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# Trust and Respect in Entrepreneurial Information Seeking Behaviours

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**Abstract.** Trust has been a vital research topic in entrepreneurship research. Many researchers argue that trust gives the entrepreneurs legitimacy within the market, and it is considered as a factor for information behaviours. Meanwhile, respect is also mentioned as a fundamental for trust and a necessity for building entrepreneurial networks. Despite their significance and relevance, there is still a limited study focusing on the role of trust and respect in entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviour research. This paper, therefore, draws attention to this gap and strives to investigate how these two concepts impact entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviour. The results show that trust and respect are two fundamental aspects that influence entrepreneurs' preference for information source selection. Furthermore, the findings show that both trust and respect act as a predominant factor for entrepreneurs to build and advance their relationships. Theoretical and practical implications and recommendations for future studies are discussed.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship · Information Seeking Behaviour · Respect · Trust · Social Capital Theory.

## 1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, trust has gained increased attention from many researchers in entrepreneurship research due to its importance in guiding entrepreneurs in their carrier. Entrepreneurs need to earn trust from others and also act as a trustor to successfully establish and grow their businesses [1]. Trust is a crucial factor for entrepreneurial activities, such as promoting the company, transferring information, enhancing customers' relationships, reducing transaction costs [2-5], and especially for nurturing entrepreneurial networks to acquire resources, opportunities, and cooperation [6-9]. Welter [10] pointed that in entrepreneurship, trust has been a well-studied subject in many academic disciplines, including human resource [9], connection with business angels, venture capitalists [11-13], banks [14], partners [15], mentors [16], and buyer-supplier relationships [17]. Many scholars consider trust to be governance factors for the globalisation of small businesses [18-19]. While others emphasise its strategic advantage for family firms [20-21], and especially its feature as a cost/risk deductible aspect in chaotic environments [4, 22-23].

Notably, through literature of information behaviour, trust critically influences knowledge and information sharing process [24]. According to Hislop [25], individuals often refuse to share their information and knowledge once they sense the lack of trust. Connaway [26] elaborated that trust is an important factor for human information

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seeking and using behaviours. Moreover, Beckinsale and Theodorakopoulos [27] debated trust as an essential ingredient for enterprise-related processes of information and communication technology adoption. Micu et al. [28] illustrated the effect of e-trust in online customer experience for web entrepreneurship. Critics also highlight trust in adopting e-government [29-30], and e-entrepreneurship [31]. The Technology Adoption Model [TAM: 32] integrates trust to define the users' perception of usefulness, perception of ease of use and favourable attitude with regards to usage of information sources [33]. So far, the importance of trust has benefited entrepreneurship research in several focused determinates. Often in those discussions, trust and its relevance to entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviours are mentioned too. However, the effect of trust and the conditions under which trust works still face the lack of attention in entrepreneurship research, especially from entrepreneurs' information practices standpoint.

Furthermore, many authors have acknowledged the correlation between respect and trust, as well as its significance for entrepreneurs. Hakanen and Soudunsaari [34] declared that respect is a vital element of the trust-building process. Though, trust and respect have different values, they always act jointly, as a person cannot trust someone whom he/she fails to respect. According to Kuratko [35], entrepreneurs need to earn trust and respect to achieve and maintain their success in careers and businesses. In some cultures, such as South Korea, China, and Japan, respect is often mentioned as a crucial element to create a good impression; thus, trust in the business relationships [36-38]. These two phenomena have been discussed in various academic disciplines, e.g., social and organisational psychology, nursing, ethics, and education, but it has not been sufficiently addressed in the entrepreneurship research.

