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(IJEPC)**<https://gaexcellence.com/ijepe>**DETERMINANTS OF DECENT WORK INTENTION
AMONG YOUTH IN SELANGOR: THE MEDIATING ROLE
OF EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

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Abstract:

This study investigates the influence of social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, and entrepreneurial soft skills on emotional engagement and intention toward decent work among youth. Despite increased exposure to social issues and digital content, youth emotional engagement toward meaningful career goals remains inconsistent, which raises concern about their intention to pursue decent work. Using the Affective Events Theory (AET) as a guide, this study aims to examine the role of emotional engagement as a determinant element linking social and digital experiences to career-related intentions. This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design. The online questionnaire was distributed to youth in Selangor, Malaysia, using

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purposive sampling. A total of 154 valid respondents were obtained. The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Research findings indicate that the credibility of influencers has a significant impact on emotional engagement. However, continuous exposure to social challenges has a significant negative impact on emotional engagement, indicating that repeated exposure to social issues can trigger frustration, anxiety, or emotional withdrawal. On the contrary, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, and entrepreneurial soft skills do not show a significant direct effect on emotional engagement. Furthermore, emotional engagement has a strong positive effect on youth intention to obtain decent work, which is fair, safe, and meaningful. Overall, the findings contribute to the academic literature by applying Affective Events Theory in the context of youth social awareness and career intentions. This study also provides practical guidance to educators, policymakers, and youth organizations in supporting meaningful engagement and aspirations for decent work in the digital environment among young people.

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Keyword:

Emotional Engagement, Entrepreneurial Soft Skills, Decent Work Intention, Digital Civic Literacy, Perceived Institutional Trust, Youth Social Awareness Program,



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Introduction

In the era of digital technology, it has driven all groups, including young people to interpret and respond to social issues globally or locally. Passive reception of information can now transform young people to provide opinions, values, and public discourse through various digital platforms (Boulianne, 2020). Therefore, when social media has become part of the daily routine of young people, they are constantly exposed to information that is not equal to social, challenges in employment, ethical issues, and environmental sustainability. This method can influence them, in addition to their understanding of society but also the emotional reactions and future aspirations of the young people involved (OECD, 2021).

Social issues have grown more visible and personally relevant because information can now be obtained instantaneously through social media, online groups, and digital content makers (Pew Research Center, 2022). Digital platforms have thus transformed the way in which young people relate to social issues. Young people encounter misinformation, competing views, and varying levels of source credibility online. (Kross et al., 2021; Vosoughi et al., 2018). The increasing volume of information makes it more difficult.

Emotional reactions are determined not just by the difficulties people meet but also by the way those concerns are expressed and by who delivers the message. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) claim that, from the standpoint of Affective Events Theory, humans generate emotional reactions when exposed to events and experiences that they regard as meaningful. Affective events that drive emotional involvement exist in digital contexts and include societal issues, institutional messages, civic information, and influencer communications. Emotional engagement matters because it demonstrates how strongly people invest themselves in the subjects they care about. Such participation affects attitudes, judgments, and behavioral intentions, including professional goals.

Previous studies examined various factors associated with youth engagement, including social awareness, institutional trust, digital literacy, social media participation, and entrepreneurial competencies (Hastings et al., 2021; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Digital influencers play a growing role in shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors among younger audiences (Lie Ao et al., 2023). Few studies have looked at how these factors work together to shape emotional engagement and how that engagement then leads to decent work intention. Most existing studies examine these variables separately, so their combined effect is still not well understood (Salem, 2021).

The link with decent work intentions has received limited attention, even though it is important for youth development. Fairness, dignity, meaningful contribution, and opportunities for personal growth matter just as much as economic security when young people increasingly look for work. Understanding what shapes these intentions may help explain how young people think about their future careers. Social and digital experiences shape young people's aspirations toward decent work through emotional engagement as the key mechanism.

This study looks at the relationships among social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, entrepreneurial soft skills, emotional engagement, and decent work intention. The present study focuses on understanding how emotional engagement influences young people's intention to pursue decent work. It also explores the factors that help strengthen emotional engagement among young people.

Focusing on career intentions and emotional engagement, this study examines how social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, and entrepreneurship and soft skills influence emotional engagement, which subsequently affects decent work intention among youth. Specifically, the study explores how these factors shape emotional engagement and how that emotional engagement, in turn, drives young people's intentions to pursue decent work. Using Affective Events Theory, this study contributes to research on youth development, digital engagement, and career intentions while supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. The findings may offer useful guidance for educators, policymakers, and youth organizations to better understand how to support engagement and decent work aspirations among young people.

