while we purposively sampled interviews to re-analyze from relevant data sets based on our research questions, we did not conduct the interviews. Thus, we were limited by the information collected in the original studies. For instance, while we speculate based on prior research that lacks of interpersonal trust and perceived shared identity may have prevented financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs from leveraging social media to explore alternate entrepreneurial identities [20, 21, 23, 49, 92], our study introduces these questions for future qualitative research to explore. Additionally, our findings in 4.2.2 allude to the class-based stigma our participants may have experienced while employing social media platforms to obtain informational and emotional support. Participants' perceived stigma may have, in turn, inhibited them from fully sharing their experiences in the interviews. Future research could expand on this study by exploring financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' social media use. For instance, by analyzing relevant social media posts on platforms like Facebook Groups and LinkedIn and coupling this content analysis with interviews, the research could more fully unpack how financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs are using social media for their transitions and platform affordances that may inhibit their use. Finally, our findings raise new questions for future research to explore including how social media platforms may better support financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs' perceived psychological safety as they seek informational and emotional support to aid their transitions.

7 CONCLUSION

In this study, we sought to understand how aspiring entrepreneurs living in a financially-constrained area leverage social media for informational and emotional support for their work-role transitions as well as the challenges they face when doing so. Through a re-analysis of a sub-sample of interviews with small business owners in Metropolitan Detroit area, we contribute a deeper understanding of challenges that aspiring entrepreneurs must navigate to obtain informational and emotional support for their work-role transition processes. Our findings demonstrate that while participants obtained informational and emotional resources from observing other members' posts on social media platforms, they rarely publicly disclosed their informational and emotional needs online. Towards facilitating online disclosure among financially-constrained aspiring entrepreneurs, social media platform designs can foster psychologically safe spaces by offering suggestions to those in one's audience about ways to respond to questions and other disclosures in ways that restore trust and mitigate identity threats.

8 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge funding from the National Science Foundation (IIS-1717186 & IIS-1665049). We would also like to thank Matthew Bui, Shruti Sannon, Ben Zhang, members of the University of Michigan School of Information's Social Innovations Group, and our anonymous reviewers for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper. We would also like to thank Selena

Grover for helping with data collection. Finally, we thank all of our participants for sharing their stories and experiences with the research team.

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Received July 2022; revised October 2022; accepted January 2023