Considering this gap in the literature, this paper focuses on the significance and relevance of respect and trust in entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviours and analyses it through social capital theory [34, 39-41]. The results of this paper contribute to information behaviour studies and entrepreneurship research. In particular, this research devotes its focus to an emerging and yet growing stream of research on the role of trust in the success of entrepreneurs. We contribute to the literature by providing an in-depth understanding of social networks in entrepreneurship studies [5, 10]. In doing so, we use the theory of social capital to elucidate entrepreneurial information-seeking activities [41] to examine how trust influences the information-seeking behaviours of entrepreneurs. Additionally, this paper will tackle how respect strengthens it. The following of this paper provides an overview of the relevant and core concepts, including trust, respect, social capital theory, and information-seeking behaviours. Then we present a discussion of the interplay between trust, respect and information-seeking behaviour. Finally, we provide discussion, conclusion and elaborate on the theoretical and practical implications. Recommendations for future studies will also be presented.

## **2 Definitions and Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Trust**

The literature demonstrates trust as a complex construct, which has been conceptualised and defined through multiple dimensions in different scientific domains. Prominently, the definitions of trust still maintain its availability and relevance in the current research [8, 10, 13, 42-44]. Psychologists perceive trust as an individual trait, or a psychological state, in which a person possesses an attitude or tendency to accept uncertainties [45-56]. From the sociological perspective, trust is a social structure and force [47-48], as well as a social cohesion for the nature of interpersonal relationships [49-50]. Social psychologists examine trust as a psychological condition that a person is willing to be vulnerable [51-53] because he/she has a positive expectation in other's motives and/or conduct [54], and mutual interdependence and risk [52, 54-55]. Sabel [56] argued that trust displays the faith and high hope in others that they will not exploit any adverse selection, moral hazard, holdup, or any other vulnerability. In other words, each member of the trustful relationship agrees to sacrifice his/her short-run and self-interest for joint goals or longer-term objectives. Meanwhile, economists claim the rationale of

trust, that a person calculates the possibility of an event based on its commitment to the agency theory [58-59]. Moreover, other scholars remarked trust through various aspects such as cognitive, emotional and intentional behaviour [1, 60]. The cognitive aspect reflects the belief or an expression of it that the trustor holds towards the trustee. The emotional aspect connects to emotions such as feelings of security, both physically and psychologically [61]. Finally, the intentional behaviour aspect indicates the reliance on other people's words and actions, which is determined by the level of trust within the parties.

Furthermore, trust in business relationships shows a strong belief in only positive outcomes [62-63]. Mohr and Spekman [64] evoked the reliance characteristics of trust in the business relationships, in which the trustor is reliant on the trustee's words to fulfil its obligation in an exchange. Additionally, Dollinger [65] presented trust as a governance factor for a business owner to overcome the uncertainty or potential risks, which always exist in the commercial transaction. Welter [10] applied trust to business owners' expectations that their partner will act on behalf of their interest, or at least consider those interests, and though they are uncertain about how satisfied they will be with the results, they still hold confidence that they will not be disappointed. Those expectations are based on the attributions that the trustor holds with regards to the trustworthiness of the trustee [52, 66].

Mayer et al. [52] recognised the trustworthiness through three characteristics, including benevolence, competence, and integrity. Benevolence implies willingness. Competence considers the ability to serve another's interests. Integrity refers to the temporal continuity, in which one's readiness and capacity to serve another's interests do not change over time. In other words, a person is trustworthy when he/she shows a consistency (integrity) in proven his/her willingness (benevolent) and ability (competent) to ethically fulfil the trustor's interests [62]. The signal of trustworthiness encourages the trustful behaviours of the entrepreneurs [10, 52]. The trustworthiness of a business partner reveals through personal characteristics, past behaviour, and emotions, such as demonstrated honesty, loyalty, sympathy and empathy [67]. Additionally, it also derives from the community or organisation, i.e., ethnic groups, professions, networks, firms, associations, or whole industries in the form of recommendations [58, 68], reputation, and image [5, 15]. Particularly, in the business world, trust is also gained from the security of political, legal or economic framework, as well as norms, values, and codes of conduct inherent within a society [5]. Often, the entrepreneurs recognise trust through personal evaluation of losses and gains in a relationship (calculative trust) [58, 69], or the social interaction (relational trust) [69-70]. Others also inspected trust by its forms and types, cognitive-based trust and affect-based trust [71], trust, un-trust, distrust, and mistrust [72], generalised and situational trust [73-75].