Literature Review

Youth Social Awareness and Decent Work Intention

As young people are navigating complex social and digital changes, youth social awareness has become critical (OECD, 2021). “Contemporary youth are active shapers of values and community responses to issues, not passive recipients of social messages” (Boulianne, 2020). Social issues awareness affects civic responsibility and individual decisions (Hastings et al., 2021). Digital platforms have a strong effect on how young people engage with and respond to social issues (Pew Research Center, 2022). Social media can affect perceptions in real time, but the information may contain misinformation (Kross et al., 2021; Makmor, et al., 2021). Therefore, information credibility affects the awareness of the youth, so digital civic literacy is necessary (NCSS, 2018). This study uses Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as the main theoretical framework to examine the relationship between social awareness and decent work intention. Youth civic engagement builds competencies that prepare for transition to productive and decent work (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2022; Hassan et al., 2024; Xue et al., 2024).

Decent work, as defined by the ILO (2011), includes job creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue. Affective responses mediate emotional engagement with social issues and influence work intentions by affecting how youth evaluate characteristics such as autonomy and social contribution. In addition, the influencer’s credibility has a significant role in youth awareness and intention to work. Influencers who are genuine and emotionally transparent are effective in influencing perceptions and behaviors (Farruh et al., 2025). The impact of entrepreneurial soft skills also acts as a mediating factor in this relationship, as youth with higher levels of empathy are more likely to look for jobs that are compatible with social values. These relationships have implications for educators and policymakers in strengthening youth responsiveness (UNESCO, 2022). From the above discussion, it can be expected that the social awareness of youth will have a great contribution to the formation of decent work intention among the young people. Increased awareness of social problems and employment-related concerns might lead youth to place more value on employment opportunities that promote fairness, dignity and social responsibility. Therefore, this study implies that social awareness of youth has a positive influence on decent work intention.

Social Issues

Social issues are issues that affect society, such as inequality, environmental problems, and issues of justice and fairness (Hassan et al., 2024). For young people, these are often not perceived as distant problems but are linked to personal values and identity (Xue et al., 2024). Young people’s engagement in a social cause can lead to the development of empathy and a greater sense of community responsibility (Ferraro et al., 2020). Social issues are important in this study in that they can help shape the youth's emotional response to issues that affect society and their own future (McIlveen et al., 2020). While previous studies have examined youth awareness of social issues, limited research has investigated how such awareness translates into emotional engagement specifically related to career aspirations and the intention to pursue decent work among Malaysian youth (Chong et al., 2025; Mustapha et al., 2024).

Perceived Institutional Trust

Perceived institutional trust refers to the belief that institutions are fair, reliable and acting in the public interest (OECD, 2025). It is not about following rules only but also having confidence that the institution is legitimate and worthy of trust (Prats et al., 2023). Youth's trust in institutions is associated with youth's feeling safe and willingness to participate in activities associated with those institutions (Chaudhry et al., 2024). Institutional trust is important in this study because it might affect how open young people are emotionally regarding social and career issues (Helsingen et al., 2022). Previous studies have largely examined institutional trust in relation to civic participation and political engagement, yet its direct influence on emotional engagement and career-related intentions among Malaysian youth remains underexplored (Chaudhry et al., 2024; Mustapha et al., 2024). Prior research has primarily focused on the cognitive and informational aspects of digital literacy, with limited investigation of whether digital civic literacy contributes to emotional engagement with social and career issues among youth (Kornbluh et al., 2026; Polizzi, 2021).

Digital Civic Literacy

Digital civic literacy is defined as the ability to use digital information in ways that enable informed civic participation (Polizzi, 2021). It is not just about knowing how to use technology but also judging information, understanding context and participating meaningfully in online public spaces (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021; Polizzi, 2021). Higher digital civic literacy is linked with greater confidence in navigating online environments and deciding what information can be trusted (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Thus, digital civic literacy allows young people to engage with social and career-related content online in more thoughtful ways (Polizzi, 2021).

Influencer Credibility

Influencer credibility is the degree to which an influencer is perceived as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and attractive by his/her followers (Lie Ao et al., 2023). Unlike traditional celebrities, digital influencers often build closer and more intimate relationships with young audiences through relatable and consistent content (Sherbaz Khan, 2023). When young people believe an influencer is credible, they are more likely to accept messages related to social issues, values in careers, and work expectations (Syed Asim Shah et al., 2023). Therefore, credibility helps determine whether online advocacy triggers a genuine emotional response or is dismissed as just another advertisement (Davlembayeva et al., 2024). Despite the growing influence of digital influencers, most studies have focused on consumer behaviour and brand engagement, with limited attention to how influencer credibility affects youth emotional engagement and intentions toward decent work (Noronha, 2025; Widaningsih & Putranto, 2025).

Entrepreneur Soft Skills

Entrepreneurial soft skills include emotional intelligence, resilience, adaptability, communication, and self-regulation (Rivera Aguirre, 2025; Hamfara Review Team, 2023). These abilities help young people remain steady when facing uncertain or demanding situations (Rivera Aguirre, 2025). For youth, these skills make a real difference because they sustain motivation and support persistence after setbacks (Altınay et al., 2020; Bigos & Michalik,

2020). They also help them manage pressure without losing focus or emotional balance (Demeure & Demeure, 2023). These soft skills may explain why some young people stay emotionally engaged when dealing with career-related challenges (Aryani et al., 2021). However, limited empirical evidence exists on the direct relationship between entrepreneurial soft skills and emotional engagement, particularly in the context of youth career development and decent work intention in Malaysia (Menon et al., 2023; Luc, 2024).

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement is a sustained state of energy, dedication, and absorption in a particular activity or area of life (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Bakker, 2022). It goes beyond short-term interest because it involves deeper psychological investment in something that feels personally meaningful (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010). In this study, emotional engagement is understood as sustained emotional and psychological investment in social and career-related concerns that matter to young people. This makes emotional engagement an important construct because it captures how youth not only notice an issue but also feel personally connected to it and remain involved over time (Xue et al., 2024; Ferraro et al., 2020). While emotional engagement has been studied in workplace and educational settings, its role as a mediator between social and digital factors and decent work intention among youth has received limited attention (Mallet, 2025; Xue et al., 2024).

Decent Work Intention

Decent work intention is a young person's intention to seek employment that embodies fairness, security, dignity, and social protection (International Labour Organization, 2008; McIlveen et al., 2020). It includes preferences for jobs with fair remuneration, safe working conditions, social dialogue, equal opportunities, and work-life balance (Hassan et al., 2024). For youth, decent work intention is not simply about finding any job but about pursuing work that respects their rights and supports their long-term well-being (Xue et al., 2024). This intention is important because it reflects how social awareness and emotional engagement can translate into concrete career aspirations (Ferraro et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024). Despite the importance of decent work, limited studies have investigated the determinants of decent work intention among youth in Malaysia, particularly the mediating role of emotional engagement in linking social and digital factors to this outcome (Chong et al., 2025; Mustapha et al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework: Affective Events Theory (AET)

This study is underpinned by the Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The theory explains the process through which environmental events cause emotional responses that affect attitudes, behaviors, and intentions. AET is relevant in this context as exposure of young people to social problems, institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer messages, and entrepreneurial soft skills can be considered as effective events, which in turn influences decent work intention (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Hassan et al., 2024). According to AET, these events influence behavioral intentions indirectly through emotional responses rather than direct effects. Hence, emotional engagement plays a central mediating role by translating these factors into decent work intention and provides the psychological connection between these factors and decent work intention (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Hassan et al., 2024).

Social Issues and Emotional Engagement

Social issues may be conceptualized as emotionally significant events because they relate to fairness, responsibility, and belonging (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996; Carvalho et al., 2021). When young people relate these issues to their values and identity, they are more likely to experience empathy, concern, and moral urgency (Santos et al., 2023). Such reactions can strengthen emotional engagement by making the issue personally meaningful. Thus, the discussion presents hypotheses as follows:

H1: Social issues positively influence emotional engagement.

Institutional Trust and Emotional Engagement

Institutional trust is expected to mediate the influence of institutional trust on emotional engagement (Spadaro et al., 2020; Lee, 2020). When institutions are perceived as fair and reliable, youth may be more receptive and emotionally invested in issues connected to those institutions. (Chaudhry et al., 2024). On the other hand, lower trust may undermine this emotional connection. Accordingly, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H2: Perceived institutional trust positively influences emotional engagement.

Digital Civic Literacy and Emotional Engagement

Digital civic literacy influences how young people interpret and engage with information online. Rather than receiving content passively, they analyze its meaning, context, and credibility before determining how to participate (Polizzi, 2021; Chen et al., 2020). This important capacity may promote more meaningful emotional connections with civic information in digital environments (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021; Park et al., 2023). Based on the above explanation, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Digital civic literacy positively influences emotional engagement.

Influencer Credibility and Emotional Engagement

Influencer credibility may act as a crucial antecedent to emotional engagement because it affects how followers receive messages (Lie Ao et al., 2023). When influencers are viewed as trustworthy, competent, and appealing, young audiences are more likely to build emotional intimacy and embrace the message as personally meaningful (Sherbaz Khan, 2023; Syed Asim Shah et al., 2023). In this scenario, credibility may promote emotional involvement by lowering skepticism and enhancing message resonance (Davlembayeva et al., 2024). Our hypothesis is postulated as follows:

H4: Influencer credibility positively influences emotional engagement.

Entrepreneurship Soft Skills and Emotional Engagement

Entrepreneurial soft skills may also contribute to emotional engagement, particularly in situations involving uncertainty and pressure (Allen et al., 2020; Bigos & Michalik, 2020). Attributes such as emotional intelligence, resilience, adaptability, communication, and self-regulation enable young people to manage challenges more effectively and maintain emotional balance (Chu et al., 2020). As a result, these skills may support stronger engagement with career-related concerns (Nwibe & Ogbuanya, 2024). The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis

H5: Entrepreneurial soft skills positively influence emotional engagement.

Emotional Engagement and Decent Work Intention

Emotional engagement refers to sustained emotional and psychological investment in something personally meaningful (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Bakker, 2022). Among youth, this form of engagement may translate into stronger concern for fairness, dignity, and security in employment (McIlveen et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2024). Accordingly, emotional engagement is positioned as a key mechanism through which social awareness may shape decent work intention (Ferraro et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024). Therefore, we propose the hypothesis as follows:

H6: Emotional engagement positively influences the decent work intention.