## **2.2 The Concept of Respect**

According to Regis and Porto [76], respect is one of the most basic human needs. Dillion [77] defined respect in various forms, from expressing an attitude, a feeling, to following a norm, a duty, an entitlement, a recognition, and a principle. As a centre of moral and political theory, Kant [78] draws the focus of respect on the way one treats others and him/herself. Banks and Gallagher [79] described it as a relation in which the subject properly responds to the object. It is often object-generated rather than wholly subject-generated, as the act of respect is owed to, called for, deserved, elicited, or claimed by the object [77]. This distinguishes respect from other feelings, such as fear or excitement, as they originate wholly from the subject's desires and interests. To illustrate, respect refers to "a deontic experience" [80], which makes it a must-manner in many situations [81-82]. Moreover, Drummond [83] argued that respect is not simply a fundamental moral emotion, but also an effective response to the other as a rational agent. Respect also regards behavioural components. Through appropriate behaviours, an individual also displays his/her conduct, thought, and feelings towards others or things. Appropriate behaviours cover from engagement to restricting the response in certain ways, which considers being suitable, exemplary, or indebted to a particular object. The performance of respect can vary from supporting, complimenting, obeying,

not violating or interfering, and caring [77].

Darwall [84-85] distinguishes two kinds of respect: recognition respect and appraisal respect. Recognition respect refers to the intention to give evaluation and consideration regarding an object, thus adjust personal behaviours accordingly. The object of recognition respect often relates to laws, dangerous issues, other's feelings, social institutions, or persons in diverse contexts. Whereas, appraisal respect refers to a positive attitude towards a person due to their characteristics or achievements [85]. Langdon [86] adopted respect through four dimensions: (a) social power, (b) social rules, (c) caring and (d) equality and accepting differences.

Regarding the correlation between trust and respect, Meshanko [87] stated that when an individual feel respected, the brain will generate an increased level of neurotransmitters serotonin and oxytocin which are associated with a sense of pleasure, trust, and belongings. Ross and Parks [40] also suggested that respect will lead to the evolvement of a true caring/cared for the relationship which results in trust enhancement between the parties. Additionally, Lucian et al. [88] acknowledged respect as a core to build a safety culture, thus achieving high levels of mutual trust, collaboration, and accountability personally and institutionally. Mineo [89] further affirmed respect as one of the core values that form the foundation of trust in the workplace. The act of respect concerns supporting professional development and showing appreciation, collaboration, and caring for others as individuals with personal lives.

In the entrepreneurship study, respect is an uncommon theme. Although it regularly exists in advice for entrepreneurs that they need to show and earn respect, researchers have not paid sufficient consideration to this domain when addressing factors that influence entrepreneurial success. Literature shows that respect often appears to be crucial in cross-cultural business [36-39]. To illustrate, Jeanne and Tyree [39] emphasised that in Middle Eastern and South Asian Culture, respect is a key to successfully form a business relationship. Precisely, managers from these cultures favour doing business with those who show respect to their values. Respect, thus, support the flow of the relationship. This view is further elaborated by other researchers like [36-38] through different Asian cultures, like Japan, Korea, China. Furthermore, a culture of respect is frequently mentioned in leadership and organisational studies. It positively affects organisational performance, including the effectiveness of teamwork, cooperation communication, and job satisfaction. Every entrepreneur is a leader for their organisation and according to Hess [90], leaders need to show respect to their followers, thus motivate their contribution and commitment to the business.