Research Framework

The framework includes the following component variables: social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, entrepreneurship and soft skills, emotional engagement, and decent work intention.

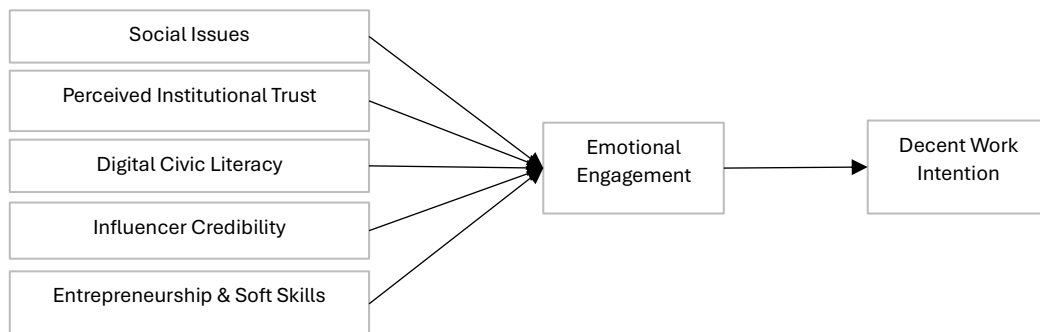


Figure 1: The research framework of the study

Methodology

Creswell and Creswell (2018) used a quantitative approach and a descriptive survey to examine the relationships among social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, entrepreneurial soft skills, emotional engagement, and decent work intention among youth. This study used a descriptive survey approach because it allows data to be collected in a consistent format and facilitates systematic analysis of correlations among variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Purposive sampling was applied to pick respondents who matched clearly stated inclusion criteria, following standard practice (Etikan et al., 2016; Saunders et al., 2019). Data were acquired through an online questionnaire delivered via Google Forms. Two screening questions were added to determine respondent eligibility; those who did not satisfy the criteria were barred from progressing further in the survey, ensuring that only eligible participants submitted data (Dillman et al., 2014). Each questionnaire part opened with brief, plain language instructions to assist respondents in understanding and completing the items appropriately (Dillman et al., 2014).

Population and Sampling Design

This study targeted Malaysian youth aged 18–30 residing in Selangor, drawing on a mix of students, young professionals, early-career employees, and young entrepreneurs to capture a range of everyday experiences with digital platforms and social issues. A total of 154 valid responses were collected and analysed: 68 students, 48 young professionals, and 38 early-career employees/young entrepreneurs. The sample was intentionally assembled to reflect different stages of early adulthood and varied work or study commitments (Jaaffar et al., 2024).

Selangor was chosen because it is one of Malaysia's most economically dynamic states and serves as a major hub for youth activity in the digital economy, education, manufacturing, and services. To account for varying lived realities within the state, purposive sampling included participants from urban centres (for example, Shah Alam and Subang Jaya), semi-urban towns (for example, Kajang and Bangi), and suburban neighbourhoods. This geographic spread was intended to capture differences in socioeconomic context and levels of digital access that shape how young people engage with social issues online.

A G*Power analysis was conducted to assess sample adequacy; the results indicated that the sample size of 154 was sufficient to detect medium effect sizes with 0.80 statistical power, supporting the robustness of the main analyses (Yang, et al., 2024). Data collection was voluntary and anonymous, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Ethical approval was secured from the researcher's institution before data collection. Although the sampling strategy was purposive rather than probability-based, the deliberate inclusion of diverse youth subgroups and geographic settings provides practical and varied insights into how digital engagement relates to social awareness and career aspirations in Selangor.

Measurement of Variables

The measurement items were adapted from previous studies and slightly revised to suit the context of this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The English-language questionnaire was reviewed by academic staff for clarity and relevance (Dillman et al., 2014). (Saunders et al., 2019) used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree for all items. The study assessed seven constructs: social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, entrepreneurial soft skills, emotional engagement, and decent work intention (Hair et al., 2022).

Specifically, social issues were measured with four items adapted from Hassan et al. (2024) and Yang et al. (2018); from Spadaro et al. (2020) and Lee (2020) perceived institutional trust with four items; digital civic literacy with five items from Polizzi (2021) and Chen et al. (2020); Lie Ao et al. (2023) and Sherbaz Khan (2023) used influencer credibility with four items; entrepreneurial soft skills with five items from Allen et al. (2020) and Bigos & Michalik (2020); emotional engagement with six items from Schaufeli & Bakker (2010) and Bakker (2022); and decent work intention with five items from Duffy et al. (2016) and McIlveen et al. (2020).

Data Collection Procedure

The target population for this study comprised youth residing in Selangor, Malaysia. Data collection was conducted through an online survey distributed via community groups, campus social media platforms, and university-based networks to effectively reach the intended respondents. The study adopted established academic research practices to ensure accessibility, reliability, and adherence to data protection standards.