### **2.3 Social Capital Theory**

Critics concern that the centre of social capital concepts lies within the role of social relations in individual prosperity [91]. Portes [92] nominated social capital as the capacity to secure advantages through membership of social networks and other social structures. Based on Nahapiet and Ghoshal [93], social capital concerns the actual and potential resources gathered from the network of relationships held by an individual or a social unit. Some scholars defined social capital as a privilege to access rare resources apart from accessible resources [91, 94-95]. Lin [96] further examined social capital theory based on the social network analysis, which emphasises on how the quality of social resources available within an individual social network affect his/her success and achievements. The theory of social capital is expressly rooted in the notion of trusts, norms, informal networks, which recognises social ties as valuable resources and powerful means regarding economic advancement [96]. Social resources available in personal networks stay in either tangible forms, i.e., financial capital, public spaces, private property; or intangible forms, i.e., social status, human and cultural capital, collaboration, information, reputation, credibility, access to networks, social and environmental responsibility [41, 97-98]. Besides, Luoma-aho [99] compared social capital theory with a metaphor as an investment is required, considering the trustworthy networks and social relations that enable collaboration and reward in economic and social benefits.

Fukuyama [74] and Coleman [100] shared a statement that social capital results from the prevalence of trust in society [74, 100], which makes it a critical factor in social capital theory. Putman [101] also supported this by viewing trust as a vital driving force in the development and operation of social capital. In other words, behaviour within social networks and groups will not be very effective when the trust within is low. Trust is a base for social capital [100-101] because, without a reasonable level of trust, the relationship, societies, partnership, and mutual commitment which characterise social capital would disappear.

In the entrepreneurship literature, trust, as a relational form of social capital, is imperative for entrepreneurs to deal with the unknown and uncertain environment, which frequently contain potential risks for the business [21-23]. Entrepreneurs often pursue ambiguous, evolving and constructive goals, and the process of entrepreneurship frequently relies on unfamiliar and dysfunctional socio-economic ties [102]. Trust, therefore, helps transform the complicated and structured transactional relations into fluid and informal relationships, as well as creates and develops social capital. To social capital theory, respect shall be considered as an emotional support, appraisal, and affirmation. This thus provides social capital for an individual while strengthening the social ties within it.

## **2.4 Information Seeking Behaviour**

Information-seeking behaviour (ISB) explores how people search, locate and use the information to afford desired information need or fill a gap in knowledge. Specifically, it concerns the seekers' choices regarding where and how to find information, as well as the way they consider, or act based on the information they receive [103]. It examines what a person undergoes when seeking information, including actions, emotions, and attitudes [104]. According to Wilson [105], the ISB analyses human behaviour with respect to sources and channels of information in both active and passive information-seeking and information-use. Furthermore, ISB study is significant especially for the group of high-stakes and high-status occupations [104].

For entrepreneurs, information is requisite for their business to survive and grow [106, 126]. It significantly influences business strategies, operations, and evaluation of activities. Popović et al. [107] asserted that high-quality information, which is relevant, accurate, and timely, certainly supports managerial decisions, and improve organisational performance. The information; thus, works as a strategic weapon for entrepreneurs to overcome pressure, adapt changes, survive and foster their enterprises in the complex and dynamic business world [108]. Alvarez et al. [109] emphasised the necessity of entrepreneurial continuous information learning processes to assure their competitive position [110]. To illustrate, a constant update on information related to governmental policies like taxation, the business procedure, regulations is fundamental for businesses in all stages [108, 111-112]. Due to a non-stop increase in information needs and information landscape, entrepreneurial information-seeking behaviours happen professionally and on a daily basis. Additionally, the activities and process of entrepreneurs' information seeking may significantly impact on the outcomes of their decision and later on business success. That is why an understanding of entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviour is essential. By studying ISB, we learn how entrepreneurs conceptualise information needs, the process of the information sources' selection and their preferences towards omnichannel of information retrieval. The results of the ISB study serve as a framework for designing and developing information packages, as well as information services that directly contribute to entrepreneurial success.

Furthermore, research has shown an inclusive reliance of entrepreneurs on their networks when seeking information [113-114]. Social relationships serve as preferred sources for business information, while trust and trustworthiness are embedded within those. Trust positively influences the success of the relational exchange for information. Besides, due to the unstable and hazardous characteristics of the business nature and the lack of resources for making only rational choices, trust generates a sense of safety for entrepreneurs. Therefore, during their information seeking process, entrepreneurs intentionally consider the strength of their social relationships (i.e., trust) for choosing their information sources, and the selected ones are those that they trust. Meanwhile, a show of respect is vital in all behaviours as it is the basis of all relationships in society

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### **3 The Interplay Between Trust, Respect and Information Seeking Behaviour Through Social Capital Theory**

Based on Johnson [41], the social capital theory is necessary to provide an understanding of the structural and relational dimensions of information-seeking behaviour. The theory adoption helps us to study the effect of social structure on information access and its flow. By determining the relationship between the information seekers and information sources, including the social position of the information source, as well as concerning others within the network, the theory provides a framework for monitoring the information behaviours. For instance, the theory is employed to explain the information source preferences. People intend to seek information from those who hold strong social ties with them or those whom they have established trust and respect. Trust reflects the bonds within a social relationship. Many scholars reported that trust encourages and facilitates the sharing of business information [9-10, 23, 25, 115].

Through social capital theory, the evaluation of social cost/risk explains the preference of information sources. People try to avoid embarrassment, loss of face, the revelation of incompetence while thriving to social benefits (e.g., making an impression, relationship building) and other factors such as willingness to share the closeness [116-117]. In information-seeking, the information seeker chooses an information source depending on their perspective towards the sources, which trust plays as an influential factor [118]. The trustful behaviours; therefore, implies the information seekers (trustors)'s belief that the information sources (trustees) have the required information and the confidence of understandability that the information seekers shall accurately interpret the messages, and importantly, they are willing to give entire and honest information to the seekers. The degree of trust decides the level of interpersonal interactions [119]. Furthermore, with trust, people are more confident in predicting and expecting the other's actions, thus, more open to interacting in the relationship [110]. Savolainen [120] also argued that people often prefer to count on close ones as information sources because of their high trust for them. Additionally, today the information is blooming due to the development of Internet and ICT, people enter the era of "fake news" in which they are sceptical with all information that comes to them [121]. Trust then becomes an important element in nurturing and facilitating the level of participation and sharing behaviour for information in online communities as when the information seekers trust the information source, they become more confident in the information that it brings. For entrepreneurs, they habitually develop and rely on their informal networks and these are trusted sources of business information, advice, and learning [113]. Smith and Lohrke [7] clarified that people are more willing to give and receive information when trust exists and plays as an instrumental in supporting the feeling of safety while reducing uncertainty, i.e., the absence of a contract, or guarantee.

Regarding the role of respect in information-seeking behaviours, it is rather an essential manner to create trust and good harmony between the information seekers and information sources, particularly among interpersonal relationships [88-89]. This also refers to the social cost/risk as Borgatti and Cross [116] stressed the consequence of comfortability for information seekers. Silver [122] also showed that people refuse to ask information when they sense the neglect, or in other words, being disrespected. Furthermore, conduct respect plays an essential role in entrepreneurship regarding social capital. Respect contributes to develop and maintain the social capital for an entrepreneur, which in return grants him/her a greater choice of information sources. Johnson [41] pointed out that social relationships provide an individual with a better possibility to attain the relevant and valuable information to satisfy personal information need. Additionally, an enriched social capital allows information seekers to extend their

network and meet people from different social and professional backgrounds [123]. Su et al. [4] also emphasised this benefit as those who have information access to a variety of sources have a greater chance of perceiving better opportunities.