Data were collected over a four-week period using Google Forms. The online survey method was selected due to its suitability for engaging youth populations, as well as its efficiency in facilitating data collection within a limited timeframe. Prior to participation, all respondents were provided with a consent statement outlining the study objectives, ensuring confidentiality, and emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation. Responses were collected anonymously and used solely for academic purposes.

A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed, yielding 180 responses. Following a data screening process, 154 responses were deemed valid and suitable for final analysis. This corresponds to a usable response rate of 30.8%, which is considered acceptable for online survey research involving youth populations. The systematic and transparent data collection procedures employed in this study enhance its reliability, validity, and replicability, in alignment with established ethical and reporting standards in the social sciences.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using Smart PLS 4.0 Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) and SPSS 29 for preliminary analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic and sectoral profiles, while PLS-SEM was used to test the measurement and structural models. High loadings and $AVE > 0.50$ confirmed convergent validity, and the Fornell–Larcker and HTMT criteria confirmed discriminant validity. There was no multicollinearity problem as all Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) were below 3.3.

Structural model assessment tested hypothesized relationships using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. The results were assessed through path coefficients, t-values and R^2 indicators. The explanatory power of the model was high, with $R^2 = 0.62$ for cybersecurity talent management and $R^2 = 0.56$ for technological readiness. The mediation effects were tested with the method of Zhao et al. (2010), and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was conducted to examine sectoral differences. The robustness of the findings and the reliability of the analytical procedures were further validated by the application of both Smart PLS and SPSS. All analytical parameters and outputs were documented to ensure full methodological transparency and replicability.

Results And Discussion

Demographic Profile Overview

The demographic profile of the respondents reveals that 154 individuals participated in this study, with the majority aged 22 to 25 years (57.8%), followed by those aged 18 to 21 years (37.7%), and 64.3% were female, whereas 35.7% were male. It signifies greater engagement among females.

Concerning educational qualifications, most respondents were either seeking or had attained a bachelor's degree (78.6%), followed by diploma holders (18.2%), while a minimal proportion had completed secondary education (1.9%) and a foundation level (1.3%). For part-time employment, only 23.4% indicated they were working part-time, implying that most participants are predominantly concentrated on their academic pursuits.

Over half of the respondents indicated previous participation in financial literacy programs, with findings of 57.1% and 60.4% across two distinct measures, while the rest of the respondents claimed no such exposure. or social media platforms. The data shows that the respondents are primarily young, educated persons with limited exposure to financial literacy tools and influences.

Model Predictive Power and Goodness-of-Fit Evaluation

The determination results indicate that the proposed model demonstrates an exceptionally high level of explanatory power for both mediating and dependent constructs. As presented in Table 1, the R^2 adjusted values for Emotional Engagement ($EE = 0.712$) and Decent Work Intention ($DCI = 0.739$) exceed the threshold of 0.70, which, according to Hair et al. (2021), signifies a substantial model fit. This coefficient implies that 71.2% of the variance in EE and 73.9% of the variance in DWI are jointly explained by the predictors—Social Issues The predictors include Social Issues (SI), Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT), Digital Civic Literacy (DCL), Influencer Credibility (IC), Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS), and the mediating construct Emotional Engagement (EE). The high explanatory power of the model highlights its robustness and predictive relevance among youth participants, especially in relation to their social awareness of decent work intentions. decent work intentions. It is highly interdependent.

Table 1: R-Squared Adjusted Value

Variables	R-square	R-square adjusted
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.721	0.712
Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.741	0.739

This study reports f^2 values (Table 2) that show how much each predictor uniquely contributes to the variance in decent work intention. The results of $SI \rightarrow DWI$ ($f^2 = 0.285$) and $EE \rightarrow DWI$ ($f^2 = 0.273$) are moderate-to-large effects, meaning social concerns (SI) and emotional engagement (EE) each add a substantial and meaningful amount of explanatory power to young people's intentions toward decent work. Then, for result $IC \rightarrow DWI$ ($f^2 = 0.215$) and $PIT \rightarrow DWI$ ($f^2 = 0.157$) shows moderate effects, indicating influencer credibility (IC) and perceived institutional trust (PIT) also contribute noticeably, but less strongly than SI and EE.

Table 2: F-Square Value

Variables	f-square
Social Issues (SI) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.053
Social Issues (SI) $\rightarrow$ Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.285
Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.077
Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT) $\rightarrow$ Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.157
Digital Civic Literacy (DCL) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.057

Digital Civic Literacy (DCL) → Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.132
Influencer Credibility (IC) → Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.082
Influencer Credibility (IC) → Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.215
Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS) → Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.031
Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS) → Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.124
Emotional Engagement (EE) → Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.273

Conversely, the relationships DCL → DWI ($f^2 = 0.132$) and ESS → DWI ($f^2 = 0.124$) exhibits small-to-moderate effects, whereas the impacts on emotion. The effects on emotional engagement, including SI → EE (0.053), PIT → EE (0.077), DCL → EE (0.057), IC → EE (0.082), and ESS → EE (0.031), are comparatively minor yet still significant. Significant. These findings indicate that although several factors directly affect both emotional involvement and the desire to pursue decent work, the impact is more pronounced on intention outcomes. The results demonstrate that emotional engagement serves a vital mediating function in enhancing the impact of these predictors on the intention for decent employment, hence corroborating the theoretical foundations of the model.

Construct Reliability and Validity

Based on the results presented in Table 3, all constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.916 to 0.946, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021). (Hair et al., 2021) demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.916 to 0.946, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 for all constructs. In addition, the Composite Reliability (rho_c) values ranged between 0.966 and 0.987, while rho_a values were also consistently high (0.941 to 0.971), further confirming the reliability of the measurement model.

Table 3: Construct Reliability And Validity Value

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Social Issues (SI)	0.934	0.964	0.967	0.853
Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT)	0.924	0.965	0.978	0.878
Digital Civic Literacy (DCL)	0.922	0.960	0.973	0.887
Influencer Credibility (IC)	0.946	0.971	0.983	0.855
Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS)	0.916	0.952	0.975	0.843
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.946	0.941	0.966	0.853
Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.916	0.942	0.987	0.862

Meanwhile, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs ranged from 0.843 to 0.887, which are well above the minimum criterion of 0.50, indicating strong convergent validity. The results confirm that all constructs exhibit adequate reliability and validity. These include Social Issues, Perceived Institutional Trust, Digital Civic Literacy, Influencer Credibility, Entrepreneurship and Soft Skills, Emotional Engagement, and Decent Work Intention. This supports the robustness of the measurement model.

Discriminant Validity and HTMT Assessment

Discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as presented in Table 4. The HTMT values ranged from 0.604 to 0.861. Most of the values fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), indicating that the constructs are generally distinct from one another and that the risk of multicollinearity or conceptual overlap is minimal. Although a few relationships (e.g., ESS → DWI = 0.848 and EE → DWI = 0.861) approach or slightly exceed the stricter threshold, they remain within acceptable limits when considering the more lenient criterion of 0.90, suggesting that discriminant validity is still adequately established.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity Assessment and Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

Variables	SI	PIT	DCL	IC	ESS	EE	DWI
Social Issues (SI)							
Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT)	0.780						
Digital Civic Literacy (DCL)	0.766	0.840					
Influencer Credibility (IC)	0.604	0.783	0.815				
Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS)	0.682	0.766	0.842	0.785			
Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.757	0.761	0.782	0.746	0.752		
Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.719	0.795	0.811	0.756	0.848	0.861	

Additionally, the Fornell–Larcker criterion is satisfied, as the square root of each construct's AVE exceeds the corresponding inter-construct correlations. This further supports the independence and uniqueness of the latent constructs. This outcome confirms that the variables such as social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, entrepreneurship and soft skills, emotional engagement, and decent work intention will capture distinct dimensions within the research model.

Overall, the establishment of discriminant validity strengthens the analytical robustness of the study, demonstrating that the constructs are empirically distinguishable and theoretically coherent. Conceptual proximity among several predictors (e.g., literacy, trust, and skills-related constructs) makes discriminant validity crucial for accurate structural model estimation and interpretation (Hair et al., 2021).

Structural Model Analysis

This research focuses on individuals' perceptions of social issues, institutional trust, digital civic literacy, and related factors influencing emotional engagement and decent work intention. It provides an important basis for understanding the observed relationships. The results indicate that Influencer Credibility (IC → EE: $\beta = 0.492$, $t = 3.337$, $p < 0.001$) has a strong and significant positive effect on Emotional Engagement (EE), suggesting that credible influencers play a crucial role in shaping individuals' emotional involvement. In contrast, Social Issues (SI → EE: $\beta = -0.410$, $t = 4.832$, $p < 0.001$) exhibit a significant negative effect, implying that

heightened awareness of social issues may reduce emotional engagement, possibly due to concerns, anxiety, or perceived systemic challenges.

Other predictors, including Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT $\rightarrow$ EE: $\beta = 0.249$, $t = 0.596$, $p = 0.552$) and Digital Civic Literacy (DCL $\rightarrow$ EE: $\beta = 0.332$, $t = 0.808$, $p = 0.420$), show positive but statistically insignificant relationships with emotional engagement, indicating that while these factors may conceptually contribute to engagement, their influence is not strongly supported in this model. Similarly, Entrepreneurship and Soft Skills (ESS $\rightarrow$ EE: $\beta = -0.149$, $t = 1.961$, $p = 0.052$) demonstrate a marginally insignificant negative effect, suggesting a limited role in shaping emotional responses.

Furthermore, the relationship between Emotional Engagement and Decent Work Intention (EE $\rightarrow$ DWI: $\beta = 0.117$, $p < 0.001$) is positive and statistically significant, highlighting emotional engagement as a meaningful predictor of individuals' intention towards decent work outcomes.