#### **4 Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Studies**

In this paper, we address two important components in entrepreneurship domain, i.e., trust and respect to assess entrepreneur's information-seeking behaviour using social capital theory as a theoretical lens. The results of this paper provide an overview of the literature highlighting the importance of trust and respect in the entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviours. The results indicate that information is vital for entrepreneurs in all stages of their careers. Therefore, the understanding of their information behaviours generally, or their information-seeking behaviours particularly will contribute to the implementation of a supportive information environment for entrepreneurship. We further contribute to the literature by showing that trust and respect are fundamental aspects that influence entrepreneurs' preference of information sources. Trust and respect act as predominant factors for entrepreneurs to build and advance various relationships. It also encourages entrepreneurs to overcome their uncertainty and their shortage of resources for making rational choices. Through the theory of social capital, we further show that the influence of trust in entrepreneurial sources selection relates to the seekers' perception of social cost/risk. Expressly, trust appears to be entrepreneurial shields from negative sequences of their social interactions. In addition, it ensures the quantity and quality of information that entrepreneurs can obtain from their information sources. Therefore, we assume that maintaining trust at any cost will naturally bring benefits to the firms and their operations.

In terms of respect, we share a discussion on a subtle and scarce domain in both entrepreneurship and information-seeking behaviour study. While explaining its concept, we also disclose respect as an instrument that nurtures trust within the relationship and fosters the extension of social capital for entrepreneurs. Noticeably, respect reduces social cost/risk when generating a supportive environment within the participants. Respect is essential for both information seekers and providers to pay attention and perform throughout their communication. Conclusively, we also recognise fundamental gaps in the extant literature, suggesting fascinating avenues for future research.

This paper profoundly reviewed prior studies that have investigated the role of trust and respect in entrepreneurs' information-seeking behaviours. From the literature, it seems that there is a lack of research regarding this topic in the field of entrepreneurship. Additionally, most of the literature only pays attention to the benefits of trust generally, including transferring information, acquiring resources, investments, promoting cooperation and substituting formal institutions. Our findings point out that information behaviour is rather a sub-concern than a mere focus of the entrepreneurship literature. Therefore, for future studies, other scholars should work on the empirical research on how trust influences the information-seeking behaviours of the entrepreneurs, i.e., their preferences towards information sources [126], their ignorance, as well as their intention to use the information sources. As entrepreneurs are also trustees and may act as the information sources, we suggest further studies to be conducted on how entrepreneurs build and maintain their trustworthiness in terms of interpersonal and virtual relationships through social media. This becomes even more critical for enterprises in the era of abundance of information where the virality of fake news in digital networks and the Internet causes the absence of trust and triggers the recovery of it. Future studies could also investigate the downside of trust in information-seeking behaviours, i.e., over-trust, mistrust, and distrust problem, its possible consequences on the business and alternative solutions on how avoid it [72, 124-125]. Moreover, despite that digital information sources become more popular for the entrepreneurs and trust shows its importance in the adoption or resistance of these sources, this area still faces the lack of research. Therefore, future researchers would benefit from exploring how trust influences the entrepreneurial intention and usage behaviour of digital information



sources. Additionally, it is essential to draw investigations on what affects trust in information-seeking behaviours, i.e., culture, personal traits, the role of security, privacy and risk perceptions.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship literature seems to neglect the study in terms of respect. It is only recognised in cross-culture study for entrepreneurship and the organisational performance, which highlight every member's conduct of respect. Besides, it is also rarely mentioned in the information behaviour literature. So far, discussion regarding respect is quite narrow and insufficient. Scholars often consider it as fundamental for building trust but fail to monitor its independent effects on relationship formation and enhancement. The absence of respect in entrepreneurship and information behaviour study hereby opens a broad scope of subjects for future research. Finally, this paper is limited to a literature discussion. The paper may also lack a rigorous approach to endogenous issues derived from the interplay between trust, respect, and entrepreneur.

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