Overall, these findings suggest that while multiple socio-cognitive factors contribute to emotional engagement, influencer credibility emerges as the most dominant driver, whereas social issues may act as a deterrent. The results also emphasize the role of emotional engagement as a mechanism through which these factors translate into behavioural intentions, supporting theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of affective responses in shaping decision-making and intention formation.

Table 5: Path coefficients – Mean, STDEV, T values, p values.

Hypotheses	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
H1: Social Issues (SI) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	-0.41	-0.405	0.078	4.832	0.000
H2: Perceived Institutional Trust (PIT) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.249	0.263	0.094	0.596	0.552
H3: Digital Civic Literacy (DCL) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.332	0.322	0.064	0.808	0.420
H4: Influencer Credibility (IC) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	0.492	0.489	0.083	3.337	0.000
H5: Entrepreneurship & Soft Skills (ESS) $\rightarrow$ Emotional Engagement (EE)	-0.149	-0.15	0.063	1.961	0.052
H6: Emotional Engagement (EE) $\rightarrow$ Decent Work Intention (DWI)	0.117	0.122	0.057	0.861	0.000

Discussion of Findings

This study analyzes the influence of social issues, perceptions of institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, and entrepreneurial soft skills on emotional engagement and decent work intention among youth. The results of this study offer significant insights into

young people's emotional reactions to the social and digital environment and how these reactions shape their decent work intentions.

The study's findings indicate that social issues have a significant negative impact on emotional expression, which leads to H1 being rejected. This is in line with research findings that indicate that social issues increase emotional expression through the development of empathy and moral compassion (Yang et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2023). Past research generally conveys the idea that if a person views social issues as relevant in a personal manner, they will become more emotionally invested in addressing such issues.

However, the analysis of this study shows a different pattern among today's youth. Higher exposure to social issues has the potential to generate feelings of depression, frustration, anxiety, or social fatigue rather than positive emotional engagement. In the digital era, where young people are constantly exposed to information related to inequality, unemployment, corruption, environmental degradation, and social injustice, this repeated exposure can lead to emotional fatigue and self-isolation, rather than motivation to take action. These findings are in line with the Affective Events Theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which states that an event can trigger either a positive or negative emotional reaction depending on how individuals interpret and experience it. Therefore, social issues can function as negative affective events that reduce emotional engagement when they are perceived as burdensome or beyond the individual's control.

The subsequent findings of the study indicate that perceived institutional trust does not have a significant influence on emotional engagement, thus leading to the rejection of H2. Although the obtained relationship is positive, the effect is not statistically significant. These findings differ from previous studies (Lee, 2020; Spadaro et al., 2020; Chaudhry et al., 2024) that identified trust in institutions as a significant determinant of emotional attachment, civic participation, and engagement. This situation may occur because young people are increasingly relying on alternative sources of information, particularly social media and peer networks, rather than traditional institutions in shaping their views and emotional responses. Therefore, institutional trust may no longer serve as the primary driver of emotional engagement among digitally connected youth. This indicates that emotional responses are more influenced by immediate and easily relatable social influences, rather than the level of confidence in formal institutions. Therefore, although institutional trust remains conceptually important, its direct contribution to emotional engagement is seen as limited in the context of this study.

Similarly, digital civic literacy was found to have a positive but statistically insignificant effect on emotional engagement, thus leading to the rejection of H3. Previous studies have argued that digital civic literacy helps individuals critically evaluate online information, identify false information, and engage in social issues (Chen et al., 2020; Polizzi, 2021; Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). However, the findings of this study indicate that merely possessing digital evaluation skills is insufficient to generate emotional engagement. Young people may be able to assess the credibility and relevance of information without necessarily forming an emotional attachment to the issue being discussed. This aligns with the distinction between cognitive processing and emotional engagement, where critical thinking skills facilitate the evaluation of information but do not automatically result in affective involvement. Therefore, digital civic literacy may contribute more to informed decision-making and knowledge acquisition rather than emotional engagement.

Among all the antecedent variables, the credibility of the influencer emerges as the strongest predictor of emotional engagement, thus supporting H4. This positive and significant relationship confirms previous studies that show that trusted and highly credible influencers can effectively shape the attitudes, emotions, and behavioral responses of the audience (Lie Ao et al., 2023; Sherbaz Khan, 2023; Syed Asim Shah et al., 2023). This analysis shows that young people are more likely to engage emotionally when a social message is delivered by an individual who is perceived as authentic, knowledgeable, and relatable. These findings are also consistent with the Source Credibility Theory, which explains that levels of trust and expertise enhance message acceptance and persuasion effectiveness. In the digital era, when influencers often act as intermediaries between information sources and audiences, their credibility enhances message resonance and emotional connections (Davlembayeva et al., 2024). The significant effect size in this study also indicates that the credibility of influencers plays a dominant role in shaping emotional responses among youth, surpassing the influence of institutional trust and digital literacy.

The analysis also shows that entrepreneurial human skills have a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with emotional engagement, thus leading to the rejection of H5. These findings contradict previous studies that suggest emotional intelligence, adaptability, resilience, and communication skills can facilitate emotional engagement and positive proactive behavior (Allen et al., 2020; Bigos & Michalik, 2020; Chu et al., 2020). One possible explanation is that individuals with higher entrepreneurial human skills tend to adopt a more rational and problem-focused approach when facing social challenges. Instead of getting emotionally involved, they might emphasize practical solutions and strategic thinking more. Consequently, these skills may contribute more directly to self-management and career readiness than to emotional engagement. The marginal significance observed in the analysis suggests that entrepreneurial soft skills may still play an indirect role, warranting further investigation in future studies.

Finally, emotional engagement was found to have a significant positive influence on decent work intention, supporting H6. This result is consistent with previous studies (Ferraro et al., 2020; McIlveen et al., 2020; Hassan et al., 2024; Xue et al., 2024) that identify emotional engagement as a critical mechanism linking personal values, social awareness, and career-related intentions. Youth with higher emotional engagement are more likely to value fairness, dignity, security, and meaningful employment, thereby strengthening their intention to pursue decent work opportunities. From the perspective of Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), emotional engagement represents an effective response that influences subsequent attitudes and behavioural intentions. The present data therefore support the theoretical proposition that emotional experiences play a central role in translating social and digital influences into career-related intentions. Practically, this shows that interventions aimed at promoting decent work among youth should not only focus on delivering facts but also on fostering meaningful emotional connections to employment-related issues.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that emotional engagement serves as an important mechanism linking social and digital influences to the intention to obtain a decent job. However, not all antecedent factors contribute equally. The credibility of influencers emerges as the most influential predictor of emotional engagement, while social issues unexpectedly reduce emotional engagement. Conversely, institutional trust, digital civic literacy, and entrepreneurial human skills show limited direct effects. These findings emphasize the importance of increasingly prevalent interpersonal and digital communication channels in

shaping youth engagement and support the main premise of Affective Events Theory that emotional responses are a crucial determinant of behavioral intentions.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examines the influence of social issues, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, influencer credibility, and entrepreneurial soft skills on emotional engagement and the intention to pursue decent work among youth. The study findings indicate that emotional engagement plays a crucial role in shaping the intention of young people to pursue suitable employment.

Among the variables studied, the credibility of influencers emerged as the strongest predictor of emotional engagement, thereby highlighting the increasing importance of trusted digital personalities in influencing the attitudes and emotions of youth. On the other hand, social issues were found to hurt emotional engagement, indicating that high exposure to social challenges can lead to feelings of anxiety, frustration, or emotional isolation, rather than an increase in emotional engagement. At the same time, perceived institutional trust, digital civic literacy, and entrepreneurial human skills did not show a significant direct effect on emotional engagement in the proposed study model.

This study contributes to the literature by expanding the application of Affective Events Theory in the context of youth social awareness and intentions toward decent work. The findings of this study reinforce the importance of the affective process in explaining how social and digital experiences influence career-related intentions. By providing a deeper understanding of the decision-making process among youth in today's digital environment, emotional engagement serves as a conduit that channels external influences into behavioral outcomes.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study offer several implications for educators, policymakers, and youth development practitioners. Educational institutions are advised to integrate learning activities that foster meaningful emotional connections to social and employment issues, rather than merely emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge. Policymakers and youth organizations need to design awareness campaigns that balance the delivery of information with emotional resonance to avoid issue fatigue and social isolation among young people. Considering that the credibility of influencers shows significant influence, collaboration with trusted and socially responsible digital influencers can be an effective strategy in promoting positive social values, civic awareness, and aspirations for decent work among youth. In addition, career development initiatives need to emphasize not only employability skills but also emotional engagement such as job dignity, fairness, and sustainable employment. This approach can encourage a stronger commitment to the principles of decent work.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study provides significant contributions, there are several limitations that need to be highlighted. First, the cross-sectional study design limits the ability to confirm causal relationships between the variables studied. Although there is a significant relationship, the direction of influence may change as the experiences of young people evolve. Second, this study relies on self-reported data, which is likely to be exposed to social desirability bias and common method variance. Respondents may provide answers that reflect socially acceptable

views rather than their actual beliefs or behaviors. Thirdly, this study focuses only on a specific sample of youth, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other demographic groups, different cultural contexts, or different geographical backgrounds.

Future studies are proposed to use a longitudinal design to examine how emotional engagement and intentions toward suitable jobs evolve. This approach can provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of social awareness and emotional responses among youth. Researchers can also explore additional mediating and moderating variables such as psychological well-being, social support, career adaptability, perceived employability, or social media usage patterns to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing intentions toward suitable employment. Considering the negative relationship between social issues and emotional engagement, future studies need to further examine whether issue fatigue, emotional overload, or the perception of a lack of personal efficacy can explain these findings. Cross-national, cultural, and age group comparative studies can also help determine whether the observed relationship is context-specific or can be more broadly generalized. Finally, the mixed-method and qualitative approach have the potential to provide a deeper understanding of how young people interpret social issues, engage emotionally with digital content, and form aspirations for decent work in an increasingly complex social environment.

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